



The Ladyslipper



Perth & District Horticultural Society

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Est. 1984

P.O. Box 494
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April 2021

President's Pen

Here we go again. April is just flying by. We have been fortunate to have this great spring weather and able to get outside and enjoy it.

I have a few things to rant about and then you can peruse another great newsletter. I really enjoy designing the newsletters with all the information Jane provides to me. So thank you once again Jane for a job well done. We hope you enjoy reading as well.

Again I want to thank our sponsors for their continued support. This month we are featuring Arnott Brothers and Fox in the Pine Landscaping businesses. So if you are in need of their types of service, please give them a call and let them know you read their article in our newsletter.

The board has drafted an amendment to our constitution which will clearly define that our meetings can be held in-person, virtual and digital so that we can continue meeting as we are on Zoom for the near future as the temporary law for this purpose that the Ontario government instated ends on May 31, 2021. I will be sending out the draft constitution for everyone to review before our Tuesday meeting so we can present the changes at the April meeting and again at the May meeting before we vote on the amendments.

Due to the Stay at Home order the Ontario government has put in place for us until May 6, 2021, the Board has decided to not go through with the plant sale on May 22, 2021 because we would not have enough time to prepare nor do we know if we would even be able to conduct the sale indoors. We will look at possibly organizing a plant exchange amongst our members so if you have any ideas how we

can accomplish that, please email me so we can brainstorm and implement.

We will have the PDHS fertilizer ready for our members to buy sometime in May like we did last year. We will keep you posted of the date, price, payment and location to pick up the fertilizer.



Keep smiling!

Linda

Fox in the Pines Landscaping

Fox in the Pines Landscaping offers consultation, design, and installation of functional, beautiful and accessible projects for residential and commercial clients. I enjoy working with clients who have a vision for their outdoor space. My role is to bring that vision to life for each and every client. I believe in creating gardens and open-air spaces that will embrace every visitor to your home. My goal is to delight, welcome and relax your family and friends. Your unique style will be reflected as we work together to fashion your vision into a dynamic reality.



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Signs of Spring: "Nymphalis antiopa"

The "Morning Cloak" is a very distinctive and charismatic butterfly, best known for its conspicuous activity in late winter, flying and acting territorial before any trees have leaved out or any wildflowers are active. These large butterflies are found in a wide range across North America and Eurasia. They migrate long distances and hibernate as an adult.



We encountered several at The Mill Pond, conservation area in late March... What a delight!

Other signs of spring include:

- ▶ The tapping of local maple trees. John Baird took this great shot.
- ▶ Wild Ramps: Check out insights on these woodland treasures from my sister Anne Avery
- ▶ Trilliums: Coming soon to a wood near you.



Welcome to spring and Gardening Season 2021.

Jane Avery, P&DHS Newsletter Editor



Ute Schall in her garden admiring the beautiful spring crocus in bloom - submitted by Jane Avery

Grounds for Debate

By Clair Bushey House & Home section of The Financial Times, UK

Gardeners on the internet cannot agree: coffee grounds, yay or nay?



A Google search will turn up "9 Genius Ways" to recycle the gritty waste outdoors, but also "5 Reasons to NEVER Use Coffee Grounds in Your Garden." A chipper

site may chime, "Wake up and use the coffee grinds;" another snaps "Think coffee grounds are good for your plants? Sorry, you're wrong."

Linda Chalker-Scott, an associate professor and urban horticulturalist at Washington State University, says instead of spreading them directly around plants, add coffee grounds to the compost heap.

A "really good, rich source of nutrients for a compost pile," coffee grounds contain more than 10 per cent nitrogen, plus phosphorus, sulphur and other elements and compounds. Such nutrients fuel plant growth. Research shows that the bacteria and fungi found on decomposing coffee grounds can prevent other disease-causing fungi from taking hold in a garden.

