



Cross Pollination

January 2009

Coordinator's Corner

The Joys of January Gardening

A month into this glorious Ontario winter, I thought it appropriate to write about gardening in January! No, I am not delirious with cabin fever nor am I talking about gardening in Ontario, *California*. The snowy winter brings its own gardening joy. There is no better time to assess the "bones" of your garden than when it is dressed in winter white. What will need pruning? What spaces will need filling? Do I have a balance of evergreen and deciduous plants? How can I possibly get more grasses in my garden?

My winter daily gardening routine continues with a visit to the basement. Those bright fluorescent lights and thriving plants can drive away any January blahs. Misting, watering, turning, deadheading, pruning are all familiar and comforting. And what joy to have fresh basil, rosemary, lemon verbena or peppermint for the kitchen! Hot herbal teas are part of my winter survival strategy. Today, I need to choose something in bloom to showcase in the den or family room. This is not a hard choice as 7 out of 9 phalaenopsis orchids are in bloom. I opt for the pink one to keep me company by the computer and laugh to see the cats licking the mist off the leaves. In December, I could pick from Christmas cacti, a mango-coloured gerbera received as a gift in July, bright begonias brought in for the winter or an orchid cactus with immense cherry red flowers. Hold on, there's a hawk in the tree just outside the window...what luck the camera is beside me...dang, too late...but a look in my bird guide tells me it was a Cooper's hawk. Yes, I remember her from last year helping herself at the bird feeder-literally!

Feeding on an unsuspecting dove, my own little wild kingdom turned the snow crimson that day. I can't separate wildlife gazing from gardening - for me, one goes with the other.

Yesterday, I was running from window to window watching the bevy of birds at my feeders: chickadees, slate coloured juncos, purple finches, cardinals and blue jays all made an appearance. My attention was caught by an especially vivid purple finch. It was actually a house finch -a much brighter red on the rump, crown and bib. I now realize that I need to plant something under the front window to add cover for the birds-something native, with a food source.

This brings me to another winter gardening joy - virtual gardening via catalogues, magazines and the Internet. What is the perfect plant companion for my birds? Perhaps Patty can inspire me with her native plant presentation? Or will Bill inspire me to find a new plant to drive away winter during his travelogue? Continued on Wednesday at 7:30...

(Photos below: Tiger and pink phalaenopsis + garden in winter)



Halton Region

Master Gardener

Meetings - 7:30 p.m.

Rooms 3 & 4



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

- February 4 - Trip to Tasmania (Bill Kertzia) and Native plants (Patty King)
- March 4 - **Weed Free Lawns without Pesticides** (Sapphire Singh) (Niagara MG's invited)
- April 8* - **Festival fact sheet review and Eco grass presentation** (Doris Calder) (*2nd Wednesday of the month)
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- May 6 – **Greening your backyard** (Stacy Hickman)

Other garden-worthy Dates

- Saturday, February 21 **Seedy Saturday** RBG 10 a.m. to 3 p.m
- Saturday, February 28 **Orchid Society Show RBG**
- 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@gtn.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.)

A note from our Treasurer, Patty King

It's that time of year again to pay your annual dues. Last year we raised the dues to \$20 and the 'group' subsidized the last \$5.

Halton Master Gardeners pay a total of \$25 each annually to MGOI.

At our MG meeting on February 4th, we will discuss whether we continue to pay the \$20 each or increase it to \$25 so that our group does not have to cover the remainder.

Please bring your cash or cheque book with you (cheques made out to Halton Region Master Gardeners).

All dues will need to be collected and sent to MGOI by April 1st 2009.



HISTORICAL GARDEN LITERATURE - Prepared by Marjorie Latimer.

The cold days of winter certainly encourage indoor activities and I use that indoor time by working on my family tree and planning my workshops for Horticultural Therapy. Delving into the historical garden/nature literature and researching the plant material written in poems and journals of Canadian pioneers is not only interesting but a good past time when temperatures are well below zero.

