

# Cross Pollination



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## Winter Care for your Plants

By David Marshall

John Keats called this time of year the “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”, but failed to mention that it is followed by the season of ice and snow.

Now that your plants have achieved mellow fruitfulness, it is time to thwart the ice and snow, and take measures to ensure a repeat performance next year.

Many shrubs and perennials are quite capable of taking care of themselves, thank you!, but if you are pushing zones, or they are newly planted, or in pots which are too heavy to bring inside, they may need a bit of help.

If they are tender perennials such as geraniums or coleus, or are prized annuals or perennials from which you want to take

early cuttings, they will need a lot of help.

If a supposedly hardy plant dies in winter, it is not usually just the cold which kills it, but a combination of cold, drying winds or waterlogged soil during the spring thaw.

I am not a fan of wrapping evergreens tightly with burlap, and certainly not with plastic. A loose wrap applied late and removed early is ok., but for broad leaved evergreens, if I am doubtful of its resistance, I prefer a burlap wind break on the windward side. It is important to water evergreens thoroughly before freeze up, because they try to transpire through the winter. A rope wrap is desirable for tall multi stemmed evergreens which may bend under heavy snow loads.

If the soil is waterlogged in

early spring, dig the plant with a good root ball and temporarily plant it elsewhere.

Some plants in large pots can be wintered outdoors or in an unheated shed or garage, but to avoid freeze-thawing of the root ball you may need to insulate the pot with piled leaves, mulch, or a Styrofoam or bubble wrap. (Beware of terra cotta pots cracking).

Plants which have to be wintered indoors need one of three conditions-warm bright, (10 to 20 degrees C) cool bright, (5 to 10 degrees C), or cool dark. The dividing lines are a bit blurred, and some plants will work in more than one category.

Be guided by the plants normal characteristics. If it is an annual, tropical, or doesn't need a rest period,

go with warm bright. If it normally goes fully dormant or is a bulb or tuber, use cool dark, and for others use cool bright, (which will work for most things).

Dig up tender bulbs and tubers such as dahlias, gladiolas, cannas, callas, and tuberous begonias and shake off loose soil. Then you can wash the root or not, (I usually prefer not, but then I am lazy). In either case dry very thoroughly, dust with a fungicide such as sulphur, and store in a cool and dark place in peat moss, vermiculite, or wrapped in newspaper.

Pot up plants which you want to bring inside.

What you do not want to bring in are insects and disease, and any weak or unhealthy plant, it is unlikely to improve under winter conditions. Inspect all plants carefully. Cut back straggly growth. Remove dead or diseased leaves (spray with a fungicide such as Serenade if necessary) and spray with insecticidal soup or horticultural oil if you see any sign of insects.

I am fortunate in having an unheated attached sun room in which I can put benches with de-icing cable to keep the roots warm, together with a supplementary fan heater on a thermostat. I keep the cool bright plants on an unheated bench away from the fan heater. Cool dark requirements are provided under a large deep bench with doors in my cool laundry room.

When I want to encourage new growth for cuttings in late February, I switch on a 400 watt metal halide grow lamp on a timer, and this also provides additional heat. Be on the look out for insects such as white flies, aphids and spider mites as temperatures get warmer and dormant eggs hatch out. Use yellow sticky traps above the plants to monitor for white flies



and wash off aphids with a jet of water.

Plants do not use much water during cool low growth conditions, and they are best kept on the dry side to avoid root rot. I recommend a moisture meter such as the Lee Valley #AB 928, \$14.50.

Sometimes a plant will lose a lot of leaves and effectively go dormant, for example bougainvillea, brugmansia and Mandevilla, (all tropicals which you would otherwise have to buy every year). Don't worry, they will leaf out when it warms up.

Similarly with deciduous shrubs. Don't be afraid to experiment. The worst that can happen is that the plant will die,

and that would have happened anyway if you had done nothing. Enjoyable gardening is all about stretching yourself, both mentally and physically.

## Heavenly Herbs

By Christine SAYS

Is it too late to pick your garden herbs, for some yes, but not all of them? You should be able to harvest parsley, rosemary, summer savoury (great in casseroles and stews) sage and thyme.

For that wonderful herb basil, my favourite, it's too late. If you haven't made your Pesto and still want to then a trip to the store is in order.

Pesto from the Italian word Pestare, which means to pound or grind. Pesto can be made from a variety of herbs, parsley, coriander/cilantro, lemon verbena and even spinach.

