Trowel Talk

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Asparagus shoot
S. R. Bicket

Warm-loving Vegetables for Zone 5

Penka Matanska

When growing warm-loving vegetables, I suggest three things to bolster your success and enjoyment. First, choose vegetables you enjoy the most, as you will be more invested in their success. Plant easy-to-grow types to begin with, like tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, zucchini, squash and beans. Finally, start small and expand as you become comfortable with the size of your garden and gain experience.

My planning starts in late winter and includes how to interplant vegetables with herbs for higher yields.

Preparations before planting

Preparing the soil and growing healthy plants are the key factors for a successful harvest.

For planting to be successful, the soil should be warmed to at least 12°C and be relatively dry. Check the temperature with soil thermometer.

Improving the soil before planting greatly increases plant health and crop yield. Amending it with organic matter such as compost or well-aged chicken manure adds essential nutrients, improves soil structure, and enhances moisture retention while still allowing proper drainage. My preference is for sanitized slow release organic fertilizer (5-3-2 NPK). I

use one cup of chicken manure pellets for each square foot of planting space and work it into the soil before planting.

Warm-loving vegetables can be either directly sown into the soil or planted as transplants, depending on the crop and your gardening style.

Direct Seeding

Certain vegetables perform best when their seeds are sown directly into the prepared soil. I start with my favourite varieties of bush beans, cucumbers, zucchini and acorn squash, following the seed spacing recommendations on each package.

Cucumber: *Cucumis sativus* 'Earliest Mincu' is a short-season variety that matures in about 50 days and produces heavily. It can be planted directly from seed. For cucumbers, I pay close attention to spacing, as these plants will need support as they grow. Avoiding overseeding is important to allow for good air circulation. Make sure you allow enough room for a trellis or support structure. Cucumbers do not enjoy intense afternoon heat, so they benefit from light shade later in the day or from trellises positioned in a way that allows the leaves to naturally shade the vines and the developing fruit.

I like directly sowing my zucchini (*Cucurbita pepo*) plants. My preferred variety is 'Zucchini de Nice', that matures in 60 days. Picking the fruit when small (the size of tennis ball) makes them ideal for salads among other dishes.

My preferred squash is the acorn squash—*Cucurbita pepo* 'Sweet Dumpling' which matures in about 110 days. This squash does take long time to ripen, but it's worth the wait due to its sweet delicate flavour.

I like experimenting with different types of beans. My winning variety is a bush bean—*Phaseolus coccineus* 'Yin Yang', also known as Calypso beans. They mature in approximately 80 days. When cooked these beans have a creamy texture and their unusual black and white colour adds interest to dishes.

After seeding, I water the soil thoroughly to encourage germination. I keep a close eye on the weather and water every couple of days if rain is not in the forecast. While plants started from seed may grow a bit more slowly at first, they become well adapted to the soil and weather conditions, resulting in stronger, more resilient plants over time.

'Zucchini de Nice' blooms and fruit
Penka Matanska

Starting from Transplants

Some vegetables grow best when they are started indoors and later transplanted into the garden. These include tomatoes and peppers and companion plants (parsley, basil) that will go in the soil at the same time. I start the seeds indoors in mid- to late-March. By mid-May, the young plants are strong enough to be transplanted into the garden.

I try to plant my transplants on a cloudy day, preferably when light rain is expected. Early morning or late afternoon is the best time to plant, as it reduces sun

stress on the plants. I follow the recommended instructions for each variety and interplant with the herbs. After transplanting, I cover the seedlings with a light-weight polypropylene fabric row cover to provide shade and help preserve moisture, especially if sunny days are forecast. This extra protection allows the plants to settle in and establish themselves. In Zone 5, May weather can be unpredictable, with sudden temperature drops and cold nights. Fragile vegetable transplants need extra attention during the planting weeks and having row covers will greatly help to preserve heat on cold nights.

Tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*) come in many varieties. Some are suitable for containers, while others need more space and grow best in large vegetable beds or directly in the ground. I start my favourite tomato varieties indoors in mid-March. Two varieties I enjoy are 'Lemon Boy' (maturing in about 75 days) and 'Sweet Million' cherry tomato (maturing in 65 days), both are known for their mild flavour and excellent snacking quality.

Peppers (*Capsicum annuum*) are long maturing plants and choosing a variety that performs well in colder climates is critical. I like 'Carmen': it is a fast-growing long red pepper with delightful flavour, maturing in about 75 days after transplanting.

Companion Planting and Interplanting

Companion planting with herbs such as basil, calendula, parsley, and oregano can be especially beneficial for vegetables. These herbs thrive in the same sunny, warm conditions as many vegetables and can help deter common pests while attracting beneficial insects. Companion herbs not only help reduce pests and improve yields, but they also make the garden more diverse. Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is particularly valuable near tomatoes and peppers, where they improve both growth and flavour. I start basil seeds in small pots at the same time, so they can later be interplanted with tomatoes and peppers. Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) and parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) attract predatory insects that help keep pest populations in check. Sowing dill alongside cucumber seeds can provide a beneficial companion effect, while parsley can be planted on the north side of garden beds with tomatoes and peppers.

French marigolds (*Tagetes*), which only grow to 25 cm (10") tall attract pollinators and deter pests, are a great companion for peppers without crowding them.

Interplanting marigolds and peppers
Penka Matanska

I also interplant cold-loving and warm-loving vegetables to provide mutual benefits, harvesting early maturing ones and opening space for the other plants to grow and spread. Lettuce can be planted on the shade side of tomatoes and peppers. This will stretch the growing season for the cold-loving veggies and help suppress weeds. Beans and brassicas grow well together. When I plant my cabbage, I leave space to plant my bush beans later. I plant zucchini near the carrots and garlic plants.

Beans, squash and corn plant combination
Penka Matanska

For most gardeners, the growing season begins once the soil has warmed and the danger of the last spring frost has passed, but garden planning and starting seeds indoors can start in the winter, building momentum for the spring. Every year I plan and try new plant combinations, and the rewards come not only in abundance of fresh vegetables but also in the quiet satisfaction of exploring new vegetable grouping growth habits.

Tip: Putting a sharp *edge on the lawn around flower beds, pathways, drives and patios will make any garden look neater. Use an edging tool such a half-moon or spade to cut the edge and create a small ditch about 10 cm deep. This will hold back the grass for a while. Weed out any grass on the wrong side of the edge. Take this chance to smooth out straight lines and curves, even reshape a garden bed.*

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan, Agnieszka Keough

Master Gardeners answer helpline questions.

I'm tired of standing there with a hose and watering my flower gardens in the hot weather, so I want to put in some sort of watering system this year, preferably something simple - easy to set up and use. What kind of system do you think would be best?

Probably the most straightforward option would be soaker hoses, which are hoses with porous walls that can be laid out between the established plants, using landscape staples to keep the hose in position. They can be hidden under a layer of mulch (mulch is important as it will also help to keep the water from evaporating too quickly), and connected to a regular hose over the distance between the hose bib and the garden. So it is as simple as a basic lawn sprinkler to use, once set up, but as the water is being slowly dripped directly onto the garden soil, the loss of water to evaporation and runoff is much less than it would be with a sprinkler. This will work well in a vegetable garden or in a fairly full established flower garden. Place the soaker hose ideally within a few inches of each plant, snaking the hose back and forth.

In the case of a garden where the plants are spaced fairly far apart, or where the space includes containers that need to be watered, a drip irrigation system may work better, and is also very water-efficient. The set-up is more complicated – each plant or container must be given its own emitter and tube to bring the water from the main hose. This also means it is best for a garden where the plants are not getting moved around very much.

