



Trowel Talk

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In Defence of Earwigs

Dale Odorizzi



A male of *Forficula auricularia* (earwig) feeding on flowers

James K. Lindsey at Ecology of Commanster, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forficula.auricularia.-lindsey.jpg>, CC BY SA 2.5

Mention the word earwig to a group of gardeners and you get a strong negative reaction. Tell gardeners that they are beneficial insects, and they look at you as if you have lost your mind. Earwigs are members of the insect class Dermaptera, and are despised by most gardeners.

Generally, earwigs are called plant pests, but this is an undeserved, harsh, and erroneous rap. Earwigs do eat our garden plants, but this practice is forced on them by gardeners who are too neat, removing

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all plant debris and leaving their garden soil exposed, often called well-groomed. If earwigs do not have any dead plant material to munch on, they eat your ornamentals and vegetables. In more natural conditions such as soil covered with mulch and organic debris that naturally occurs under plants, the earwigs happily find much to dine on, leaving your prized plants alone.



European earwig

Katja Schulz from Washington, D. C., USA , <https://news.wsu.edu/press-release/2019/06/05/wsu-scientists-unmask-humble-earwig-apple-protecting-predator/>, CC BY 2.0

Too often, gardeners blame earwigs for damage caused by other pests such as snails, slugs, and cutworms. The blame is put on earwigs as they are found at the scene of the crime where they may be taking shelter for the day. In fact, earwigs are one of the great controls for these pests. They enjoy dining on soft bodied insects such as aphids, mealy bugs, and slug eggs. They also eat mites, nematodes, insects, and decaying matter.

Earwigs work at night and often will take cover in our plants in the daytime. In my early years of gardening, earwigs were prevalent in my garden. They particularly liked to take cover in the daytime in the petals of my large double marigolds. I soon learned that if I wanted to take a bouquet into the house, I should shake the flowers over a bucket of water. Often 20-30 of them would fall in the water. Even then, a few earwigs would hang on and come into the house. Those were the days when chemicals

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan, Agnieszka Keough,
Master Gardeners answer helpline questions.

I had an issue with a few types of seedlings this spring when I started them indoors – most noticeably, tomatoes. They germinated but didn't get any bigger or start growing true leaves, as expected. Instead, they just sat there and eventually started looking washed out, leaves curling and yellowing. The alyssum didn't look great either. After a couple weeks, I started another batch of each in different soil. It was the only thing I could think of that might not be the same as last year's conditions. Those grew fine. The soils were both labeled as seed starting mixes, just different brands. What happened? I did have other seeds started in the same soil as the first tomato batch, and they seem to be okay.

There are a few reasons why seedlings might have arrested growth. These include having the wrong light or temperature conditions, over- or under-watering, or seed that did not develop properly possibly due to overheating.

- Did any conditions besides soil change between batches?
- Were the seedlings getting the same amount of light and watering?
- Were they somewhere (like a windowsill) where light and temperature could change significantly in a short time in spring?
- You didn't say, but were the seeds used for planting both times from the same package (or same year, if they were seeds you collected yourself)?

The seedlings not growing, and then eventually discolouring, sounds like a nutrient deficiency. Did the soil you were using first contain any fertilizer, or did you do any fertilizing after the seeds sprouted? Seeds will contain enough stored food to produce

were available to dispose of every kind of insect, usually killing more than the intended victim. I bought every kind of earwig bait I could find. One day, sitting at my breakfast table, I watched mesmerized as a goldfinch destroyed a couple of zinnias in my window box. Hubby asked why I was so happy to see a goldfinch do that damage when I had worked so hard to get rid of an insect that only hung out in the plant. Good question!

Earwigs do not do any damage in the house and prefer to hide in corners. They do like to hang out in crowds and emit an odour if startled. While I have learned to appreciate earwigs, I still do not like seeing them in my house and actively go after them.

If you are not convinced that earwigs can be beneficial, you can trap them by laying sections of old hose or rolled up newspaper in your garden. After a night's work clearing the pests and debris from your garden, they will crawl into the hose to take daytime shelter. Go out in the morning and tilt the hose into a bucket of water with a few drops of soap added and dump the earwigs captured in the hose into it.

