

THE EDIBLE GARDEN

July 2019

Bee Line

Creating Pollinator-Friendly Containers

*Julianne Labreche
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

Inspiration comes from the strangest places sometimes. Take this spring, for instance, when I decided to plant a couple of big pollinator-friendly containers to attract butterflies, bees, moths and other beneficial insects to my front garden. That's when my usual sources of inspiration failed me – books, other master gardeners and Dr. Google.

The Muse finally struck when listening to a businessman talk about the success of an innovative gardening experiment in the West Queen West area of Toronto, a bustling business area. Called 'Pollinator Paradise', the large garden containers have been designed to hold mason bee houses high up in a birch log style lofts as well as edible, pollinator-friendly plants. The containers have the business area buzzing and have caught the interest of the public. Four local schools and a university are sending students to study them. The project won a prestigious environmental award too.

"I've never received so many emails on anything before with the community thanking us for the bee hotels," says Rob Sysak, the enthusiastic executive director of this local Business Improvement Area (BIA). "Social media has exploded," he adds. "It's a fantastic opportunity to engage with the public."

The artfully decorated containers are professionally planted, rotating throughout the seasons. There are lots of edibles, including chives, borage, dill, basil, lavender, and sage. The herbs are shared with pollinators but are also snipped and used by local chefs too. The containers also hold pollinator-friendly flowers—white and purple alyssum, zinnia, cosmos, verbena, nicotiana and sunflowers. Leggy serviceberry and goji berry bushes, tea sumac and willow reach high up toward the mason bee houses. *"The planters are as much about local production through the streetscape, while looking good and providing tiered yields,"* says Andrew Roy with Edible Landscaping Guild, the landscaper who designed and created the permaculture containers.

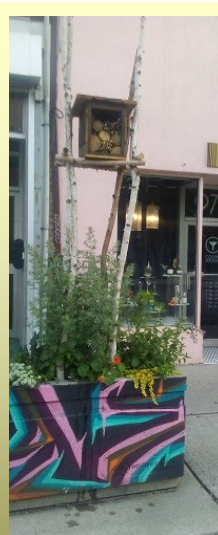
There's even a local beekeeper on site maintaining a few hives and selling local honey. Plans are afoot for community walks through the neighbourhood, creatively called 'Take a Walk on the Wildflower Side'. A lot of residents are getting interested in the local pollinator sightings.

Like any wildlife, pollinators need food, shelter and water to survive. Back home, inspired by these artful creations, I've created two much smaller pollinator containers using a couple of sturdy but lightweight obelisks that fit neatly into each container. A young man next door, a carpenter, created a perch



Astragalus canadensis in planter at West Queen West

Andrew Roy



Bee Hotel and Artemisia in planter on West Queen West

Andrew Roy



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Black Knot Disease

*Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark County*

Plum trees are absolutely spectacular in full flower. They bloom early in the spring with blooms that line the branches before the leaves appear. Many people grow them simply for their spring beauty but there are cultivars that are hardy in Eastern Ontario, although some of the cultivars may not be widely available. Cherry Trees are also a beautiful addition to the spring landscape and some varieties such as Nanking or Manchu produce a delicious Cherry crop, if you can harvest them before the birds get to them.

As beautiful and productive as these small fruit trees can be, one problem that can gravely impact your trees is a fungal infection, know as Black Knot. Black Knot appears as unsightly swellings (galls) on twigs and branches. At first, these galls appear relatively harmless. They are rather subtle and velvety green in appearance. Gradually, they increase in size, harden and become black. The tips of the infected branches often die back. Severe infections can kill whole limbs, and the tree may become stunted. Although it is primarily a disease of plum and cherry trees, it can infest other stone fruit such as apricot and peaches as well as ornamental Prunus species.

Black knot disease spreads in spring. On rainy days, the fungus releases spores which are carried on wind currents. If the

that neatly rests at the top of each obelisk and houses the bee houses. The bee bath in each container is an old china teacup fastened to a metal pole, 'upcycled' by Canadian gran-nies in the Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign that assists AIDs victims and their families in parts of Africa.