In both cases, the water pressure available will

determine how long a continuous length of hose or irrigation line can be without the water all leaving the hose before the end is reached, resulting in some plants not getting watered. Some testing may be needed to see what works in a specific situation. Most soaker hoses don't required a very high pressure, but connecting multiple hoses together, or having uneven terrain can require more force (pressure) to get the water where it needs to go. If there is a large area to be watered, requiring multiple lengths of hose, you may need to water different sections in turn, as if they were multiple beds in different areas, to ensure enough water is reaching each area.

In order to do the watering most efficiently, it is also good to have plants placed with others of similar watering requirements, and in appropriate sites. For example, plants that like water will require more attention if they are in a high, well-drained location; they might be best in a lower area where water will collect naturally. In an area where all the plants are drought–tolerant, you will have to water much less often than you would if some of them needed more moisture.

I have daffodil bulbs in my lawn that I want to move, but I know it will be almost impossible to find them to dig up once the foliage has died back or been mown. Can they be dug up in the spring (in the period between the bloom finishing and the lawn desperately needing to get mowed) if I replant them right away?

Moving the daffodil bulbs (or other bulbs) early is definitely possible, if you take care of them afterwards. Digging up the bulbs while they are still growing (rather than dormant) can make it difficult for them to re-establish, and disrupt their bloom cycle, if they are too stressed. So you would go through all the effort of moving them and end up with bulbs that aren't blooming, or that don't come back next year. If you want to move them early, your best option is to deadhead the flowers, and dig up a good root ball; try especially to get under the bulbs far enough that the bulb roots are still intact and encased in soil. Then, as you suggest, immediately replant the bulbs in their new home. If you don't want to bring the grass to the new location with the bulbs, gently separate the bulbs from the root ball before planting. Water them in, and keep them moist until the foliage yellows and dies. If you can wait a little to move them, once the foliage has started to die off (browning at the tips), it signals that the bulbs are entering dormancy. They will still be easy to see, but will move much better

Alternatively, if the big issue is locating the bulbs, perhaps you could put a stake or other easily visible marker over/in each clump of the bulbs to be moved, and mow around it until the bulbs are dormant, then dig them up and either replant immediately as mentioned above, or dry them off and store them, and replant in fall, as normally recommended.

Integrated Pest Management

Dale Odorizzi

If you are like me, you may remember the days when you would see an insect eating one of your plants and immediately grab a bottle of some kind of pesticide to spray it. The Ontario provincial ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides made many of us gardeners look for a better approach. One of my Master Gardener courses introduced me to the concept of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is a decision-making framework that minimizes pest damage while reducing risks to people, beneficial organisms and the environment. Different organizations describe IPM in (four, five or six) steps, but the underlying process is consistent. I will describe the six-step process.

Step 1. Identify the pest

Accurate identification is essential. If you do not recognize the insect, try to take a picture of it and learn who it is and if it is problematic. In the early 2000s, I started a hummingbird/butterfly garden. I took great care to plant both host and nectar plants for the butterflies. One of the plants I started was the hollyhock. While I was admiring the plant one day, I saw a caterpillar enjoying my hollyhock. I reached up to squish it off and at the last second realized that the caterpillar was a painted lady caterpillar. A few weeks later, I was awarded with a beautiful painted lady.

As my example shows, proper identification prevents unnecessary or harmful treatments. You will avoid killing beneficial species. It will also ensure that you are using the right method of control and prevents wasted time and money.

Biological control –skunk eating grubs
Dale Odorizzi

Step 2. Monitor Pest Activity

Track the pest population on your plants and determine if they are causing any harm. The best way to start this is with visual inspection. You can also use traps to see how many insects you have on your plants and evaluate how much damage they are doing.

For example, I really like *Heliopsis* (false sunflowers) I learned to my great chagrin that aphids are also a big fan. While some folks would dash off to get a bottle of insecticidal soap, I am more of a lazy person and really don't mind running my finger and thumb up the stem, squishing hundreds of aphids along the way.

I few days later, they were back but also back were a few chickadees having a protein rich snack of my aphids. Also, the Heliopsis stayed healthy, despite their continued infestation of aphids.

