

THE EDIBLE GARDEN



MARCH 2015

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GARDEN NOTES

- Once the snow has gone covering soil with plastic (black or clear) for two or three weeks will help warm soil.
- As snow melts allow the soil to dry before working it.
- Dig in compost and/or well-rotted manure.
- Start planting cool season seeds outside when the soil temperature is above 4°C.
- Start planting seeds indoors for transplanting later see March 2014 for timing.
- In April add compost or well-rotted manure to rhubarb.
- Prune fruit trees before the buds swell if you haven't already done so, to stimulate new growth.
- Remove, dead, damaged, diseased or dangerous branches first. Then prune with moderation taking **no more** than 25% off.
- Apply dormant oil before buds break when temperatures are above 0°C for 24 hours, on a calm day.
- The 'Dolgo' crabapple tree approaches perfection as an addition to almost any garden.
- It "performs" in all seasons including winter when some of its fruits still cling to its branches.
- Its creamy blossoms and beautifully red fruits are equally attractive.
- In fall its foliage turns to a bright yellow.
- The fruit is delicious used for jellies, juices and can be canned or frozen.
- It is one of the most disease resistant fruit trees available.
- It makes a good specimen tree anywhere including on small urban lots.
- It is hardy to Canadian Zone 4.
- It is readily available at our local garden centres!

DID YOU KNOW?

Goji berry and Haskup (See February's Edible Garden) look like this:



Goji berry



Haskup

GARDENING WITH CHILDREN

*Kathleen Lang,
Master Gardener of Lanark County*

You are hard pressed to find a child who doesn't like digging in the dirt, so gardening has a built in draw as a fun activity. To get young children excited about having their own garden, **start small**. Don't make the mistake of overwhelming them with a huge space. Container gardening is a good place to start with small kids.

Project: Gardening with the kids (grandkids)

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: All summer (and hopefully longer)



1. **Get them excited** by letting them pick out what they will grow. Take a walk down the seed packet aisle and let the pictures tempt them. Steer them towards fast growing plants like radishes, peas, beans and cucumbers. Smaller children do better with larger seeds such as corn and sunflowers. Be sure to give a glance at the show schedule of the local fair. They always have junior classes and kids will get a big kick out of growing something and entering it at the fair. More than likely, kids will choose to grow the vegetables that they like the best. Keep their choices to just a few, their garden is small, and don't forget to include a flower or two. Bright flowers that grow child height fascinate them. Any kid is thrilled with a sunflower that grows 8 feet tall.
2. **Playing with dirt.** Remember, kids **LOVE** playing in the dirt. Let them help you prepare the soil, even if all they can do is break up the clods. Child-sized tools make them feel more a part of the project.
3. **Identify the garden (container) as theirs.** Besides making markers for their plants, also make a marker for the space with their name on it, a good rainy day activity, so that everyone can see it's their garden.
4. **Playing with water.** Playing with water is right up there with playing with dirt. Get them a small watering can. A garden hose is heavy for small hands and too tempting to water everything in the yard (and everybody).
5. **Garden Journals.** Let them start a small journal (scrapbook) of their garden. Until seeds and seedlings really get going, let them draw a picture or two of what they think their plants will look like. They can save the empty seed packets and cut out pictures from last year's seed catalogues. Have them continue to make notes and take pictures through the season. Make sure they write down what they liked the best. Patience is not a child's strong suit, so fill in garden down time with journal activities.
6. **Include the whole environment.** Try teaching them a little about mulching, composting and conserving water. Don't forget to point out bugs – good and bad.
7. **Let them make their own mistakes.** Sometimes adults don't have a lot of patience. It's important to let kids control their little patch. If it's messy, it's their mess. Just let them enjoy their little garden. Guide, don't command.
8. **Let 'em get big.** Sunflowers, pumpkins, zucchini, melons and climbing beans thrill them when they get giant-sized.
9. **Encourage them to taste the produce.**
10. **Try theme gardens.** Try a Salsa, Spaghetti or Pizza garden. Let them grow the ingredients of their favourite foods— garden to table. Also, Fairy gardens are now very popular with children.

GROWING AND PRESERVING HERBS

*Helen Halpenny, Dale Odorizzi,
Master Gardeners of Lanark County*

Ancient Greeks and Romans believed that you had to scream and curse at your seeds to successfully grow Basil! Even without screaming and cursing at them, I have found herbs are easy to grow, very prolific and add interest and enjoyment to our cooking and to our gardens. Some are annuals, others are perennials and a few are grown from bulbs. I tend to grow annuals in my vegetable garden and perennials in my flower beds.

The snow may be piled high outside, but starting a garden indoors can happen right now. Light levels begin to increase and a sunny windowsill can be the perfect place to get a head start on the gardening season. There is lots of time before mid-May to get herbs growing. A wide variety of each type of herb is available if you use seed—for example, one seed catalogue has over 16 types of Basil. Seed racks at retail stores are filled with dozens of choices. Many herbs start well from seed while others are best grown from transplants. Plants are also available at many garden centres or plant sales. Give them lots of sun and well-drained soil. The smell of basil, mint and thyme and the taste of fresh herbs is a true harbinger of spring.