If gardeners are inclined to destroy all pests they see in their gardens, they are doing the wrong thing. They can be removing food that attracts birds and beneficial insects or destroying predators that perform a valuable service in our gardens. 🌱



**Food for the caterpillar of
Wild Indigo Duskywing
(*Erynnis baptisiae*)**

- Wild indigo—*Baptista tinctoria*, *B. laevicollis*, *B. bracteata*, *B. australis*
- Crown vetch—*Securigera varia*
- Lupin—*Lupinus* spp.
- False lupine—*Thermopsis villosa*

Wild indigo duskywing - *Erynnis baptisiae*

Judy Gallagher, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/52450054@No4/20647547121/>, CC BY 2.0

the cotyledons (first leaves) but usually further growth needs nutrients from the soil. It's possible that something was lacking in the nutrients available and your tomatoes and alyssum were particularly sensitive to it.

Another possibility is that your first soil had pests that attacked and weakened your seedlings. Bagged soil is supposed to be sterile (at least, until it's opened), but it's not unknown for it to harbour the eggs of a pest like fungus gnats.

I have quite a large Ficus benjamina tree in my living room, and it has a scale problem. Do you have any suggestions on how to deal with it? I've tried wiping and spraying it down with soapy water, but it hasn't gotten rid of them.

Scale can be a really tough challenge. You do have a few options. Gently scrape off any adult scale you find with a cloth or cotton swab saturated with rubbing alcohol. If you see them, wipe off any young, mobile scale too. They can be difficult or impossible to see, as they are tiny and colourless. Check all the nooks and crannies of the tree, including under the leaves.

You can also try spraying the tree with horticultural oil, especially if you have a larger infestation. This can help smother any scale you miss during inspection and cleaning. You will have to keep monitoring the tree. Check every week or ten days, and remove any new scale you find.

Be aware that you may only be able to keep the scale under control, not get rid of it completely. Keep your Ficus isolated from any other houseplants, as you don't want the problem to spread. Be sure to check all your other house plants carefully to make sure they aren't also infected.

With warmer weather here, it would be a good idea to get the plant out of the house for the summer. Find a spot with afternoon shade. Site it there, and treat it over the summer. When fall comes, if you are still finding scale, you may wish to consider whether or not it is worth keeping the Ficus. 🌱

Grow a Garden Full of Memories

Lee Ann Smith

However you define a garden oasis, I'd like to encourage you to grow some memories! Consider choosing specific plants to celebrate the people and places most important in your life. You can give yourself the pleasure of revisiting favourite friends, family members, events and places—and not have to leave your backyard.

A fun way to start is to consider the names of your friends and family, and then hunt for namesake plants. For example, do you have a David? *Phlox paniculata* 'David' is a reliable perennial blooming pure white over several weeks in mid- to late summer. It is also much less prone to the powdery mildew that afflicts many of the garden phlox varieties. Another idea is the groundcover, dead nettle (*Lamium* 'Red Nancy.') This plant features in my garden as a tribute to my sister, who is fair skinned and prone to sunburn.



Lamium 'Red Nancy'

Lee Ann Smith

You might take the namesake theme even further and create an area in the garden dedicated to your ancestors. As our family's historian, I've been working on this project in my own garden, with much delight. I started with my maternal grandmother, who always insisted her mother intended for her to be

called Mary Marguerite, despite the Mary Margaret recorded on her birth certificate. So of course, I must have the marguerite daisy (*Argyranthemum frutescens*)! This annual is available in white, yellow and blue, and does struggle a bit when temperatures rise above 29°C. No matter, I smile about my grandmother—with her love of the exotic middle name — for as long as the blooms survive.

Of course, your ancestors may not have been blessed with names popular with plant breeders. This is the case with my great-grandmother, Julianna. However, I do know that her favourite plant was the silver dollar plant (*Lunaria annua*). She grew these along the side of her house in Buffalo, New York every year. This plant is a very aggressive re-seeder, but I would love to recognize Julianna, so it could have a place in my "Ancestor Area."

Sometimes your friend or family member's favourite plant will simply not suit your garden site and a creative solution is required. This is the case with my grandfather's roses. He grew magnificent climbers and several types of hybrid teas. Even as a child, I understood the peace rose (*Rosa* 'Madame A. Meiland') took pride of place in my grandparents' backyard. This pink-edged yellow hybrid tea type has a fascinating history. It was developed during World War II and named Peace at the end of the war. Millions have been planted around the world.

My tribute to my grandfather's roses is not Peace, however. My Ottawa garden does not enjoy the gentle climate of St. Catharines ("The Garden City") where my grandparents lived. So I will grow the campfire rose (*Rosa hybrida* 'Campfire') instead. This shrub rose is deeper in colour than Peace, but hardier and less prone to all the maladies that plague hybrid teas. It is also a tribute within a tribute: 'Campfire' was named for the famous Tom Thomson painting and is one of the Canadian Artist series of roses. Maybe you have an artist you'd like to recognize with a rose?