My environmental observations told me that the Heliopsis and the aphids were welcome to coexist in my garden.

Chickadee having a treat after a morning eating aphids
Kim Allen

Step 3. Set Action Thresholds

Determine the point at which pest activity becomes unacceptable. Not every pest sighting requires action. Spotting a tomato hornworm on my tomato plant requires immediate action, even though it will mature into a five spotted hawk moth. I squish them immediately as I know a good portion of my treasured tomato plant will be gone if I run for a bucket of soapy water. However, if there are white bumps on the hornworm, let it live. A parasitic wasp has laid its egg in the hornworm, and we would like to encourage the wasps as they are a vital actor in IPM.

Not every pest sighting requires action. Thresholds prevent overreaction and unnecessary pesticide use.

Step 4. Prevention is the first line of defense.

It reduces the chance that pests become established. Not every pest sighting requires action.

Thresholds prevent overreaction and unnecessary pesticide use.

Examples:

- Crop rotation, using resistant varieties
- Seal entry points in buildings to prevent insects overwintering indoors.
- Proper sanitation and storage of garden tools and produce.
- Managing moisture.

Biological control - American toad
Dale Odorizzi

Step 5. Control (Use the Least-Risk Options First)

If monitoring shows pests exceed thresholds, choose the least-toxic, most targeted control methods.

Control categories:

- **Cultural:** Adjust planting times for vegetable crops (next season), irrigation and sanitation.
- **Physical:**
  - ◊ Traps are available for some insects (e.g. Japanese beetles) but can attract even more to your yard.
  - ◊ Barriers such as sticky traps, toothpicks, floating row covers and plastic mesh can keep pests from our plants.
  - ◊ Hand remove and squish the pest or drop it in a bucket of soapy water
- **Biological:** Predators (frogs, toads, snakes, skunks, beneficial insects), parasites, pathogens
- **Chemical: Pesticides**—used only as a last resort and applied selectively. Chemicals do not distinguish between good bugs and bad bugs.

Garter snake, eats insects but also eats frogs and toads
Dale Odorizzi

Biological control - dragonfly
Dale Odorizzi

Step 6. Evaluate Results

Assess whether the chosen methods worked and adjust future strategies accordingly.

A real-world example of applying Integrated Pest Management to growing potatoes.

Step 1--Identify the pest. In the case of potatoes, the big three pests are Colorado potato beetle, flea beetles and potato leaf hopper.

Floating row cover protects *Brassicas* from cabbage moth
Dale Odorizzi

Step 2--Monitor Pest Activity. Check your plant every two or three days in early summer, looking for egg clusters, small larvae, adult beetles feeding, leaf damage and importantly natural predators such as lady beetles, ground beetles and birds.

Step 3--Set Action Thresholds.

- Eggs-If you see more than a few clusters of eggs, remove them.
- Larvae-If you see groups of larvae, start picking them off immediately.
- Adults-If there are just a few, they can be picked off.
- Damage—If defoliation reaches 10-15% early in the season, intervene. Later in the season potatoes tolerate more.

Step 4--Prevention

- Crop Rotation—Do not plant potatoes in the same spot more than once every three to four years.
- Mulching—Thick straw mulch makes it harder for beetles to find stems.
- Planting—Early to get plants established before peak beetle population or late so the beetles have moved on.
- Clean Plant debris—Reduces overwintering sites.
- Floating Row Covers—Keep beetles off until flowering. Then remove to allow pollination.

Step 5--Control

- Cultural Controls—Remove egg masses by hand. Crush larvae. Encourage predators, birds, ground beetles, parasitic wasps, frogs.
- Physical Controls—Hand pick adults and larvae into soapy water. Use row covers early in the season. Use deep straw mulch to disrupt beetle movement.
- Biological Controls—Lady beetles, ground beetles, spined soldier bugs, lacewing larvae and parasitic wasps, spiders and some species of birds (bluebirds, cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches and wrens) will eat adult beetles.
- Chemical Controls—Limited to non-existent for the home gardener.