Coffee grounds should make up no more than 20 per cent of the compost pile. Gardeners should wait until the coffee pot contents cool before chucking them on to the heap. Too much heat can kill microbes that transform food and yard scraps into compost. Spreading grounds directly on to the soil around plants risks the acidity of the coffee grounds' secondary compounds harming the roots, Chalker-Scott says. The fineness of the grounds also contributes to compacting the soil, which inhibits plant growth.

But if coffee drinkers can't compost and are determined to use their grounds anyway, they should do so by spreading them thinly to avoid compaction and covering them with a wood chip mulch. The effect will somewhat mimic the compost pile.

Still they shouldn't expect coffee grounds to keep away slugs, snails or other pests, or to attract helpful critters like earthworms.

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I'm ready to restart my garden (and escape the news of the world)

This "First Person" reader submitted article written by Angela Jouris Saxe of Tamworth ON ran in The Globe and Mail on March 29, 2021

More than a year has gone by since COVID-19 upset our equilibrium and forced us to seek solace wherever we could find it. Then, as I do today, I found comfort in gardening.

Last March when the frost was still in the ground and the snow was sitting in shallow depressions and around the base of trees, I started my groundskeeping tasks. I began by picking up all the branches that had been torn off by winter storms and all the odds and ends that our dog Sadie had managed to get a hold of when our backs were turned: ripped up plastic bags and mangled containers. Old bones and toys hidden in late fall reappeared covered in mud. My favourite woollen hat, shredded into tiny pieces, lay scattered throughout the field. I filled the wheelbarrow. I worked outside until the sunset and I was chilled to the bone.

A general cleanup is my first garden task of the season, but last year I added other tasks and projects just so I could be outside. In the past, I would spend the early morning reading in bed but last year I was too restless. I got out of bed immediately, made coffee, switched on the computer and started reading the latest news on COVID-19. By midmorning, I was thoroughly exhausted – mentally and spiritually. It was time to head outdoors no matter what the weather was like.

Last April was an especially cold month. The north wind brought an Arctic chill to the air and the sky was dark and gloomy: a perfect time to clean up the woods surrounding the house. I cut down prickly ash and hacked away at vines that were thick as my wrist. Wild grape vines and Virginia creepers had wrapped themselves around young oaks and maples, crippling them. I spent hours liberating them, setting them free so that they could stand tall and grow. I ripped up the vines from the forest floor where they had anchored themselves around stumps and boulders. I dug out stubborn weeds and moved rocks. I was totally present, in the moment. Not once did I think about the pandemic. Gardening became my daily meditation practice.

The cold weather continued into May. I raked the leaves off the beds, replaced plants that didn't survive the winter, dug up old beds and thinned out overcrowded plants. Spring bulbs popped up and brightened my day. They filled me with hope. I always plant them in the fall with the chant: I hope to see you next spring! Because I do think of my mortality, I also wonder whether I will be around to see them break out of the darkness and into the light. When I see the cheerful daffodils and graceful narcissus make their appearance, I feel fortunate to have made it through another winter.

Last May, the pandemic had cast a shadow over my joy. I wondered whether I would even be here to plant more bulbs in the fall! Would I see another spring? But tending a garden doesn't just require physical labour, it also demands one's attention. There's no time to think about the devastation of COVID-19.

Every spring I fertilize the trees planted years ago by my then adolescent sons. They now stand tall and majestic. And every spring I plant a couple of more trees knowing that I may never see them reach their full height.

Last year, I inspected the trees for winter damage and consulted books and websites to determine when best to prune. Between late April to mid-May, I noticed tiny caterpillars on branches. The spindle trees were infested with



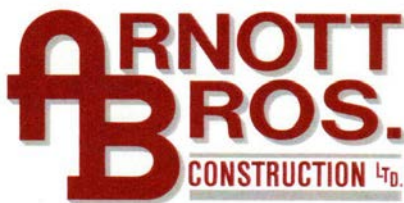
drifts of webbing that on closer inspection revealed tiny larvae of the white satin moth. I worried about the damage and felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of infested trees and shrubs. But I've learned that caring for trees teaches one about faith and trust. The old adage, "And this too shall pass" rings true. Thirty years ago, the oaks and maples were stripped bare by gypsy moths but three years later, the moths were gone, and the trees survived. In 20 years, the pandemic will be part of our collective history, and young children will remember the year they wore masks and stayed home from school.