If the goal is to grow herbs to clip for culinary use or as garnishes, then the suggestions below may help. These favourites can be started indoors and outside when the weather warms. Most herbs thrive in a sunny location. After picking herbs, wrap unwashed leaves in a damp towel, slip into a plastic bag and refrigerate. Before using, wash the leaves and pat dry with a paper towel. Shred just before using as leaves darken quickly after cutting. While herbs taste best fresh, you can preserve them by freezing or drying. To freeze herbs, whirl with a bit of oil in a food processor and then pour into ice cube trays. When frozen, put the frozen cubes in a bag for use as needed. When you take your “Herb Cube” from the freezer, it will keep for about one week in the refrigerator. Once you have used an ice cube tray to freeze herbs, do not use it for regular ice cubes as they will taste of the herb. To dry herbs, cut off branches, tie them together in small bundles and hang upside down in an airy place until they are dry. You can also use a dehydrator. The dried herbs can be stored in air tight containers. Many herbs make excellent pesto. Visit our September 2015 Edible Garden for an excellent pesto recipe.

Tips on growing and preserving my favourite herbs.

A = Annual, **P** = Perennial, **B** = Bulb, **Bi** = Biannual.

Basil (A and Bi): Grows easily from seed, germinating in one to two weeks in a warm location, such as the top of a fridge. When the sprouts show, move them to a sunny window sill and keep soil moist. Water with lukewarm water and fertilize every week with half strength soluble fertilizer. Fresh basil has a wonderful smell and combines with tomatoes in any dish. Use basil all season long. The more you cut, the better it grows. Dried basil will turn black, much like the basil you buy at the grocery store. Freeze fresh or make into a pesto and freeze in trays.

Chives (P): Can be grown from seed or by division from an existing clump. I usually pot up a portion of a plant in fall. Then I leave it in a cold place to give it a period of dormancy before bringing it to a bright window in February. It bounces into growth quickly and its mild onion flavour enhances salads and such. Chop leaves into short pieces and dry in hydrator or on a screen. Cut back to ground level when leaves turn brown.

Coriander (A): The leaves are “cilantro” and the seeds are “coriander”. This grows easily from seed. Freeze the leaves and dry seeds when ready. Use the seed whole in pickles or ground in dishes.

Dill (A): Grows easily from seed. Dry.

Garlic (B): Plant the bulbs in October. Harvest in July when about half the leaves have died down. Leave in the sun for a few days to mature. Hang bulbs to dry or use the freezer approach. No oil is necessary. Plant a few of your sprouting garlic cloves and use the greens for a mild garlic flavor. See our October 2014 Edible Garden Newsletter for detailed planting instructions.

Mint (P): Beware—it is one of the easiest plants to grow but Mint travels quickly by root and can be invasive outdoors so it is best contained in a pot. It is quick to grow indoors where you can watch seedlings grow while you inhale their fragrance.

Oregano (P): Is a popular Mediterranean herb. Sow in March for transplants that are good to put out in May. Don't cover the seeds with soil. Thin the seedlings as they sprout to give them space to grow. There are many varieties of oregano from which to choose. The entire plant is edible. Drying is best for this herb.



Cilantro



Sage in winter



Summer Savory

Parsley (Bi or P): Is rather slow to germinate, sometimes taking three weeks to begin growth, but well worth the wait. To keep the soil moist it is best to cover the pot with a transparent cover while germination takes place. On a sunny window sill you can have parsley plants that look and taste great, and when planting time comes, the plants will be well established for moving into the garden. Outdoors, parsley will tolerate half-day shade. Curly parsley is pretty for garnishing, but flat leafed parsley has the best flavour.

Rosemary (A): In our region, this is an annual that can be overwintered indoors. Dry.

Sage (P): Grow from division although one plant may be enough. However it can be grown from seeds. Dry. If you dig under the snow, you may still be able to harvest fresh sage.

Savory Summer (A): Grows well from seed. Best dried.

Savory Winter (P): Grows well from seed. It has a stronger flavour than Summer Savory. Dry. Winter Savory may not survive winters in our climate.

Thyme (P): Grows well from seed. Dry.

