

Master Gardeners of Ontario

What's Growing On
MAY, 2010



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Spring, 2010

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Victoria Day Is Not Sacred

David Hinks - Ottawa Carleton

No, Victoria Day is not sacred. In fact, long before Victoria Day, over half of my vegetable garden is planted. By then I am even harvesting and eating some of the early crops, such as lettuce, radish and spinach.

The Victoria Day rule for planting the garden in this part of the continent is still an important rule for heat-loving and frost-sensitive plants such as peppers, eggplant, basil, pumpkins, melons and cucumbers. However there are a large number of vegetables that can be planted in the garden as early as the first week of April. Some years I have planted peas, potatoes, onions, lettuce and spinach as early as the last week of March.

An early start is essential for plants that do not tolerate heat. The Ottawa spring can be incredibly short, with snow still on the ground at the end of April and 30 degree temperatures by late May. Some plants such as peas, broccoli, cabbage and turnip grow quickly in cool temperatures and practically stop growing in the heat of the summer. Lettuce and spinach will "bolt", that is produce flowers when temperatures climb above 20°C, resulting in bitter unpalatable leaves.

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Crop Rotation-Who Needs It?

Shane Rajapakse - Etobicoke

You are what you eat! In a day and age when increasing attention is paid to the quality of the food we eat, more and more people want to grow their own food. As a hallmark for sustainable farming, crop rotation minimizes problems down the road while preserving soil structure and health.

Crop rotation is not just for the farmers - it can be put to use in small plots of land as well. By rotating crops each season, we promote a natural method of pest control which helps to break disease cycles that can occur when the same crop is grown in the same spot for successive years. For example, Clubroot is a soil borne fungus that affects brassicas, and accumulates from successive growth in the same location. Monocropping also depletes the soil of nutrients specific to that crop. In the same way our bodies can ache if we do the same thing over and over, the soil can get tired if we plant the same vegetable, year after year in the same spot.

Simply put, crop rotation requires you to avoid growing the same crop in the same spot year after year. Plant your like-family vegetables in a different spot than the previous year and rotate your different crops like a cycle. It's helpful that some vegetables will replenish lost nutrients back to the soil after a crop has been harvested. It helps to grow legumes after heavy feeders like corn or leafy vegetables. While you're at it, add in some green manure to enrich the soil. No matter what vegetables you are growing, there are many rotations to suit your needs. You decide!

Remember that any crop rotation is a work in progress, and much of the enjoyment and challenge comes from experimenting with it each year as you learn from previous years. By keeping in mind a few

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Onions and garlic are a special case. They need cool weather to produce the foliage which will provide the energy for the bulbs that start forming when day length begins to shorten in late June. Garlic is very hardy and I plant it in late October for the next year's crop.

Frost-hardy vegetables such as lettuce, onions, peas and spinach can be planted outdoors as soon as the ground can be worked, often the first week of April in Ottawa. Semi-frost-hardy vegetables such as beets, carrots, chard and potatoes are best planted in late April or early May as they germinate slowly in cold soil.

So what happens if the weather turns really nasty? One year I had peas that were about 10 cm high when we had a late snowfall of 20 cm. Once the snow was melted the peas were still growing with no problem. I have had potato foliage frozen to ground level – it didn't take them long to spring back with fresh growth from the roots. Onions and spinach take frost in their stride.

Some gardeners try to get a head start on the season with relatively tender plants such as tomatoes. While gardening is not a competitive sport, there are those who take a certain amount of pride in having the first juicy red tomato on the block. I may plant a few tomatoes two or three weeks before Victoria Day but I spread my risks by planting the main crop when it is warmer.

Raised beds and well drained soil assist an early start by warming up much faster. In order to determine if soil is workable, take a handful and squeeze – if it stays together in a ball it is still too wet, if it crumbles it is ready. Time to get out and get planting!

