

THE EDIBLE GARDEN



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GARDEN ACTIVITIES

- Thin out crowded vegetables.
- Stake plants needing support.
- Monitor for insect and disease problems.
- A gentle hoe once a week around your plants will help keep weeds down and expose slug eggs and insects to birds.
- Weed by hand those weeds missed by the hoe. It is important to remove weeds before they flower and set seed.
- Mulch between plants to conserve water and suppress weeds.
- Remove diseased plant material from the garden and place in the city composting bins. The city compost is supposed to be hot enough to kill pathogens. Thoroughly cleaning any tools, including hands and clothes, that came in contact with the diseased material will help to control spread of the disease.
- Harvest garlic scapes (a stem which will produce small bulbs) as they appear. It is good for the plant and you will enjoy the delicious spring fresh garlic.
- Water container grown vegetables at least once a day, more often if they dry out quickly. Feed diluted liquid food occasionally.
- Rhubarb ideally can be harvested when the stalks are about 25 cm (10 inches) long. Grip the stem at the base, pull upwards and outwards while twisting. Trim the leaves off and discard.
- Harvest edible flowers such as violets, roses, chives, nasturtiums etc. **WARNING** – some flowers are poisonous so take time to research plants before you are harvest them eating!

DID YOU KNOW?

- Recognising an insect and knowing its life cycle is an important tool in pest management. OMAFRA (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food) has a number of informative web pages on vegetable pests with photographs:-
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/insects/insects.html>
- Plant disease and fungi too: -
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/insects/diseases.html>
- To keep Cucumber Beetles from destroying your plants, put a Kozy Koat around the hill in which you start your cucumbers. When the plant starts to get crowded in there, remove the Koat. Alternatively, cover the cucumbers with floating row covers. When the plants start to bloom remove the cover.



- A similar barrier around carrots will help to deter the carrot fly. Evidently the female carrot fly likes to fly close to the surface of the ground looking for nesting sites (carrots). A barrier causes the fly to go higher and miss the carrots
- 1/2 teaspoon of sugar and 1 teaspoon of olive oil (or oil of your choice – grape, almond...) rubbed over the hands helps remove that rough dry feeling after gardening. Leaving the oil on for 15 minutes gives an extra silky feel.

PESTS AND DISEASES ON MY VEGETABLES

*Diane McClymont Peace
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*



Caterpillar of Black Swallowtail on Dill

Growing vegetables at home is a great way to enjoy fresh, tasty, and healthy foods, but other organisms like them too and can damage or destroy your harvest. There are, however, a few steps you can take to reduce their damage.

Many insects and diseases overwinter in the soil, so it is important to rotate your plantings; that is to plant each crop in a different part of the garden each year. It is a good idea to record where you have planted each crop during the previous year and map your present year's planting. Be aware that pests and diseases can attack members of the same family; for example don't plant cabbages where you had broccoli, Brussels sprouts, or cauliflower, the previous year.

There are many kinds of cutworms that can crawl out of the soil and sever your newly planted or spouted seedlings. Sinking half a toilet paper roll or foil cylinder several centimetres into the soil around the plant can protect them until the stems are tough.

For flying insects that feed and lay eggs on your plants, covering them with floating row covers while the insects are active, can go a long way to reducing damage, especially from cabbage worms and flea, cucumber, and potato beetles. Row cover fabric is made of light permeable polyester or polypropylene. Lay it loosely on top of plants and hold down with stones or bricks or support with wire hoops. You can remove the cover when the damaging phase of the insects has passed and use it elsewhere.

Even with these measures, it is important to inspect your plants regularly for damaging insects. Aphids can be sprayed with a strong stream of water or better yet, a soap solution (1 part liquid soap (not detergent) to 40 parts water). Larger insects such as Tomato hornworms, Potato and Japanese beetles can be hand-picked and squashed or dropped in a container of soapy water.



Bees on a Dahlia for the nectar

Attracting beneficial insects to your garden that prey on pests is another good strategy. Let them work for you. Planting a variety of flowers that provide bloom from spring to fall will attract insects that come for the nectar but also feed on the pests. Use ever-blooming annuals such as alyssum (*Lobularia*) and later-blooming herbs such as parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*), dill (*Anethum graveolens*), and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*). Perennial flowers such as yarrow (*Achillea*) and catnip (*Nepeta*) near the garden also attract beneficial insects.

Birds can also work for you in the garden. By providing nearby shrubs and trees for resting, and bird houses for nesting, you can attract birds. Consider adding a bird bath to your garden.

Some plants also act as trap crops. They are more attractive to pests than your crop. Curled mustard (*Brassica juncea* var. *crispifolia*) or Chinese Daikon or Snow Belle radishes (*Raphanus sativus*) can attract Flea beetles and protect plants from Squash borers and Cucumber beetles.

Plant odour can deter some pests. Catnip (*Nepeta*), Tansy (*Tanacetum*), Marigolds (Tagetes), Beebalm (*Monarda*), Wormwood (*Artemisia*) or Mints (*Mentha*) can discourage Stink bugs, Aphids, Cabbage moths and Flea beetles.

You should monitor your plants for diseases. If you see white fuzzy spots on leaves (powdery mildew), provide good air circulation, remove heavily damaged leaves, and spray the plant with a baking soda solution (5 mL in one L of water) or lime-sulphur. The spray should be reapplied after rains if needed. To avoid brown spots on beans and their leaves (Anthracnose), don't weed or pick when the plants are wet, destroy infected material, don't save seeds, and rotate crops.

To avoid damping off, blights, and post-harvest rot (usually *Botrytis*), water in the morning, control aphids, destroy diseased fruit and plant material. If you see any viral diseases (spots, stunting, leaf and flower distortion, mosaic patterns) destroy the plants. Try to select disease resistant varieties.