I Love My Basil

By Dale Odorizzi, Lanark County Master Gardeners

When you buy basil in the spice department of the grocery store, you get a package of greenish-black flakes. When you look for basil seeds in a seed catalogue or basil seedlings at a nursery, you are faced with so many choices. What are the differences? Which one should you select? There are many varieties and all of them are delicious. The following are some of the common kinds:

- **Genovese** is basil from Genoa, Italy. It is said to be the best for making traditional Italian dishes and is terrific in pesto. This basil has large, aromatic leaves that are more pointed than sweet basil and has a spicier sweet taste that is delicious in all vegetable dishes.
- **Bush basil** can be purple or green and has white flowers and edible seeds. The tiny leaves smell like a combination of licorice, cloves and cinnamon and are used in classic recipes with tomatoes and lamb. The leaves also can be used to make a cup of tea.
- **Sweet basil** is the most commonly used. It has bright green, large oval leaves that are sweet and peppery and are perfect for all types of tomato dishes.
- **Opal basil** is similar to sweet basil. It has deep purple-red leaves and flowers and grows in sunny climates. It smells of cloves and its oils are used in perfume making. The vivid colour of opal basil makes it a striking garnish.
- **Thai basil** is essential to cuisine from south-east Asia. It has light green leaves and dark red flowers. It has a mild licorice taste and shines in green and red curries, Asian soups, stir-fries and noodle dishes.
- **Lemon basil** at first tastes like sweet basil but has a mild scent and aftertaste of citrus fruit. They are a perfect seasoning for cream sauces, fish, chicken dishes and tea.

Basil grows better, the more you pick it. It will just keep growing. It is also believed that basil planted near tomatoes enhances the flavour of tomatoes. Don't let the number of varieties overwhelm you. Start with one type and then work your way through the others, amazing your guests with these flavorful additions to your cuisine. No yelling and cursing required.

BOOK REVIEW

*Dale Odorizzi,
Master Gardener of Lanark County*

BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS,
HERB GARDENING
1st edition,; Wiley

RECIPE

*Nancy McDonald,
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

**Sweet Cicely Tea Biscuits with
Rosemary Orange Honey**

Fresh Herbs add zip to your food and "Better Homes and Gardens, Herb Gardening" provides a comprehensive guide to planning, planting, creating and caring for a beautiful and delicious herb garden. When I first think of herbs my mind goes to culinary herbs but the term herb is defined in Wikipedia as any plant used for food, flavouring, medicine, or perfume. This book tends to agree with Wikipedia. The authors of Herb Gardening provide a step-by-step guide for starting your own fresh herb garden. There are 35 projects, including handy shopping lists and simple instructions, to keep your garden growing for years to come.

Whether you want to begin a large backyard garden or a small windowsill set-up, this book will guide you through all the critical steps with innovative ideas, simple plans and easy directions. There are more than 575 gorgeous full-color photos, including step-by-step photos to lead you through important construction stages. It offers 35 recipes for specific uses for herbs, such as homemade teas, spreads, potpourris, sauces, dressings, and seasonings. There is an entire chapter of plant-by-number plans that are easy and simple, as well as tips from the "Better Homes and Gardens Garden Doctor" throughout. It also includes helpful seasonal-care charts and, my favorite part of the book, an encyclopedic listing of 145 herbs for easy identification and care.

The "Herb Encyclopedia" section contains information about the herb itself, provides advice on where and how to plant, how to harvest, recommended varieties and the uses for the plant. For each herb there is also interesting "You should know"; for example, Catnip has been found to be 10 more effective than DEET at repelling insects, Lady's Mantle historically had medicinal uses but today can be used to make hand lotions and facial creams. It also identifies the many herbs that are pollinator attractors, something we all aim to add to our gardens.

It is a terrific guidebook. The content is interesting to read from start to finish, it is also easy to zip through to find what you need.

Butter

In the 1990's on two occasions I spent the day at Lizzie Francis's home in Navan baking bread. We made many different kinds of bread in the welcoming kitchen of this log home. Lizzie generously provided the recipes & one I have made many times is the Current and Sweet Cicely Tea Biscuits with Rosemary Orange Honey Butter.

Biscuit: makes about 3 dozen

2/3 cup currants
2 cups boiling water
4 cups flour (1 whole wheat, 3 white flour)
4 Tbsp. White sugar
10 Tsp. Baking powder
1/2 Tsp. salt
2 Tsp. Sweet Cicely chopped
2/3 Cup margarine
2 Cups milk

Honey Butter:

1/3 cup honey
2 Tbsp. Rosemary honey
1 Tbsp. Orange rind

Rosemary Honey

1 cup honey
Several sprigs rosemary

Biscuit

- 1) Soak currants in water and drain well.
- 2) Mix flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and sweet cicely
- 3) Cut in margarine.
- 4) Stir in milk and knead 16 times.
- 5) Roll to about 3/4 " thick.
- 6) Cut into biscuits.
- 7) Bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes. Serve with honey butter.

Honey Butter:

- 1) Blend all ingredients.

Rosemary Honey

- 1) Heat honey gently.
- 2) Place herbs in a clean jar and pour warm honey over them.
- 3) Seal and allow to mellow at least 1 week.

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

Photographs: Herbs – Dale Odorizzi; Gardening with children - Gerda Franssen; Goji berry and Haskup – Diana McClymont Peace & Mary-Sue Haliburton

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

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