



Cross Pollination

February 2009

Coordinator's Corner

What does your garden say about you?

"Gardens say so much about a culture, don't they? ...You really see what the people value."

I was quite struck by this comment uttered by the main character in the novel "Loving Frank". What were the very diverse gardens in my neighbourhood saying about what we value?

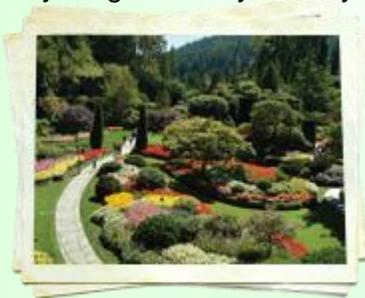
Most front gardens around me have the ubiquitous lawn adorned with the requisite perennials, annuals and shrubs disguising the foundation. A number of these have proudly displayed Trillium awards attesting to their owners' civic pride and duty. Most of these lawns remain emerald green in even the driest of summers, early morning automatic sprinklers defying the watering bans.

Two gardens in my neighbourhood are sparsely planted but have lawns that retain their green hue, regardless of the season or the weather. They require no cutting, watering or fertilizing. They look the same in January or in July, evoking a Hollywood-like ability to retain eternal youth. They are pest-free, disease-free, work-free and life-free.

Another front garden has real turf- an impressive monoculture of incredible tidiness, order and uniformity. The equidistantly-spaced red geraniums stand at attention inside circular flowerbeds hemmed in white scalloped cement edging.

Then there are the few "mavericks" who have replaced the traditional front lawn with a medley of plant material. These gardens are bursting with both plant and animal life.

What do these gardens say about the people who own them? What is their attitude towards nature, both flora and fauna? What does your garden say about **you**? Is your garden addicted to chemicals once popular that are now banned? Has your garden become a water junkie? Do you rule or does nature rule? Or are you and nature in partnership? What **does** your garden say about you?



SUMMER

Photo of Butchart Gardens, Victoria, B.C.

Halton Region

Master Gardener Meetings

7:30 p.m. RBG - Rooms 3 & 4



Please bring something for the draw table and change to buy tickets - \$2.00 each or 3 for \$5.00

- March 4 - **Weed Free Lawns without Pesticides** (Sapphire Singh) (Niagara MG's invited)
- April 8* (*2nd Wednesday of the month) - Trip to Tasmania (Bill Kertzia)
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- May 6 – **Greening your backyard** (Stacy Hickman)

Other Garden-Worthy Dates

- March 1st - **A Day in the Garden**
Guelph at The Turfgrass Institute on Victoria Rd.
Registration at 9AM, day ends at 2:15.
\$30 at the door - lunch included.
For reservation, contact mgguelph@hotmail.com or call the MG hotline at 519-824-4120 ext 56714.
- March 5-8 **Stratford Garden Festival**
www.stratfordgardenfestival.com/
- March 7th **Seedy Saturday**, London, ON
Siloam United Church (at rear entrance)
1240 Fanshawe Road East,
Admission is \$5.00 per adult.
For more information contact Nancy Abra
at 519-461-0037 or at aabra@gtm.net

Other garden-worthy dates, continued . .

- **March 13-15 Ontario Garden Show**
Hamilton Convention Centre
www.ontariogardenshow.com/sitepages
- March 18-20 **Canada Blooms**
www.canadablooms.com
- April 20th **Have Your Garden and Eat It Too**
7-8 p.m. in Burlington Central Library's Centennial Hall. (Admission is free.)
- Saturday, April 25 - **RBG Members Mulch Day;**
8 a.m. to noon
Mercer's Glen site (off Old Guelph Road, next to the Hwy 403 overpass).
Members only

A small donation will offset the cost of providing this opportunity to members. Bring your own containers, shovel or scoop and be sure to bring along your membership card as this event is exclusive to Royal Botanical Gardens' members.



RBG

Gardens in Northamptonshire and Yorkshire, England by Roberta Roberts

In the summer of 2008, I visited family in England in Northamptonshire and Yorkshire. Knowing my gardening passion, my cousin took us to Harlow Carr, the last and most northern of the four Royal Horticultural Society's gardens. The original aim of the Garden was to set up in 1950 as a trial ground to assess suitability for growing in northern climates (England!) It now spans 58 acres with a variety of sections: New Main Borders (contemporary planting with a twist!), raised beds in the Kitchen Garden presented through creative design with mixed vegetables; the Scented Garden with sculptural willow screens, for blind visitors. One area of particular interest to me was "Gardens through Time", 7 gardens depicting the specific plants and trends over the past 200 years of gardening history. For example, the Victorian Garden of the 19th century included little plots for children, a trend at the time. A major part of the garden overlooked The Queen Mother's Lake and there I saw a nest sitting up in the middle of the lake - a black waterhen perched on top! Another area was experimental, testing out compost and mulches. In this month's magazine is featured the Winter Walk, showing how attractive an area can be planted for mid winter conditions (theirs) There is a large shop offering plants, garden tools and accessories as well as books, china, clothing etc and an essential stop at Betty's Cafe Tea Rooms, a branch of the upscale renowned cafe in Harrogate, specializing in cream teas!! The Gardens are open every day of the year except Christmas Day. This week (real time) the snowdrops are dominating!! See pictures at www.rhs.org.uk/harlowcarr

Cornus and salix stems are stunning in February – from the deep, almost blood red stems of *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' to the long green shoots of *Salix irrorata* which turn purple and are covered with a striking white blossom. Also, ornamental grasses on the main border look very impressive back lit in the low winter sun.