Turtle laying eggs, great slug eater
Dale Odorizzi

Step 6--Evaluate the Results after any intervention

- Did the beetle numbers drop below your threshold?
- Did the plants recover?
- Did beneficial insects remain active?
- Did your prevention strategies work well enough to repeat nest year?

My family were big gardeners. They always used pesticides to protect their valuable crops. When I started my own gardens, I thought I was just being frugal by not using pesticides. Learning about Integrated Pest Management showed me that cheap can be good.

Native Shrubs: Canadian Serviceberry— *Amelanchier canadensis*

Heather A. Clemenson

Canadian serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*) is also called the eastern serviceberry, shadbush, shadblow, Juneberry, or wild currant, and has the distinction of being one of the earliest blooming shrubs in the spring.

In terms of its early history, the serviceberry fruit were used by indigenous peoples and colonists. The shrub had many medicinal uses, for example, the root bark was used by indigenous peoples to cure diarrhea and indigestion. Serviceberry remains an important part of indigenous traditional medical practices. The fruit can be eaten fresh, dried, cooked in jams and jellies or made into wine. The hard wood is close-grained and has been traditionally used for small woodworking projects such as wooden handles, walking sticks and fishing rods.

Description:
The Canadian serviceberry is native throughout eastern Canada. This deciduous multi-stemmed shrub is an understory plant often found growing in wetlands, swamps and thickets. The serviceberry is an early succession plant which means that it will quickly colonize areas disturbed by fire, storms or mechanical disturbance.

This shrub has a moderate growth rate and will grow in a wide range of soil types, including sand, sandy loams and coarse loamy soils. It will grow in wet or dry sites. As an understory shrub it will grow in full shade or partial shade, yet it also does well in full sun.

The serviceberry has an upright vase shape and can grow to a height of approximately 8 metres with a 5 to 6 metres spread. It is an open shrub with thin gray wood branches that can let in light to other plants growing below.

The leaves are oval and small, from 3 to 6 cm long and 2 to 3 cm wide, with fine-toothed edges and downy undersides. In the fall the leaves of the native serviceberry turn an attractive yellow and gold, whereas a few serviceberry cultivars have orange or red fall foliage.

Canadian serviceberry leaves
Heather A. Clemenson

The early spring white flowers, though showy, are relatively short-lived, generally lasting only a week or more. They form upright terminal clusters. Each flower has five petals surrounding many stamens.

The serviceberry is self-pollinating, however, there is some evidence that it sets more fruit when pollinated from another serviceberry. Serviceberries will fruit two or three years after planting. While they can produce fruit every year, they tend to have a good fruiting year once every three years. The berries are from 0.6 cm to 1.3 cm in diameter with a purple waxy bloom. Berries are usually ready to harvest from two to three months after flowering.

Canadian serviceberry spring flowers
Heather A. Clemenson

Maintenance:
The Canadian serviceberry requires little attention. Like all new plants, it will need to be watered regularly during its first year and may benefit from mulching, but it will need very little maintenance, neither pruning nor fertilizing in following years. Pruning would only be needed to remove dead, diseased or crossing branches. If pruning to shape the shrub, the best time to prune would be when the shrub is dormant in late winter or early spring before the buds begin to swell. It can be pruned as a tree by retaining only one stem. The native serviceberry might have some suckering, but any suckers can be easily removed.

Pests and Diseases:
While the serviceberry can be subject to powdery mildew, leaf spot rust and other foliar diseases, any damage is mainly cosmetic. Cleaning up and disposing of any diseased leaves in the garbage (do not compost) in the fall and avoiding overhead irrigation will help mitigate such diseases. As with many plants and shrubs the serviceberry can also be attacked by Japanese beetles, spider mites and other small insects and mites. Removing Japanese beetles by knocking them off the plant into a container of soapy water is one way to help rid the shrub of these pests. However, there are several alternative solutions (see: Trowel Talk, March 15, Vol. 16, #3, for a detailed article by Rob Stuart on “Japanese Beetles”.) An application of insecticidal soap can be used to remove spider mites and other small insects. However, attracting natural predators to your garden, such as lacewings and ladybugs will also help to keep small insects under control.