During the winter, Sadie had destroyed the shrubs in the front beds. It is her nature, as a Great Pyrenees, to shred wood and her favourite toy is a thick branch. In the dead of winter when the woody stems of the Weigelia peek through the snow, she ripped off a branch and gnawed away happily. So I replaced the woody shrubs with perennials that will die back in the fall. I learned that I can't change the behaviour of a dog that was bred over a thousand years ago to survive in solitude while guarding sheep high up in the mountains. They dig holes and bury things that they will need later on; it doesn't matter that these holes are at the base of my plants or in the middle of the lawn. The garden has taught me patience and acceptance.

I worked hard all spring and into the early summer, but then came a drought and everything looked limp and dull. Our rain barrels quickly emptied, and we were careful not to deplete the well. I watered all the new plantings and left the others to survive or perish. I thought about all those that are sick from COVID-19 in countries where medical care is minimal; where health providers must decide which patient they can help to survive and which ones they cannot.

But to be honest I had grown weary of the daily news. When I slammed the computer shut, and fled outside, I thought of the oft-quoted line from Minnie Aumonier who wrote, "When the world wearies and society fails to satisfy, there is always the garden."

It is March again, the snow is melting and I am planning my next garden, ordering seeds and designing new beds. But this spring is different: scientists have created a variety of vaccines and they are discovering which medicines best alleviate symptoms. Now, when I look at my garden, I'm grateful for the lessons it continues to teach me: one must have patience and hope. I will be vaccinated when the time is right and, just like my forest's gypsy-moth infestation, this pandemic will pass leaving us more resilient, wiser and hopefully better prepared.



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Six Steps to a Beautiful Perennial Border

By Stephen Westcott-Gratton for Garden Making magazine. <https://gardenmaking.com>

The notion of designing and planting a new perennial border may fill veteran gardeners with anticipatory glee, but new gardeners often experience sensations more akin to a panic attack. Not to worry: there's a first time for everything, and by following a few basic guidelines, you have every reason to expect success.

Perennial (often called herbaceous) borders are a British concoction, and were traditionally located in front of fences, hedges and walls, often on "the borders" of the property, and were usually rectangular. These days, almost any large flowerbed filled with permanent plantings is called a perennial border, even free-standing "island" beds. The advantage of this



A perennial border filled with Delphiniums, astilbes, lilies, day lilies and lambs ears - by Joanne Young

static system is that it relieves gardeners of the work and expense of planting annuals each spring and waiting for them to fill in. Well-chosen perennials require little maintenance throughout the growing season, returning bigger and better every year. By selecting species that bloom at different times of the year, perennial borders can be in flower from spring until autumn.

Your new border should blend in with your overall garden design: in yards where the existing plantings are relaxed and casual, curved borders and island beds may suit best, while more formal gardens structured on geometric principles and straight lines will look better if rectangular beds are employed.

How to Create a Perennial Border

1. Evaluate the Site

Choosing the location is crucial. I usually recommend that if it's your first attempt planting a perennial border, you pick a flat site with at least six hours of direct sun per day. Most perennials are sun lovers, so selecting a sunny spot provides you with a wider plant palette before you even put shovel to soil. I also advise against planting next to mature trees, as most young perennials are unable to compete with these garden goliaths for sunlight, water or nutrients. If the new border can be seen from an important window in your house or an outdoor seating area, so much the better.

The next thing to consider is the soil. Is it usually on the wet or the dry side? Is it mostly clay, sand or something in between? Soils at either end of the spectrum—mostly clay or mostly sand—can be improved by incorporating generous amounts of organic matter, such as leaf mould, composted manure and your homemade compost. Not many perennials tolerate persistently soggy soil. If this describes the area you're contemplating, either improve drainage by burying weeping tile (perforated plastic pipe) to divert the water, raise the planting area or choose another location.