Pests and diseases can be reduced at the end of the season by removing dead plants and rotting vegetables.

Pretty Enough to Eat!

*Dale Odorizzi,
Lanark County Master Gardeners*

We often think vegetables are for eating and flowers are for looking at. You can combine the two to add flair to your food with flowers.

Make sure that your flowers are edible and that they have not been sprayed with chemicals, making organically grown flowers, either home-grown or grown by organic growers, the best. Edible flowers should only be used in moderation to add zest or as a beautiful garnish.

Some of the best flowers to eat are:

- **Nasturtiums** are ideal to brighten a tossed salad. They have a watercress-like taste. The leaves are edible with a peppery flavour and the large round seeds have been used as a substitute for capers.
- **Violets** are small in size and sweet in flavour, making them best suited for desserts. Crystallize them for fancy cake decorations or cut them up and sprinkle on ice cream or freeze them in ice cubes to flavour cool drinks.
- **Pansies** are extremely colourful and versatile. Use them whole or cut up in desserts, salads or side dishes.
- **Pot Marigold (Calendula)** has bright orange or yellow petals and has been used for centuries to give a beautiful saffron-like golden colour in everything from cakes to casseroles. Use the petals only, not the whole flower.
- **Daylilies** are completely edible but the flowers are the prettiest. Each has a unique flavour, sweet or savory, raw or cooked or fresh snacks right off the plant. Remove the pistils and flower base for best taste.
- **Lavender** combines well with other herbs. Use sparingly as it has a powerful fragrance. Sprinkle a few flowers on ice cream.
- **Rose** petals taste as good as they smell. They are best used in desserts and confections such as rose petal jam. Use only unsprayed roses.

Try vegetable and herb flowers which have the same taste as the more familiar part of the plant, only milder. Try squash or zucchini flowers in soups or stir fries or deep fried in batter or sprinkle a few bright flowers of scarlet runner beans on a casserole. Flowers of chives, onions, garlic and leeks are very decorative so add a few to salads or stir fries. Herbs are a great source of edible flowers. Pale blue rosemary or pink or purple thyme add visual interest as well as flavour. Borage is grown for its pretty sky-blue flowers and has a mild cucumber-like taste.

Never Eat these flowers.

While some flowers are edible, others are extremely toxic. The iron clad rule for eating mushrooms applies here too— Unless you are 100% sure of the flowers identity and are sure it is safe to eat, do not eat. The following are some commonly grown flowers that must never be eaten. Buttercups (*Ranunculus*), Castor Beans, Crocus, Daffodil, Delphinium, Foxglove, Hydrangea, Lily of the Valley, Monkshood, Morning Glory, Petunia and Sweet Pea.

BOOK REVIEWS

*Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark*

The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Pest and Disease Control

Rodale Books
ISBN: 978-1-60529-677-7

By creating a healthy garden environment and keeping a watchful eye, you can rely on completely natural methods to manage a wide range of common insect and disease problems in your garden, yard and landscape. One of the rewards of organic gardening is developing a balanced ecosystem in which plants defend themselves against pests and diseases.

This book teaches you how to create a garden and landscape environment that helps plants stay healthy, naturally. It provides you with troubleshooting tips for more than 200 types of plants, including annuals, bulbs, fruit trees and bushes, herbs, perennials, shrubs, trees and vegetables. There are hundreds of colour photographs that assist in identifying the garden pest, disease or beneficial insects in your garden. Finally it will advise you on the best, low-impact controls to keep pests and diseases from ruining your crop.

The first section of the book teaches you how to create a healthy garden that helps prevent problems by promoting plant health. The second section (my favourite) provides a plant-by-plant problem solving guide, listing the problems that plant may have and the likely cause of that problem. Section 3 provides guides and photos to assist you in identifying the pests and diseases that attack your plants. Finally section 4 provides organic methods to prevent and control the various pests and diseases.

I typically use this book by identifying the plant with the problem and then looking that plant up in Section 2 to determine what is causing that problem. For example, if the potato leaves have large ragged holes, I would look in Section 2 at the problems and learn that it is likely a Colorado Beetle or a Blister Beetle. I would then go to section 3 and look at the photos and identify that I do indeed have Colorado Beetle. I then would learn how to control them; I can shake the beetles into soapy water or squish them as I see them. I might be able to attract Native Predators by planting pollen and nectar plants close by, mulching with straw or cover the plants with floating row covers.

This book is extremely helpful to me as a gardener and as a Master Gardener. A definite keeper in my gardening library.

RECIPE

*Dale Odorizzi
Master Garden of Lanark*

Compost

Some compost recipes are very complicated, advising you to include your green matter and your brown matter in very specific measurements. This can scare people off making their own healthy and nutritious compost. The most important thing to remember about composting is:

**All Organic Matter breaks down
eventually!**

To help your organic matter break down more quickly, follow these simple guidelines:

1. Save and use brown matter, for example – dried leaves.
2. Full sun works best. The hotter your compost pile, the faster it works.
3. Composting requires balance between green matter such as grass clippings, vegetable peelings, coffee grounds or weeds that have not gone to seed (nitrogen) and brown or dry matter such as dried leaves and shredded newspapers (carbon).
4. The bigger the better. A compost pile should be at least one cubic metre in size.
5. Bad smells are a sign something is wrong, usually not enough brown matter. If your compost pile smells, add some water occasionally. A dry pile remains inactive.

The more you turn your compost the faster it breaks down. I operate with three piles. One contains finished compost. The second contains the previous year's garden waste. The third year contains this year's garden waste. Sometime in the late summer, I turn pile two. Finished compost goes into the finished heap and the unfinished goes into the current year's mound, leaving a new space for next year's garden waste.

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

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

The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com).

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton is a member group of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners.