

THE EDIBLE GARDEN

MAY 2018

AUNT MOLLY'S GROUND CHERRIES

*Faith Schmidt
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

Last year, when asked for a favorite garden treat, an on-line classmate recommended Aunt Molly's Ground Cherries. I had never heard of them so I decided to learn more. After researching several articles on them, it seemed a super idea to order seeds and give them a try. And - am I ever glad I did!

Aunt Molly's Ground Cherries, (*Physalis pruinosa*), are members of the Solanaceae or Nightshade family, as are tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini and eggplant. They are related to but distinct from tomatillos, (*Physalis philadelphica*), and Cape gooseberries, (*Physalis peruviana*). Although they are encased in a papery "envelope" or husk as are the latter two, they have a distinct taste- a mild pineapple, citrus flavour and are somewhat but not too sweet. Actually, they are absolutely delicious!

HOW TO GROW THEM

Last spring, we ordered seeds and started them in our small greenhouse, transplanting the seedlings outside to a sunny area after hardening them off. Lots of mulch kept the weeds down and watering to a minimum.

By mid-summer, they were about 10-15 cm tall with a 30 - 40 cm spread. Although only 18 plants were grown, by mid-summer they were so prolific that even the chipmunks could not keep up with them. They seem quite impervious to insects.

In some more temperate areas, these plants will apparently reseed themselves. We did leave some cherries on the ground in the fall to see what, if anything, would happen. In the meantime, seeds will be started in the greenhouse this spring to ensure an adequate supply of my now favorite member of the Solanaceae family.

HARVESTING

When the papery husk turns from green to a soft, dry, yellowy-tan colour and the fruit inside is a lovely deep yellow, they tend to fall on the ground or drop to the ground when lightly touched. They are then ready to be harvested - with one for the basket and one for immediate consumption. They tend to be addictive fresh out of their husk. They store easily, apparently can be frozen for later use and can be used in many recipes. They are an excellent snack. Aunt Molly's Ground cherries continued to produce until a heavy frost.

USES

Besides being delicious as a snack, they are wonderful in all green salads, on cereal, in muffins, pancakes and pies. Basically, I substituted whole Aunt Molly's Ground Cherries for blueberries in many of my favorite recipes. This next summer, with more plants, I am looking forward to making jam with them as the seeds are so small that they are not really "noticeable". I also plan on freezing some for over the winter. They can also apparently be dried.

NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

Like tomatoes, this fruit is low in calories and high in nutrients, such as minerals and vitamins, especially vitamins A, C and niacin.



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VICTORY GARDENS FOR BEES

Julianne Labreche

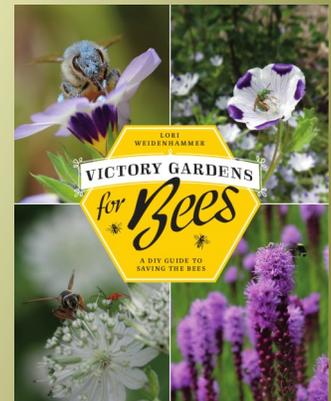
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

During the Second World War, people of all ages worked side-by-side to grow food for their families and to share the harvest with others. It was a means of survival at the time and contributed greatly to the common war effort.

Today, forward-looking gardeners are working together again, this time to build victory gardens for bees. Around the world, bee numbers are dwindling. Some species are endangered. It makes sense that gardeners protect these important pollinators by growing plants to attract bees and create habitat to protect our bee populations, both native and non-native.

A useful reference book for Canadian gardeners who wish to create bee friendly gardens is -

***Victory Gardens for Bees: A DIY Guide to
Saving the Bees***



RECIPE

Here is a recipe I enjoyed this summer using these delightful fruits:

BUTTERMILK PIE

Place a large cookie sheet on the middle rack and preheat oven to 205°C/400°F.

Line a deep dish pie plate with your favorite pie dough (or purchase a ready to cook one).