No Dig Vegetables

Editors

Digging a garden every year, is not practiced by all vegetable gardeners. Growing numbers employ “no dig” methods. In the 70's Ruth Stout wrote articles about growing vegetables under a thick layer of straw. She never dug, watered or used harsh chemicals. She just planted and picked. There is a [UTube video about her](#) which you should watch because it's a hoot. A more recent proponent, Patricia Lanza in her books on “lasagna gardening” recommends layering various types of organic matter in raised beds. She suggests growing vegetables year after year, never digging or walking on the beds and adding new organic matter to the top. Permaculture enthusiasts use similar techniques. Mel Bartholomew in his popular square foot gardening books even recommends ignoring the native soil and planting in his growing medium in raised beds above the soil. These no dig methods promise high yields, less work, and natural management of insects and diseases.

Net Resouces

Editors

The net is full of great sources of vegetable gardening information. It is also full of information which is not very useful so some patience is needed while looking. Videos are available for those with a high speed connection. For example, the Royal Horticultural Society of the UK has a number of good [videos on vegetables](#). Alan Titmarsh has also created a number of [videos for the BBC](#) on gardening. [Garden Girl](#) also has useful videos. The Peterborough Group has a number of [basic fact sheets](#) on vegetable growing on their website.

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Growing with Clay

Tony Rudd - London/Middlesex

My Dad's vegetable plot was heavy clay. It was difficult digging in the winter and in summer it dried bone hard. It occupied his mind constantly as to how he was going to overcome it. When he finally gave up the plot after 20 years, it was not much better than when he had started. Yet year after year we had a plentiful supply of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Clay is an omnibus term for soils with very fine particle sizes. They come in a number of colours red, blue, yellow and white for instance. Some clays are sticky, some slippery. Others form deep cracks when dry. All clays can be a problem for the home vegetable gardener. Because they are of fine particle size, they hold water and do not drain easily. There is usually a later start in the spring while the soil dries down. Conversely, in the later stages of a drought, clay soils hang on to water and plants have to exert enormous pressure to be able to extract water from drying clay soils.

As well as holding water, clay soils hold on to plant nutrients. If you can once overcome the drawbacks of clay soils, you will have a very fertile and productive garden.

Organic matter is a remedy for many soil problems, including clay. As vegetable matter decomposes in soil it releases substances that form aggregates with the clay particles. This opens up more and bigger spaces in the soil allowing freer movement of air and water. This allows better drainage and encourages root growth. Particles of organic matter lodge between soil particles and

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Mystery Plant

Do you know this plant? The answer will be revealed next issue. Contact editors@mgoi.ca with your guess.

The mystery plant was a mushroom called dog stinkhorn *Mutinus caninus*. Yes we know it's not a plant but we could not resist using something this strange. Thanks to Diane Vaughan for the suggestion. Catherine Kavassalis, Oakville was first, honorable mention to Elizabeth Stewart, Toronto, Janet Trezise. LSSMG, Lois Bennett – Tweed/Quinte, Erika North – Thunder Bay.

MGs in Action

Toronto Master Gardeners and TBG Launch New Urban Vegetable Gardening Programme

The Toronto Master Gardeners have partnered with the Toronto Botanical Garden to develop a new programme to address the challenges faced by both land and balcony city food growers. Sponsored by the McLean foundation, the series of five weekend workshops will take new gardeners through all the stages of successful and sustainable gardening, from initial planning to harvesting and preparing for the next growing season. Suitable for those with small balconies as well as those with large properties, each class will have both outdoor and indoor components and each student will leave with a container planted with seasonally appropriate vegetables. Topics include: Veggies in the City: Getting Back to Basics, Getting Started: Spring Crops and Veggie Garden Designs, Tending Your Plot – Summer Crops and Growing Techniques, The Harvest: Enjoying the Fruits of Your Labour, Planning for Next Year: Storing, Seed Saving and Overwintering. Interested gardeners may register for individual classes or for sets of 3 or 5 at discounted rates. More information is available at www.torontobotanicalgarden.ca.

Garden Design in Guelph

"Digging In – Well, Well" – Guelph & Wellington County MG have committed to working with the City of Guelph on designing and planting a garden on one of the city's "Well Houses" properties. The City is interested in saving on lawn care and showing citizens garden alternatives. It is just a beginning, but has the potential of turning into a demonstration garden and of also beautifying our community!