Serviceberry berries
Julianne Labreche

Garden use:
The Canadian serviceberry is often used as a focal point in the garden, especially because of its early blooming as well as for its fall colour. It can also be planted in a small group and is particularly effective when planted against a background of evergreen trees or shrubs as its silver-gray bark also stands out for winter interest.

As it is one of the first shrubs to bloom in the spring, it also has a significant role as a pollinator plant, providing an important food source for bees and butterflies. The larvae of a variety of butterflies feed on the leaves and, later in the season, the berries attract birds, such as blue jays, woodpeckers, cardinals, goldfinches and robins, as well as other wildlife including squirrels and chipmunks.

There are several native serviceberries found across Canada such as: Saskatoon serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), smooth serviceberry (*A. laevis*) or running serviceberry (*A. stolonifera*). Also, there are several cultivars of *A. canadensis* available such as: Rainbow Pillar serviceberry (*A. canadensis* 'Glennform'); Prince William serviceberry (*A. canadensis* 'Prince William'); and Spring Glory (*A. canadensis* 'Spring Glory'). Each cultivar has different selling features whether fall colour, higher fruit yield or in the case of 'Spring Glory' it is often sold as a single stemmed cultivar and therefore as a small tree. Whether it is the native shrub or a recent cultivar, an Amelanchier is well worth considering as a garden feature for its flowers, fruit and fall colour.

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Send questions and photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for identification.

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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.

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Letters to editor: newsletter@mgottawa.ca

Banner Photograph: . *Trillium grandiflorum*
Design and layout: S.R.Bicket

Clinics

Ask a Master Gardener, face to face gardening questions.

Market locations can be found on the calendars of the Lanark and Ottawa–Carleton websites

Almonte Farmers Market , 8:30 am to 12:30 pm
Saturday, May 15, June 13

Barrhaven Farmers Market: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm
Sunday, May 31, June 7

Beechwood Farmers Market: 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
Saturday, June 6, 13

Carleton Place Farmers Market, 8:30 am to 12:30 pm
Saturday, May 23, June 6

Carp Farmers Market, 8:00 am to 1:00 pm
Saturday, May 16, 23, 30, June 6, 13

Main Street Farmers Market, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
Saturday, May 16, 23, June 13

Manotick Farmers Market: 10:00 am to 12:00 pm
Saturday, June 13

Ottawa Farmers Market: 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Sunday, May 17, 31, June 14

Parkdale Farmers Market: 9:00 am to 3:00 pm
Saturday, May 16, June 3

Parkdale Farmers Market: 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm
Wednesday, June 10

Perth Farmers Market, plant sale, 8:00 am to 1:00 pm
Saturday, May 16

Perth Farmers Market, 8:00 am to 1:00 pm
Saturday, May 16, 30, June 13

Westboro Farmers Market, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
Saturday, May 16, 30, June 6, 13

Talks and Events

Vegetables in Any Situation
Judith Cox
Monday, May 18. 7:00 pm
Russell Horticultural Society

Paint with Blooms
Nancy McDonald
Wednesday, May 20, 7:00 pm
Greater Ottawa Water Garden Horticultural Society

Promising a Rose Garden
Judith Cox
Wednesday June 3, 7:00 pm
Greely Garden Group

Let it Rot! Composting for the Home Gardener
Dale Odorizzi
Thursday, June 4, 6:45 pm
Rideau Lakes Horticultural Society

Culinary Delights with Herbs and Edible Flowers
Nancy McDonald
Tuesday, June 16, 7:30 pm
Ottawa Horticultural Society

Native Plants in Ontario
Candace Dressler
Tuesday, June 16, 7:00 pm
Smiths Falls Horticultural Society --