FILLING:

Beat together:

- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 1 1/2 cups sugar

Add: - 3 large beaten eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla

Mix in:- 3 tbs. flour (I use gluten-free)

Add: - 1 cup buttermilk, beating until smooth



Put 1 cup of whole Aunt Molly's Ground Cherries in bottom of pie crust and pour in batter.

Place pie on cookie sheet and bake at 205°C/400°F for 10 minutes.

Reduce temperature to 180°C/350°F and bake for another 55-60 minutes, watching that the top turns golden and does not burn but pie is set.

Enjoy!

WORKING WITH CLAY SOIL

*Susan Bicket
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

Clay soil will often solicit a groan from gardeners, when wet, it's heavy, sticky and difficult to work with and when dry, it's hard and lumpy. Great for making pots! It's slow to drain, warm up in the spring and is easily compacted and often alkaline (pH > 7) but can also be a very fertile soil which holds moisture well.

It requires work and time to bring out its full potential. The addition of organic matter in large quantities is needed! Some may choose to use raised beds or try the lasagna method of creating beds instead. There are two ways to add organic matter – digging it in and surface applications.

VEGETABLE GARDEN

When dealing with clay soil in a vegetable garden digging in organic matter or even double digging over the whole bed pays dividends in improving soil structure, drainage, aeration and microbial activity relatively quickly. It is also an effective method to use for growing root vegetables without the forks or kinks in the roots that often happen when grown in clay.

It's important to work the soil at the right consistency, too wet it's heavy, sticks to tools and gardeners, and turns over in huge slabs. Too dry, you almost need a pick-axe to break it up. Backbreaking. It is about right when tossed on a garden fork it breaks easily into small lumps. In my own garden, this is usually 2 to 3 days after a good rain. It takes longer in spring when the soil is saturated with melt water.

Turning the soil in the fall allows nature to break up clods. So that in spring, as the soil dries it can be raked to a finer tilth.

Once the soil has been dug over and amended, it's important to avoid compacting it. To prevent compaction, avoid walking on the soil. Good planning, making the beds no wider than 2 arms lengths if accessible from both sides, or 1 arms length if accessible from only one side goes a long way here. If walking on beds is unavoidable, use planks to spread your weight over a greater area or install stepping stones. Use an organic mulch such as compost.

(Douglas & McIntyre, Ltd., 2016). It is written by the creative and passionate Vancouver artist and educator Lori Weidenhammer. She has worked for years to help educate people about bees, often appearing as The Queen Bee at schools and community events in western Canada to encourage students to grow and eat locally and to plant for pollinators.

“As the planet groans under the weight of human population growth, we should be gardening for our lives,” Weidenhammer writes in her introduction to the book. *“We need to undo the damage we have done to make the world inhospitable for the very bees that make our planet liveable—and it is through our gardens that each of us can make a difference.”*

Just as governments encouraged homeowners many years ago during the Second World War to do their bit and to grow vegetables, Weidenhammer suggests that we as gardeners should be doing the same today by planting bee-friendly plants with pollen and nectar supplies to help our bees.

Over one-third of our food crops and 80 percent of flowering plants are pollinated by bees. It is not an insignificant issue, so working together as a gardening community is critical at this important juncture in global history.

Her message is clear: “No bees, no seeds”. Without seeds, food systems will start to collapse for both wildlife and humans.

Who ever thought that it would be left to humble gardeners to save the world?

Of course, the solutions go beyond planting gardens for bees. The issues are massive and global: pesticide and fungicide use in modern-day agriculture and farming, climate change, loss of biodiversity, insect diseases and malnutrition from monoculture crops. It will take a global village of change-makers to turn around the way we produce our foods and grow our gardens.

In the meanwhile, ordinary gardeners can do their bit to help the bees. It's no matter if you tend a small patio or balcony garden, a suburban lot or a wildflower meadow, you can make a difference. For instance, even the smallest garden can grow bee-friendly plants, including many herbs and simple annuals. A large garden or farm can benefit from a bee hedgerow to support

It is necessary to add more organic matter each year to maintain and build soil. Autumn or spring are ideal times for digging this in. It's also a good habit to add compost when digging something up. Mulch can be added throughout the year. As the years pass and the soil improves less digging will be needed.