Seedy Saturday in London

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hold them apart. Organic matter such as compost also releases plant nutrients to the soil.

Just before first frost, take a spade and dig a furrow. Into the trench put as much compost and or manure as you can spare. Dig the next furrow burying the compost and again fill the trench with more compost etc. Do not break up the clods. Let the soil freeze in that condition. If you want to put compost on top, do so after the soil has frozen. Frost breaks concrete and will also break clay.

Next spring, when the soil has dried down, work the surface with a rake prior to planting. Avoid unnecessary traffic to prevent compaction. It will be necessary to repeat it every year until there is enough organic matter to make a permanent difference.

Radishes All Summer Long

Robert Pavlis – Guelph and Wellington County

As soon as it gets warm, radishes get woody and flower. This is great news. The flowers turn into seed pods not unlike peas. These seed pods are great eating and taste just like radish roots. Pick them young while they are tender.

Crop Rotation continued from page 1

things, it will make it much easier to work out a suitable rotation for you.

- Know botanical names of your vegetables and group vegetables from the same family together
- Explore the internet - there are a wealth of resources awaiting your discovery
- Keep a notebook handy to keep accurate records and any observations
- Grow green manure - they enrich the soil like essential nutrients for the soul
- Alternate deep-rooted and shallow-rooted crops to promote a balanced draw
- Leafy vegetables generally use a lot of nitrogen - plant soil builders prior

Some basic types of groupings that may work for you include: heavy feeders (broccoli, lettuce, tomatoes, eggplant, corn, squash); light feeders (carrots, turnips, sweet potatoes, peppers, garlic, onions, chives); nitrogen fixing (soil builders – green beans, lima beans, peas, soybeans); green manures (clover, vetch, alfalfa, rye, buckwheat).

Milestones

New MGITs

Etobicoke – Sharon Burge, Vena Eaton, Louise Grech, Mary Ellen Mathison, Lauren Nurse, Ariela Weisfeld

Halton – Jane Leonard

Niagara – Pam Coring, Julia Dodge, Sue Gemmill, Julie Makin, Stephanie McClure

Ottawa- Carleton – Tom Marcantonio, Valerie Proctor

Toronto – Joanna Blanchard, Sheila Boudreau, Jackie Campbell, Tina Cesaroni, Connie Foster, Abdullah Hamidi, Verna Leader, Linda Lynott, Cathy McCartney, Gwen Rattle, Emma Rooney, Elizabeth A. Stewart, Billy To, Maureen Webber, Joan Weed, Bonnie West, Dianne White

New MGs

Etobicoke – Lillian Brown; Anna Arabczuk

Halton – June Wright

LSSMG – Terri Briggs, Lynne Marie Sullivan

Ottawa- Carleton – Josie Pazdzior

Stratford – Carolyn Rastorfer

Sudbury (Esplanola) – Irene Granger

Toronto – Linda Boyko, Veronica Callinan, Judy Clarke, Sharron Colbert, Lori Di Monte, Jean Gardiner, Maureen Hulbert, Susan Lipchak, Lesli Musicar, Dawn Scott and Claire Trepanier.

5 Years

Kitchener MG – Kim Ball, Ken McRae, Gary R. Miller, Liz Stacey

Ottawa-Carleton – Rebecca Last, Mary Ann Van Berlo

Toronto – Daryl Bessell, Jane Bridgeman, Pat de Valence, Ruthanne Stiles

10 Years

Kitchener – Sharon Campbell.

Niagara – June Streadwick

Ottawa- Carleton – Bob Duff, Edythe Falconer

Toronto – Peter Cox, Ellen Farrelly, Lorraine Flanigan, Catherine Peer, Lucy Van Wyk

15 Years

Niagara – Joan Jones

Toronto – Sonia Leslie

20 Years

Kitchener – Huguette Meinzingler,

Toronto – Mary Mordy

Growing Strawberries

Laura Stockdale, Peterborough



The strawberry is a very popular fruit for home gardens and can be grown anywhere in Ontario. It is the first fruit to ripen and by a selection of “June-bearing” varieties, ripe

fruit can be obtained from mid-June to late July, the year after planting. Nothing beats eating a fresh strawberry picked either off your own plants or at a local pick-your-own farm. With some planning and preparation now, you can be ready to plant early next spring. Strawberries do not like wet feet and require full sun. If soils tend to be poorly drained, planting on a raised ridge (4-6 inches) is helpful to keep the root systems from becoming water logged and to prevent plants from smothering from ice in the winter. Strawberries should not follow crops of peppers, raspberries, potatoes, tomatoes, or eggplants. This precaution avoids serious root diseases such as verticillium wilt and black root rot. All perennial weeds and grasses should be destroyed by

cultivation the previous year to planting. Manure or compost can be incorporated the fall previous to planting to add organic matter and fertility at a rate of 2-3 bushels per 100 square feet. A soil test is recommended to determine fertility and pH. Strawberries prefer a slightly acidic soil with a pH of 6.3-6.5 for best growth.

Laura is an MG who runs a u-pick strawberry farm. See the website for the full article



Etobicoke MGs enjoy well deserved champagne for passing the Certification Exam. From left to right: Lillian Brown, Anna Arabczuk, Bev Sutton, Karen Klar, Marcia Barron and Anne Grgic.

Events

- April 9 (evening), 10 and 11 - Peterborough Garden Show at the Evinrude Centre, 911 Monaghan Rd. vendors, speakers, demonstrations, floral competition. \$5 www.peterboroughgardens.ca
- April 10 at 10:00 a.m. at Knox Presbyterian Church, 55 Hincks Street, St. Thomas – The Elgin County Master Gardeners present 'Plant Pollinators'. Door prizes and Annual Plant Auction. Bring a bag lunch. Refreshments will be provided. \$5.00. Contact Helen (519) 773-9621, Diane (519) 633-3213 or Richard (519) 633-3939.
- April 23 to 25; Friday and Saturday – 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sunday – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Royal Botanical Gardens. <http://www.rbg.ca/pages/GardenShow.html>
- April 14 at 7:00 p.m. – Four Partners Event – “Healthy Landscapes”, Speaker-Martin Galloway – University of Guelph Arboretum Centre. Free.
- April 17 at 2:00 p.m. – “Bees in the Garden” Suzanne Zacharczyk, and May 24 at 2:00 p.m. – “The Low Maintenance Approach to Garden Design” with Marsha Gettas at Montgomery Inn, 4709 Dundas St. W., Etobicoke. Presented by Etobicoke MGs. Pay what you can.
- April 20 at 7:00 pm at Eising Greenhouses and Garden Centre, 814 Cockshutt Road, Simcoe – Norfolk

County MGs present "Pushing the Zones" –speaker Kevin Kavanagh, owner of South Coast Gardens. Free. norfolkmg@yahoo.com

- May 15 at the Newmarket Church of Christ, 230 Davis Drive, 9:00 a.m. LSSMG Plant Sale.
- May 15 – Guelph and Wellington County MG. Plant Sale at the Turf Grass Institute on Victoria Road South in Guelph
- May 22 at 8:30 a.m., Prince Edward County Master Gardeners' Plant Sale, Giant Tiger parking lot, Main Street, Picton. Contact: Virginia Mitchell VKMitchell@persona.ca
- June 2 – 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and June 3 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Flower Show at the Royal Botanical Gardens, 680 Plains Road W., Burlington. Admission to the show is included with admission to RBG. Demonstrations will be held daily at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
- June 19 and June 20 – 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Through the Garden Gate: The Beaches Tickets are \$40.00. For more information: 416-551-0241 or tgg@torontobotanicalgarden.ca
- July 17 – 18 – M.G.O.I. Summer Workshop at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture. \$250. For more information go to www.mgoi.ca For registration contact June Streadwick at streadwick@sympatico.ca or at 905-934-6137.