The planter itself is full of lots of pollinator plants. Like the Toronto model, it will have herbs and tough, easy-to-grow plants to attract pollinators. Early in the winter, I grew basil and pansies from seeds in the basement. I also grew some nasturtium to act as a 'spiller' with bright red flowers to attract the butterflies. The orange and red cosmos will be a real bee magnet. There will be simple red zinnias and some big bold geraniums. These are all plants that attract pollinators.

It's a flash of beauty for the summer season, a source of fresh herbs for summer salads and will provide support for pollinators that need our help, like many beneficial insects and other wildlife on the planet.

While the planet will continue to be plagued by pollinator stresses, my own little corner of it will be a safe haven thanks to the inspiration of some savvy business people in the West Queen West section of Toronto. They have attracted pollinators and business profits too,

Purslane and Pigweed

Edythe Falconer
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

Why am I presenting Purslane and Pigweed in the same article? It's a catchy title so I can "alliterate". I could take this even further - "*A Passionate Plan for Planting Purslane and Pigweed on your Patio or in Planters*".

Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) and Pigweed (*Amaranthus retroflexus*) do have a few things in common though. Both are weeds and as such are regularly despised by farmers and gardeners. Both are disposed to covering ground that has been left bare, as in their plant way they see that as their weedy duty. They may not be horticultural stars but they do have some creditable characteristics that are worthy of our attention.

Purslane does have a pretty relative – portulaca – but we don't eat portulaca. Pigweed has a rather humble name, but it too has some glamorous relatives as it is part of the Amaranthus family. We can eat pigweed and some of its Amaranthus relatives --- "*Well*", you say, "*maybe you can but I don't plan to.*"

If you've seen the new Health Canada Food Guide you'll have noted that half of the "pie" is allocated to fruits and vegetables. Purslane and pigweed could come under your scrutiny as a potential part of that half. You don't have to shop for purslane or pigweed. They come on their own to your yard or farm or your camp site and they are free. Harvest them and you have done two things at once – you've weeded – a virtuous activity in itself, and you've provided an interesting new addition to your cuisine at no cost but a bit of energy as you pick and prepare them for your next **Unusual Plant Party**.

We've already hinted at their willingness to grow in any soil. Purslane is a succulent annual with a habit of trailing over the ground. When it's seeds are ripe and ready to pop they don't need any help in dispersal. The next generation will be in place for next year. It's CV includes the following: antibacterial, antiscorbutic, depurative, diuretic, febrifuge, omega 3 fatty acids. All parts of the plant are edible.



Purslane
Edythe Falconer

Antiscorbutic – prevents or cures scurvy
Depurative – purifying, purgative
Febrifuge – reduces fever

spores happen to land on new spring growth of a susceptible tree, especially if the tree is damp, the spores germinate and infect the tree. The source of the disease is usually wild, abandoned or neglected trees. Finding and destroying the source is important to controlling the black knot tree disease.



Black knot
AnthonyDean

In fall or late winter, prune off infected limbs 15-30 cm below the knots, disinfect pruners between cuts with 10% bleach solution (1-part bleach to 9-parts water). Destroy the prunings. Do not compost. If possible, remove any wild plums or cherry trees, nearby.

For persistent infections, apply two sprays of lime-sulfur, 7 days apart before the buds begin to grow in spring. Spraying can help to limit the spread of the disease but must be combined with conscientious removal of galls as they are identified.

Vegetable gardens in pots

Judith Cox
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

I've had a big change in my life and no longer have access to a large vegetable garden. My own garden needs extra attention now that I have more time but building another large vegetable garden is not on my agenda. Because I love fresh lettuce, tomatoes and herbs I have decided to grow my vegetables in containers instead of going without.