### Basil

This herb belongs to the Labiatae group of plants. It is native to India and south east Asia and has been cultivated for thousands of years.

There are almost 60 varieties of basil, some of my favourites are: Thai basil, lemon basil and dark opal basil, the last one colours vinegar beautifully.

The aromatic oils are concentrated in the growing tips of the plant. When the plant is mature pinch off these tips regularly as this encourages leafy growth and discourages flowering.

### Pesto Recipe

2 cups of green herbs (your choice)

½ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese

1/3 cup olive oil (use the good stuff, virgin)

Garlic cloves to your taste I used 3 fat ones

Note: You can use pine nuts or almonds in this recipe, but I find it makes it too rich.

### Method

Puree all except the garlic

Puree garlic separately

Then add garlic to the mixture

You can freeze the pesto and use within 6 months

If freezing, put into shallow containers which makes it easier to unmold

# Spring Bulbs

by Christine Says

Fall is an opportune time to clean up your garden, move some things around, incorporate organic matter into the soil, and to plant spring bulbs.

This year I'm going 'little is lovely' and 'miniature is me'. I hate those long lasting leaves of the narcissus which hang around forever, even though I try to hide them, but not very successfully. We have the *Narcissus minimus*, earliest to bloom and of the trumpet variety.



*Narcissus minimus*



*Narcissus Thalia*

Gold, which is yellow and February silver, a creamy white. They are very

prolific daffodils.

'Peeping Tom and 'Jack Snipe' (who wouldn't want to plant these with names like that), and they are quite lovely. They are white with turned back petals and a yellow cup, and may bloom for up to three weeks. Try them with muscari (grape hyacinths).

Quite a few years ago I planted *N. bulbocodium* the common name is 'hoop petticoat' narcissus, just 6 inches tall. It has an unusual shaped trumpet as its name implies. Now these little darlings are a little shy about our northern climate, but mine have been coming up for years. They may diminish in numbers but you can always buy more. It is a delight and a surprise to see these each spring and this fall I'm going to plant more.

I hope you will consider buying some of the 'little gems' there are many more out there. Tuck some of the wee ones in the ground you'll be glad you did.



*Narcissus Peeping Tom*



*Narcissus Jack Snipe*



*Narcissus bulbocodium*

# Halton Region Master Gardeners

Come Grow with Us



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## Our Halton Master Gardeners'

### Website by David Oldacre

As mentioned in one of our earlier meetings, our new website is now up and running. Please spend some time to take a look at it as we have a lot of good information on it. The objectives of the website are basically to provide:

1. An important source of useful information about horticultural issues and the activities of Halton Master Gardeners (MG) for gardeners and horticulturalists in the Halton County region

A data base of information which can be shared by all members of Halton MG. The website is divided into two sections – a public space for everyone, and private space specifically for Halton MGs. While anyone can access the public space, the private space is only accessible by password.

Website: <http://haltonmastergardeners.wordpress.com>

Password for accessing the Members Pages = halton

**The Public space consists of the following pages:**

**WELCOME:** primarily used for announcements about our activities, and updates to the website

**WHO WE ARE:** describes who we are, and what we do

**EDUCATION:** information about our continuing educational activities within the community

**SEE US IN ACTION:** information about our Advice clinics at Royal Botanical Gardens, and other places in Halton

**BECOME A MASTER GARDENER:** information about how to become a Master Gardener. It is also a place for submitting gardening questions and comments to the Halton MG chapter

**RESOURCES:** This section is designed to provide our readers with useful horticultural information which can be used in day-to-day gardening and contains the following subpages which includes a search box for finding information about specific topics such as:

- Presentations: a list of presentations which we would be please to make to

your organization

- Fact Sheets and articles: articles on horticultural topics

- Book Recommendations: List of recommended books on horticultural topics

Links: to other horticultural websites

The Private space consists of the following pages which require a password for access:

**MEMBERS:** This summary page is for Members of the Halton Master Gardeners and contains the following sub-pages:

- Organization: Membership list, including who does what, Volunteer and Refreshment schedules, Time Sheet forms, Policies and Procedures.

- Minutes of Meetings: links of minutes for Halton MG meetings

- Newsletters: links to newsletters published by Halton MG

- Presentations to public: links to presentations which may be given to the public

- Additional Resources: Notes on MGOI Meetings and other reports of interest to Halton MG

- Technical Education Reports: Reports on Technical Education Updates

- Photo Album: photos which may be of interest to Halton Master Gardeners

- Biographies: we invite Halton Master Gardeners to post their horticultural experiences