

Trowel Talk!

September, 2017

Fall in love with glory of autumn

When does summer end and autumn begin? Is it when there is a nip in the air and dew on the grass each morning. Is it when shadows lengthen as the sun climbs less high in the sky? Pinpointing this transition is as hard as deciding when summer arrives after spring. Whenever it may be, if I have to choose a favourite season, it would be the fall.



Photo: Gillian Boyd

The author's butterfly garden features asters, rudbeckia and Joe Pye weed which provide nectar plants for pollinators right up until frost.

Gardeners always rejoice at the miracle of spring: colourful bulbs, ephemeral woodland flowers, the early violets, primulas and columbines. Suddenly our gardens are fresh and green again and filled with colour. In the blink of an eye, summer arrives with roses, peonies and irises. Lilac and mock orange scent the air and daisies, beebalm and phloxes overwhelm us with blossom.

September and October have a beauty all their own. Autumn does not tiptoe quietly into winter but leaves in a fanfare of glowing colours. Who is not dazzled by our deciduous trees as they prepare for dormancy? Canada's maples with their flaming scarlets, dull crimsons, their oranges, golds and pinkish-reds, put on a virtuoso performance that is brilliant and unsurpassed.

Garden colours are richer, more intense and longer-lasting now that the sun's heat is less fierce. The flower borders still hum with insects – hoverflies and many kinds of bees and beneficial wasps, all taking advantage of nectar blossoms while they last. There are still butterflies on the wing: sulphurs, tortoiseshells, and maybe a late monarch or two.

One of the best plants in the garden now is the native New England aster in varying shades of purple or the occasional pink. Easy, undemanding and tough, they grow in the wild yet fit wonderfully well into the fall border. There are many cultivars in a range of heights and colours but the species plants still hold their own. Chrysanthemums too come in an incredible assortment of colours and flower forms. Not all are hardy but are still worth planting. Fall sedums punctuate the garden in shades of pink and red and, if left standing, add winter interest with conical caps of snow.

On a calm day, the sweet autumn clematis can fill the garden with its delicious almond vanilla scent. The great blue lobelia entices insects to visit. Pink turtlehead flowers need the weight of bumblebees to open them before other insects can gain access. Both these last two are native plants that add distinction and diversity. The fall-blooming cimicifuga (or bugbane) is the star of the garden when it finally opens. Bees cling to the fragrant white spires of honey vanilla all day long and gardeners too find the scent intoxicating.



Photo: Gillian Boyd

***Cimicifuga simplex* (recently reclassified as *Actaea simplex*) makes its presence known in the fall garden.**

In October, the tall salvia stems open into a burst of sky-blue flowers. Giant hyssops, tall rudbeckias and Russian sage keep flowering till frost. Bittersweet berries split their yellow coats to show the scarlet fruit within. Ornamental grasses add a graceful finishing touch. 'Autumn Joy', a favourite rust-red sedum, is a well-named symbol of the season which is truly a gift of Nature.

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Master Gardener

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September TO DO List

- Watch the weather forecast for a period of overcast and rainy days – plan to divide and/or move plants before the rain so that they get watered in and can get their roots established before the ground freezes.
- Remove any diseased plants and don't put them in the compost where they may be able to infect other plants once the compost is spread in the garden.
- If you have gardening or plant ID questions, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Further to our feature article, some other great fall plants to consider are:

Shrubs or small trees:

- *Clethra alnifolia* (summer sweet)
- *Hamamelis virginiana* (witch hazel)
- *Heptacodium miconioides* (seven-son flower) -- below



Perennials:

- *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune' (blue fortune anise-hyssop)
- *Catananche caerulea* (cupid's dart) – below



Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgochelp@yahoocanada.ca

- monitored daily

- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

North Gower Farmers Market: Sept. 16, 8:30am-1pm

Main St. Market: Sept. 23, 10am-2pm

Ottawa Farmers Market: (Lansdowne) Sundays, June 18 to Sept. 24, 9am-1pm

Richmond Fair: Sept 14-17

Riverside South Market: (Riverview Park & Ride) Sunday, Oct 1, 10am-2pm

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Rip out or rejuvenate – September 19 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Pretty Street Community Centre, 2 Pretty Street, Stittsville

Hosted by the Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society (Guest fee: N/A)

Bulbs for year-round enjoyment – October 3 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Old March Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Kanata March Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

Going grassless – Honey I shrunk the lawn – Thursday October 19 – 7:30 pm

Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener

City View United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Nepean

Hosted by the Nepean Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$4)

Cut and Come Again Vegetables – Wednesday, October 25 – 6:00 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Carlingwood Branch, Ottawa Public Library, 281 Woodroffe Avenue

Hosted by the Ottawa Public Library (Free to library card holders)



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>



- *Coreopsis verticillata* (threadleaf coreopsis)

- *Echinacea purpurea* (with deadheading, it will continue to bloom until frost)

- *Eupatorium maculatum* (Joe Pye weed)

- *Helenium autumnale* (Helen's flower)

- *Hibiscus moscheutos* (hardy dinner-plate hibiscus)

- *Knautia macedonica* (with deadheading, it will continue to bloom until frost)

- *Ligularia dentata*

- *Ratibida pinnata* (Gray-headed coneflower)

Grasses:

- *Imperata cylindrica* (Japanese blood grass)

- *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder' (silver feather grass)

- *Miscanthus zebrinus* (zebra grass)

- *Panicum virgatum* 'Prairie Fire' (red switch grass)