My Horticultural therapy group next month will be learning four poems written in the 1700-1800's, written by such famous names as Wm. Cullen Bryant, Walt Whitman, Wm. Carlos Williams, and Pauline Hanson 1917. Each poem was inspired and reflected upon historical plant material.

We design our gardens today to encourage beneficial insects. Did you know that in William's poem about Queen Anne's-Lace dated in the 1800's, is classified as a beneficial plant by Rodale? The nectar from the small open flowers of lace provides invaluable food for parasitic wasps. These wasps control caterpillars, aphids, and other soft bodied pests. The plant is a member of the Carrot family and today the Ministry of Agriculture lists Queen-Anne's Lace as an Ontario Weed. (OMAFRA Pub. 505)

Have you ever walked along the Burlington Beach strip to see the Lilacs blooming where back doors once existed on homes now demolished? The memories of past life and homesteads leave land marks. Great conversations abound around the poem written in mid 1800's by Walt Whitman, "*When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloomed*"

Journals and letters written by pioneer women such as Catharine Parr Trail describe the wild flowers that frequent the fields where the family settled in Ontario near Kingston. She mentions sketching and pressing flowers to be dried for documentation.

When we read passages and poems written centuries ago, it is interesting to dig into the context of the passage and fully understand the message, the imagery and the life of plants that have survived generations that continue to grow in our gardens and in the wild. Catharine Parr Trail wrote these words in her book "The Backwoods of Canada" 1836: "*I encourage as much as possible to have a taste for flowers. It is a study that tends to refine and purify the mind and can be made, by simple steps, a ladder to heaven. Teach a child to look with love and admiration to that bountiful God who created and made flowers so fair to adorn and fructify this earth.*"

During my workshops, the participants will prepare a poetry booklet while listening to classical music, the room filled with essential oils to further enhance the poetry by bringing the scents of our gardens indoors on this very cold and wintry day. This truly is a spiritual experience to reflect upon during winter.



Grow Biointensively - Submitted by June Wright

At the tech update hosted by the Toronto Master Gardeners on January 10, 2009, some of the Halton Master Gardeners attended a lecture on bio-intensive gardening presented by Angie Koch of Fertile Ground. The presentation was informative and well presented.

According to Wikipedia, "the biointensive method is an organic agricultural system which focuses on maximum yields from a minimum area of land, while simultaneously improving the soil."

Why would one consider bio-intensive gardening? You can grow up to 6 times more food; you use up to 88% less water and use 50-100% less organic fertilizer than in a regular vegetable garden.

What are the characteristics of bio-intensive gardening?

1. Intensive soil preparation. The garden is developed in raised beds 4-4.5 feet (maximum) wide by any length long. Never does one step onto the bed but rather places a board across the bed and works from that platform. The garden is double dug and fresh compost is mixed in every year for the first few years, less frequently after you have good soil health.
2. The soil must have 4-6% organic matter to support the intensive growth. The plants are spaced very closely together, set in equidistance apart so that the mature plant leaves will just touch and the soil is covered. A living mulch is used which dramatically reduces the water needs of the vegetables. It is advisable to start the garden with seedlings as you are able to properly space the plants and seedlings require less water than seeds needing to germinate.
3. Companion planting is practised so that space is used wisely, micro-climates are created and symbiotic relationships are developed. Some examples of companion planting would be: corn, squash and beans; beets and bush beans; corn and cucumbers; basil and tomatoes; squash and nasturtiums.
 - Other features of bio-intensive gardening include growing high carbon crops (wheat, rye, oats) and high calorie crops (potatoes, sweet potatoes, garlic, parsnips.) to enrich soil and for compost production.
 - Open pollinated seeds are used to maintain biodiversity and allow the farmer to harvest the seeds. In a small garden you can only grow one species of vegetable if you want to harvest the seeds.

You can get more information at www.fertilegroundcsa.com , www.growbiointensive.org www.boountifulgardens.org and by reading the book 'How to Grow More Vegetables Than You Ever Thought Possible on Less Land Than You Can Imagine' - by John Jeavons.



Seeding at re-root