The next day we went to "The Walled Garden" at the Scampston Hall, which has been under the same family ownership since 1690. The present owner is Sir Charles Legard. In 1773, Capability Brown designed the Park on a naturalistic scheme (popular at the time). The Walled Garden was derelict for 50 years and was renovated and opened to the public in 2004. The design is by Piet Oudolf from Holland and of particular interest to me as he designed the new gardens at the Toronto Botanical Gardens and there are similar trends (on a smaller scale) e.g. the drifts of grasses where swarthes of *Molina* centered in close cropped lawn. The round columns of yew; the Silent Garden with square clipped bases (to grow 3 metres before the tops are levelled - ensuring a wonderful reflection in the pond). The Serpentine Garden contains 6 serpentine clipped yews contained by cloverleaf elements and will have an undulating top when they reach 2 metres.

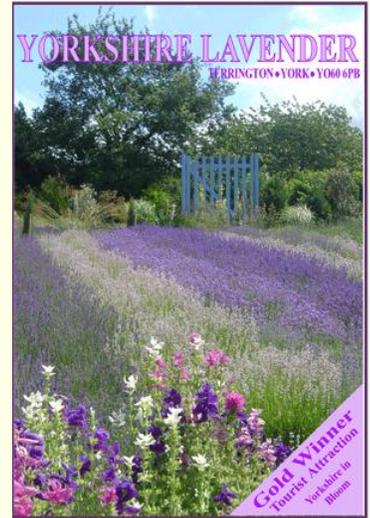
Oudolf's signature "The Mound" pyramid (about 12 ft high?) with grass on three sides and steps up the fourth providing an over view of the gardens from the flat top, apparently considerably more successful than his "mound" at TBG whose circular path leading up to the top soon collapsed and became a hazard.

The stylized and geometric designs of the garden are spectacular and three sides of the garden are surrounded by a treed "Plantsman's Walk" which just opened in 2008 and, while somewhat bare in spots, offers a variety of plantings. Raindrops necessitated a visit to the Tea Room and shop for cream teas!! See pictures at www.scampston.co.uk

On our way to the next garden, we passed Castle Howard, the setting for the TV series of "Brideshead Revisited". The domed roof was visible from the road.

Yorkshire Lavender Farm, a 14-year old 60-acre property set in the Howardian Hills outside Terrington, provides spectacular views of the Vale of York. It claims to have the largest selection of lavender and herb plants in the north of England. The scent from the lavender permeates the air, particularly as one brushes past the pots around the entrance. Gazing over the scene, which is partially on a hillside, with paths winding through the beds, I beheld a vision of purple, blue and white. The number of different varieties is mind-boggling and a "Wibbly Wobbly Way" (a path with lavender plants snaking down the centre of a gravel path), makes one smile.

The gift shop and inevitable Tea Room offer biscuits, jams and everything with lavender. We succumbed to lavender essence that claims to cure everything from tangled hair, wasp/bee stings, sore throats and smelly feet, a natural anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and insect repellent for use on humans, dogs(fleas) and horses(flies). See pictures at www.yorkshirelavender.com



On our return to Northampton, my sister drove me to Althorp Estate, which covers 14,000 acres across Northamptonshire, Warrickshire and Norfolk with cottages, farms, woodlands and villages. It has been the home of the Spencer family for 500 years. The 550 acre walled park contains the house (now famed as the childhood home of Princess Diana), a stable block and farms with a chapel on the side of the road, presumably part of the property. The wall seems to go on forever as we pass the main entrance (seen full of flowers after her death) and various other entrances. We went by the east gate which leads through the stable area, spruced up as a very upscale tea room (strawberries and cream this time), gift shop, videos of Diana as a child and a collection of her evening dresses - all very tastefully presented. The grounds around the square grey stone house are flat and just a mown lawn with some shrubbery and a few perennials at the entrances. The website talked of renovated gardens but they were nowhere to be seen. About a mile away through the trees was the lane to the lake where Diana is said to be buried



Althorp Estate

on the island. The house is very pleasant and we wandered through house, gallery of ancestors' pictures, a library, various presentations of china and history, and about 8 of the 15 bedrooms, two dining rooms, (one huge, the other middling size) and various rooms. While there are private quarters, it is obvious that much on display would be in normal family use except during the 2 months of public viewing. It looked comfortable and lived in. However, as much as I enjoyed seeing the place, the gardens were a disappointment - Prince Charles did not fall in love with her horticultural heritage!! (and he a keen gardener).

The northern part of England has many interesting gardens and it's very worthwhile to spend some time there.