I have had great success growing many different types of vegetables in containers and this is a great way for those with small gardens to expand their growing possibilities. Except for giant pumpkins, almost anything can be grown successfully in a pot. Your container should always have good drainage and if it does not, feel free to add

All parts of purslane are edible unless you run into the hairy-stemmed lookalike – a spurge known as *Euphorbia vermiculata*. The telling difference between the two is that hairy-stemmed spurge exudes milky sap from its stems. Our noble purslane does not. That milky sap is poisonous.

I have eaten purslane in salads and stews.

Now for pigweed. I've eaten that too – long ago as a spinach-like food, in the spring when its leaves are young and tasty. Prairie lettuce! Deer like it too and for the same reasons. A great spring tonic. *Amaranthus retroflexus* is quite the family – Tumble, Prostrate, Smooth, Green, California, Fringed versions with some so gorgeous that we plant them as statuesque and stately ornamentals. Young leaves can be eaten raw or sautéed.



Pigweed
Edythe Falconer

If you really don't want to ingest any part of purslane or pigweed my best advice is to pull them out as soon as you recognize them and dispose of them into your compost bin or compost pile – before they have set seed.

Pigweed leaves are a good source of Vitamins A and C. They also contain significant amounts of manganese, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, and zinc. There are 28 calories in one cup of leaves.

Book review

Grow something different to eat

By Matthew Biggs

Susan Bicket
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

DK publishing, ISBN 978-1-4654-6429-3, 2018

This is an excellent book for those feeling adventurous or looking for something a little different to grow. The author starts with brief descriptions of general gardening techniques used in the book. Then carries on, focusing on the individual food plants – 58 in total – organised into the following chapters:

- Fruiting vegetables,
- Salad vegetables,
- Leafy greens,
- Roots, bulbs and shoots,
- Grains and seeds,
- Herbs and spices,
- Fruit.

Some examples of foods profiled are: yacon, strawberry-spinach, red orach, chickpeas and goji berries. Each plant is allocated 4 generously illustrated pages and rated with regards to ease of growing. The information includes a description of the plant, how to grow it, how to care for it, harvesting and tips on preparation for eating and storing. Although the author is based in the UK, the suppliers list (in my copy) is all North American including Canadian suppliers. The book is available through the Ottawa Public Library and book sellers.

Watch for *Trowel Talk* the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.ca/>

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - <http://millstonenews.com/> - for a column by David Hinks of the Lanark County Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab.

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Master Gardeners of Lanark County are member groups of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners. The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com).

a few holes in the bottom or side. I like to use a combination of compost and potting soil; the compost adds lots of nutrients. If you are growing tall or vining plants a strong cage or structure will help keep the plant upright.

Over by the barbeque, I like to have a pot of cooking herbs that can be used as needed. Sage, basil, rosemary, thyme and parsley are wonderful in a container. Be sure that the herbs do not flower, or they will start to go to seed and not be as tasty.

Small tomatoes often known as patio tomatoes grow very well in a container. I make sure they have a good cage and a few marigolds around to attract beneficial insects. I have also grown larger tomatoes successfully but watch that they are well watered.

Potatoes can also be grown in containers. Be sure the container is large with good drainage. Plant the potato or potato piece about two thirds down in the container. As the potato grows, cover it with dirt and compost and more potatoes will form. When it finally reaches the top and begins to ripen you will have young potatoes ready to harvest.

Vine crops also need close monitoring to be sure they are well watered and have good supports on which they can climb. Cucumbers and melons will scramble up trellises and be healthy producers.

I start my lettuce in March in containers and plant it continuously throughout the season. Lettuce containers can be moved into your shade garden in early July. They prefer cooler temperatures. Along with lettuce, add some kale and Swiss chard to the container.

Do not overfeed your containers or you will find yourself with more greenery than vegetables. Adding compost to the pot is often enough and a gentle fish or kelp fertilizer can be a good addition as the containers grow. Too much water will cause your plants to rot, while not enough will make them wilt. If the soil of the planter is dry all the way up to your knuckle, then give it a drink.

Try planting something delicious this year in a container. It is such a treat to pick your own salad.