You may be lucky enough to have travelled to a place that has a plant named for that destination. There is a tulip called Toronto, for example (*Tulipa* 'Toronto'), a greigii type featuring a bouquet of three to five tangerine-red blooms per bulb. There is also a double daffodil named Tahiti (*Narcissus* 'Tahiti'). Its fluffy blooms include both a double row of yellow petals and a ruffled yellow and orange trumpet. Both of these plants are garden-worthy, but especially so if you have warm memories of either place.

Have you ever been to Larkspur, Colorado? What a great reason to add a larkspur (*Delphinium* spp.) to your garden! If your destination doesn't have a namesake plant, is there a plant you first noticed when you travelled there? Something the place is known for growing? Even if the exact variety might not live in our ecoregion, perhaps there is something similar that will trigger memories of that location for you.



Canadian liberator tulip
Lee Ann Smith

For a war veteran you would like to commemorate, you might consider growing plants in shades matching the colours of the flag. You could try red cardi-

nal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) for example, maybe under-planted with some white sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*). Another example from my own garden is the Canadian liberator tulip (*Tulipa* 'Canadian Liberator'.) This variety of the triumph type was released in 2020 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Canadian-led liberation of the Netherlands. My father-in-law was part of that Second World War campaign.

Forget-me-not (*Myosotis*) is a groundcover that is highly invasive through its reseeding vigour. It should never be planted on a cottage property or near a woodland. But this is the official plant of the Alzheimer's Society, so I planted some for my mom. I pull most of it before it sets seed, and still always have plenty in my garden.



Forget-me-nots
Lee Ann Smith

You may have plants that were gifts from family or friends. Of course, these will bring a smile every time they come up in the spring. You might even have a friend who has introduced you to a particular colour in the garden. For example, I have several chartreuse plants, each of which remind me of my friend Linda, for whom this colour is a favourite.

Remember, too, that scent is one of the most powerful triggers of memory. Is there a fragrance that takes you back to childhood summer days? Maybe rose, peony, lilac? If so, try to find a spot for one of

these.

I hope you'll consider this method of enriching your gardening experience. By including meaningful plant material, colours, and even scents, you can

Gardening for Birds: Planting for Cedar Waxwings

Julianne Labreche



Cedar waxwing
Barbara Adams



Cedar waxwing
Barbara Adams

One late winter day, just as the weather was turning mild, a large flock of cedar waxwings descended onto the old crabapple tree in my backyard. It was a sight to behold. There were so many of these lovely birds, recognizable with their narrow black facial mask, a yellow band on the tail and flickers of a red waxy secretion on their wing feathers. Within minutes it seemed, the withered, dried small crabapples on the tree were devoured. Then, the flock moved on.

Cedar waxwings are a medium-sized species, about 15 to 20 cm long. They are nomadic and highly social birds that breed in the summer months in Canada and travel in flocks to different places to spend their winters. You will find them in Ottawa during summer, eating fruit such as raspberries and strawberries and carrying out an array of dazzling aerobatics as they chase and capture insects for their

trigger pleasurable memories, grow a tribute, and make your garden even more uniquely yours. 🌱

young. In fall, they gather to migrate south, eating different fruits and berries along the way, including elderberry, serviceberry, dogwood, and winterberries. They migrate as far south as Mexico and Central America.

Cedar waxwings will be happy to visit your garden if you plant fruit or berry bushes, both native and non-native. They are one of the few birds that specialize in eating fruit. Many birds that eat fruit regurgitate the seeds but cedar waxwings consume the entire fruit, thereby helping with seed dispersal of fruit through their droppings. Like other birds, however, they rely on insects to feed their young for their first few days before changing to a fruit diet. Gardeners who enjoy birds should avoid using pesticides in the garden and not be so quick to destroy bugs.



Winter crabapple fruit

Julianne Labreche

To attract cedar waxwings to your garden, grow these native plants:

Dotted hawthorn (*Crataegus punctata*) –This large sized shrub or small tree grows in full sun or partial shade. Its white flowers provide nectar for birds and its bright red berries provide fall fruit. This deciduous tree grows in clay, loam, sand and coarse soil. Caution is advised, however, as it has sharp thorns.

Common juniper (*Juniperus communis*) –This is a small evergreen shrub that prefers full sun and produces berries in fall and winter. Common junipers are dioecious, meaning there are separate male and female plants. Female plants produce small blue berries, while male plants produce little brown cones. Juniper berries are popular not only with cedar waxwings but also other birds including grouse, pheasants and bobwhites (these latter birds, seen in rural settings, never visit my urban garden).

Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) – Despite its common name, this evergreen is not a cedar but a juniper. It grows in full sun. At maturity, it is a medium-sized tree, up to ten metres high. It will grow in clay, sand, loam or coarse soil. Its fruit is a favourite of cedar waxwings, which explains, in part, the name of this bird. 🌿

For the sounds of cedar waxwings [click here](#)



Common juniper

Julianne Labreche

Tip: *Cats are the most significant cause of bird deaths in Canada. It is estimated that feral and domestic cats kill approximately 196 million birds annually in this country. To protect birds in the garden, avoid placing bird baths or feeders close to shrubs and areas where cats might hide in wait.*



My cat on a leash

Julianne Labreche

and areas where cats might hide in wait. If you have a cat, consider keeping your pet indoors where it will be safe and so will the birds. If your cat spends time outside, consider placing a bell on its collar. Some cat owners train their cats to walk on a leash outdoors.

In the Alcove Garden: Blazing Star

Amanda Carrigan

Botanical name: *Liatris spicata*

Zones: 4-9

Growing conditions: sun, moist to average

Native to: Central North America



Liatris

Candace Dressler

Several species of *Liatris* grow in North America. They occupy different habitats across the continent, but share grassy foliage, an upright shape, and magenta-purple (or sometimes white) flower spikes which provide nectar and seeds for wildlife. The genus name, *Liatris*, seems to be of unknown origin. The specific epithet *spicata* refers to the spike or spear shape of the flowerhead.

Liatris spicata, native to eastern North America, is the most common species found at nurseries and garden centres. It prefers damp meadow habitats and full sun. Some populations are found in southern Ontario. The species *L. novae-angliae* (also known as *L. scariosa* var. *novae-angliae*), which is also found in Eastern North America, is probably the native species closest to Ottawa. It prefers drier conditions and partial shade, its preferred habitat being sand barrens, prairie, and coastal plains. Another good *Liatris* for drier conditions would be *L. aspera*, a native of Michigan and southwest. It prefers sandy prairies and poorer soils. Some populations can also be found in Ontario.

Each flower spike of a blazing star is made up of multiple, smaller clustered blooms with thread-like petals. Some species, like *L. spicata*, have flowers clustered evenly in a spike around the stem. Others, like *L. novae-angliae*, are known as 'button' types, with distinct clusters of flowers spaced along the stem. Butterflies, especially monarchs, love visiting for the nectar, as do native bees and flies, and the seeds later provide food for birds. Depending on the species and growing conditions, *Liatris* can range from only 20 cm tall to about 1.5 m tall. All prefer sunny conditions, and grow best in leaner soils. Over-fertilized blazing stars can be lanky or floppy in appearance.

Mature plants of most *Liatris* species have a corm or bulb-like root. They do not spread or form large colonies from the roots, but reseed where they are happy. The tubers in established clumps can be dug up and separated to make new plants. Seeds along a *Liatris* stem ripen sequentially, and fluff out. Each seed has some hairs attached as a parachute, to disperse the seeds in the same way as dandelions. The ripe seeds may germinate right away, if sown when fresh. Otherwise, they will germinate in spring, or they can be collected and sown in spring after 90 days of stratification or cold treatment.

Liatrix species generally have no serious pest or disease problems.