ALTERNATIVES TO DIGGING

For those who don't want to dig it's possible to improve soil by adding organic mulches to the surface and allowing nature to work. The soil improvement process takes longer but is less disturbing to soil life. Root vegetables may be interesting shapes, or pop out of the ground, for several years. This is a method I use around perennials, trees and shrubs. The extreme form of this method is Lasagna gardening.



Slabs of freshly turned clay
Susan Bicket

FRUIT TREES AND BUSHES

Unless you are prepared to dig and amend an area 3 times the mature spread of the tree or bush, mulching is more appropriate for trees, and bushes.

The biggest danger when planting trees and bushes is creating something known as "clay-pot effect". This is where the roots can not grow beyond the width of the hole because the clay forms a smooth impenetrable barrier around the edge. The tree or bush becomes pot-bound. If the soil in the hole is looser and more porous than the soil surrounding the hole, water will collect in the hole drowning the tree. Eventually the tree or bush will die.

To avoid this, dig a wide hole – 2 to 3 or more times the size of the root-ball – but no deeper than the depth of the root ball. Dig a square rather than a round hole, the roots are more likely to find cervices to leave by at corners. If planting in a poorly drained area, make the hole shallower so that the top of the root-ball sits about 5 to 15 cm above ground level. Using a garden fork break up the soil around the sides and bottom of the hole creating escape routes for the roots and water.

Knock off as much soil as you can from potted plants and tease the roots out, sometimes, for very pot bound plants, use a knife to cut 3 or 4 slits from the top of the root ball to the bottom and spread the roots. This helps prevent a "clay pot" replacing the container. This may seem drastic and in the short term a bit more TLC is needed, but the plant establishes itself more quickly.

Position the roots in the hole and backfill. Do NOT amend the soil as is so often recommended. Adding mykes – mycorrhizae is ok and even beneficial. Tamp down and water as you go to eliminate air pockets, this may require some effort in clay. I have resorted to crumbling lumps by hand. Now add 5 to 10 cm of organic mulch on the surface of the soil. Keep a mulch free zone of about 2.5 to 5 cm around the trunk. The activities of soil organisms will breakdown the mulch and carry it into the soil and the soil structure will improve slowly. Add mulch each year to maintain and improve the soil.

Bare rooted trees or bushes must be planted immediately. If the soil is too wet either heel into a cool damp area or pot up into a large pot, using garden soil if any is dry enough.

Note: Any tree or shrub should well hydrated, before planting. Containerized or burlapped plants should be watered the day before, bare rooted plants soaked for 4 to 8 hours. Bare rooted often establish more quickly than containerized plants.

Note: For burlapped plants, remove any twine and as much of the burlap as possible once the roots are positioned in the hole. The burlap may not be bio-degradable. If the roots are contained in wire, again cut as much away as you can, or it may eventually strangle the tree.

bees and improve food security.

Victory Gardens for Bees is more than an ecological essay; it is a hands-on, practical guide describing what to grow and how to grow it to attract many different species of bees to your garden. Chapters are dedicated to edible gardens, native plants, trees, shrubs and flowers to attract bees in different parts of Canada. It is also a useful guide for identifying bees in your garden, and it provides some tips on bee-keeping too.

If you're looking for a useful book to guide and inspire you as a gardener, then consider this book that makes for an interesting read, is beautifully illustrated, and is chock-a-block full of useful bee snippets that will both fascinate and inform you as its reader.

WINTER ROSE

Judith Cox
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

So softly she sleeps with her branches up high
With roots going down and her dreams in the sky
So softly wind murmurs and memories freeze
With ice into rain on sleeting fast breeze
So softly through winter until the sun warms
The earth and the air and the mosquito swarms
So softly her petals unfurl into spring
As sunshine awakens the birds and they sing

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).