The Portable Greenhouse - An exclusive for Halton Master Gardeners, by Gerry Cragg

Dot Knight, Newsletter Editor, asked, "As an obsessive-compulsive gardener, would you write an article on how have you spent this past winter?"

Well, I was delighted to be asked until I started to wonder - Is Dot asking me because I am a gardener or because she thinks I'm obsessive-compulsive? And is there really a difference anyway? I've been obsessing about this for about 2 weeks now until I got an email from Dot gently reminding me of my commitment. So here goes. If this is old hat to you - "been there, done that" - please keep it to yourself. I might have trouble accepting that this is yesterday's news.

I would love to have a greenhouse!! All winter I obsess about it. I get all the greenhouse catalogues, have book marked all the websites, and pick up "Greenhouse Magazine" anytime I am at Chapters.

I want a big greenhouse, a small one, a year round one, a spring one. Glass, Plexiglas, plastic, wood, steel, aluminium, cement floors, wood floors, no floors, gas heat, electrical heat, hot water heat, no heat.

Last Christmas, my daughter gave me a new set of sheets as a gift. As I opened them up, I gave pause while looking at the package they came in. Heavy plastic, zipper opening, well constructed... ah hah!

And so I now have a greenhouse!!

And not only sheet bags! Why you can use packaging for duvets, blankets, bedspreads - all types of bedding!! In fact after scrounging from family, friends, and blue boxes, I now have a number of greenhouses. It's not really all that hard to turn a bedding bag into a greenhouse.

Figure 1a shows a sheet bag, empty of sheets. Figure 1b shows the same bag after it has gone through my "patented greenhouse conversion".



Figure 1a



Figure 1b

Portable green houses come in a variety of sizes. Figure 2 gives you an idea of just a few of the possibilities.



Figure 2

(If done correctly you will end up with 12 pieces of wood). Assemble and insert into the greenhouse.

Ventilation is not a problem. With a little practice, you can easily modify the greenhouse to allow ample ventilation. Figure 3a shows a greenhouse that has been modified to allow for ample ventilation, while figure 3b shows the same greenhouse with the ventilation system turned off.

Portable greenhouses can be modified to have a sturdier more permanent structure. Simply measure the width, length and depth of your greenhouse, and cut a piece of wood to create 4 wooden pieces for each of the 3 dimensions.



Figure 3b



Figure 3a

While an example of my greenhouse with a wooden frame is on loan to the Eden Project, I have shown a sample of the tools and material required in Figure 4.

Not sufficient room to meet your demanding needs? Need something bigger? Just buy a "Bed in a Bag".



Figure 4

Winter Sowing, Outdoors? In Canada by Jess Cronin

While I'm usually glad when the gardening season finally comes to an end, by January 1st I'm ready to start playing in the dirt again. However, the weather rarely accommodates my desires and with limited space in my home, an indoor growing operation isn't feasible.

About six years ago I was introduced to Winter Sowing outdoors. I have modified my technique a number of times, but the principles remain the same:

- Gather your pots/containers of choice. I have used everything from plug trays, seed flats, peat pots to takeout containers. My favorite containers have been 2 litre plastic pots and homemade newspaper pots in trays.
- Pick up some cheap soil or use your own compost. I prefer using my own compost - just think of all the nutrients the little seedlings will get.
- Choose your seeds. My best success stories have been with Asters, Bee Balm, Columbine, Cosmos, Foxgloves, Hollyhocks, Snapdragon, Penstemon, Love in the Mist and my top performer - any type of Poppy. (*A successful seed is one that makes it from the potting stage to the adult plant stage - many have been lost in the transplanting stage. This is the main reason I use either peat pots or newspaper pots for Lupines*).
- Cover your work area with newspaper — it's not a messy job but the less cleanup, the better.
- Fill 2/3 of container with soil mix.
- A very important step — Spray soil with water. I like to use a spray bottle.
- Place seed in the container at the depth specified on the seed pack.
- With your spray bottle, mist the soil & seeds.
- The final step can vary depending on what cover you choose to use. One year I used leftover vapour barrier in 2 foot square sections and placed it on 2 litre pots using large elastic bands to keep it in place. The practice I am currently using involves placing the trays inside very large, clear plastic bags. ****It is very important to poke small holes in the plastic cover****. (You are basically making your own greenhouse.)
- Place all your covered containers outside, wherever there is room and no risk of them blowing away.

I have Winter Sowed until early April (as long as the nights are still cold). I'm usually checking the flats/trays daily at this point. I have found sprouts as early as April 1st.

As soon as the seedlings have their first or second set of true leaves they can be moved into the garden. There are a number of advantages to this method:

1. Damp off has never been a problem.
2. There is no need to chill or soak any seeds before planting.
3. Hardy plants are produced.
4. Winter Sowing satisfies both the need to garden during the winter months and gives me a head start on my spring work.

There is a huge amount of information online @ www.gardenweb.com. Trudi Davidoff is generally considered the queen of all things Winter Sowing related and she is always happy to answer any questions.

Happy Winter Sowing!