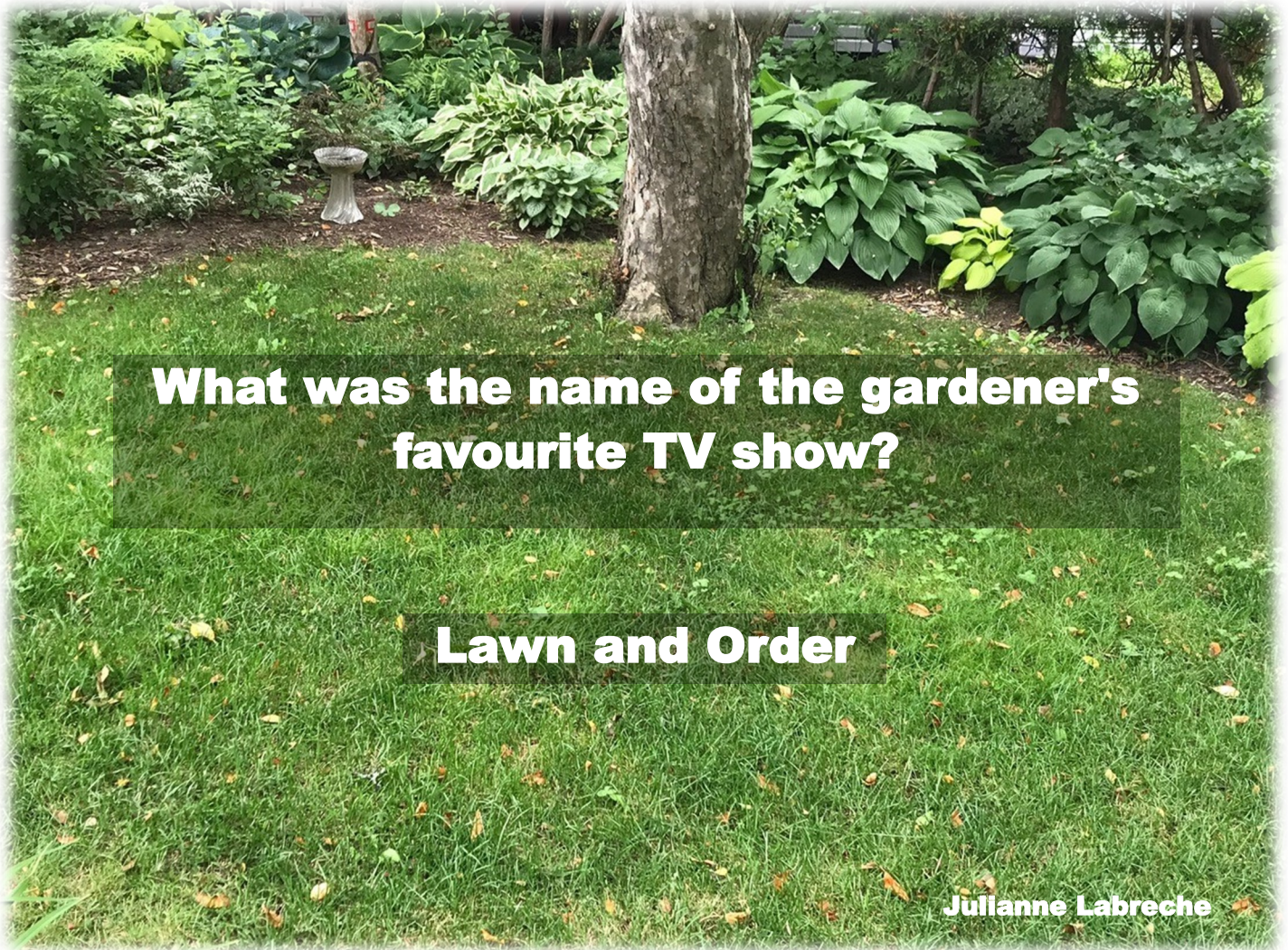
Tea made from the roots of blazing star is a folk remedy for various internal complaints, such as kidney and bladder problems, gonorrhea, colic, or delayed menstruation, as well as a gargle for sore throats. Blazing star was also used in a poultice to treat snakebite.

Overall, *Liatrix* species are a valuable addition to the garden. Its striking form and colour give long-lasting visual interest from summer into fall, and it provides food for multiple species of insects and birds. 🌱



Liatrix

Adrian Barber



What was the name of the gardener's favourite TV show?

Lawn and Order

Julianne Labreche

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Helplines - are monitored daily
Send questions and photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for Identification.

Trowel Talk can be found on the [Lanark County Master Gardener's blogsite](#) and Ottawa Carleton Master Gardener's Website <https://mgottawa.ca/>



Clinics

Ask a Master Gardener, face to face, gardening questions.

Barrhaven Market

10:00 am—1:00 pm, Sunday June 25

Beechwood Market

9:00 am—2:00 pm, Saturday June 24

Carp Farmers Market

8:00 am—1:00 pm, Saturday June 17, July 1

Cumberland Farmers Market

9:00—1:00 pm, Saturday July 8

Article suggestions box

This is your chance, as a reader, to suggest an idea for an article you would like to see in Trowel Talk. Click on the button.



Trowel Talk team:

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Letters to editor: newsletter@mgottawa.ca

Banner Photograph: Bearded iris possibly Nibelungeny, S.R.Bicket.



Talks and Events

For information on gardening in and around the Ottawa valley:

<https://gardeningcalendar.ca/>

Talks given by Master Gardeners for garden clubs and horticultural societies. If you wish to attend please contact the host organization to confirm venue. Zoom or other virtual meeting software is still in use by some societies.

North Gower Farmers Market

8:30 am— :00 pm, Saturday July 15

Ottawa Farmers market

9:00 am—1:00 pm, Sunday June 18, July 2

Westboro Market

9:00 am—1:00 pm, Saturday June 17, July 1

Thursday July 6, 7:00 pm

Rebecca Last

Waterwise Gardening

[Rideau Lakes Horticultural Society](#)