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2. Map out dimensions and remove sod

Map out the section of the garden where your border will lie, and visualize it full of plants. For rectangular beds, use string and garden stakes to delineate the area; for curved beds, a rubber hose works well.

The average perennial border is between six and seven feet (about 2 m) wide; this allows easy access to the middle of the bed from either side for routine maintenance. If your border is situated against a wall, leave an 18-inch (45-cm) pathway between the wall and the back edge of the border for access. A deeper bed, say eight to 10 feet (2.5 to 3 m), permits a wider range of plant heights. For a border this wide, you'll need to consider pathways or strategically placed flat stones to stand on.

For most homeowners, there will be turfgrass to remove, likely the least satisfying part of this project. You can do this by smothering the grass with layers of wet newspaper and black plastic on top, but for this process to be really successful, it takes about a year. It's much faster to sharpen a few garden spades and slice off the turf in sections, taking only one-half inch (1 cm) of soil away with the grass roots. Use the removed turf to patch bare spots elsewhere in your lawn, or stack it upside down and compost.



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3. Fatten up your soil

To get off to the best possible start, you must first improve and feed your soil — regardless of whichever kind you find yourself working with — before installing plants. The Elizabethans talked about “fat soil,” which sounds strange to our ears, but it’s a term I like, as it implies earth that’s teeming with plant nutrients and enriched with beneficial organisms. The best way to fatten up your soil is to add organic matter such as compost, composted manure or leaf mould. Layer about four inches (10 cm) of organic matter atop the soil, then, using a garden fork, mix it into the top two or three inches (5 to 8 cm) of garden soil. If you’re making a large border, this adds up to quite a lot of compost, so buy it in bulk from a nursery or landscaping firm (farmers are another source). Allow newly dug beds to settle for a week or two before planting.

4. Add a focal point

Perennial borders—particularly if they aren’t anchored to the rest of the landscape by buildings or boundaries—can seem flat and uninteresting, so many gardeners like to add permanent grounding features such as birdbaths, bird- and bat houses, sundials, sculptures, and all manner of teepees, trellises, arbours and other whimsical plant supports. Nevertheless, remember when adding non-plant material to a border, less is better; otherwise it can end up looking like a crowded mantelpiece. Borders also look more natural and integrated if they don’t just end abruptly, trailing off into nothingness. Employ existing walls and fences as natural endings or “bookends,” or install groups of shrubs or evergreens to visually hold in the extremities. Large rocks may also be used to serve the same function, but don’t get carried away or your garden will look like something out of *The Flintstones*.

5. Choosing plants

Now you should be about ready to plant. It’s a good idea to do some research and have a list of plants prepared before you head to the nursery—it’s easy to get carried away by whatever is in flower that day, and impulse buying isn’t good gardening practice. Many of the best long-lived perennials, such as *Acanthus*, *Baptisia* and *Dictamnus*, don’t look very prepossessing in a pot on

the sales bench. Likewise, perennials that bloom later in the year, such as echinacea, monkshood and black snakeroot, might seem insignificant in spring, but can shine in the border in late summer/early fall. Include spring-, summer- and fall-blooming perennials on your list to ensure your new border is interesting throughout the seasons.

I like to start off with the healthiest, best-grown plants I can, so this means seeking out a reputable nursery that will stand behind its product. Avoid neighbourhood plant sales and large green clumps offered to you by well-meaning friends and relatives. The majority of these species are invasive (which is why they have so many to spare), and you can unwittingly pick up unwanted disease and insect pests at the same time. Rambunctious plants are useful for covering large areas but are difficult to control in a perennial border. Instead, go for plants that seldom need dividing.

To add height and interest to your border, consider incorporating a few shrubs and vines with showy flowers or unusual, colourful foliage. Avoid planting different species whose foliage looks the same side by side (e.g., hardy geraniums next to *Astrantia*; daylilies next to Siberian iris). A good perennial border should always look appealing thanks to its attractive, contrasting foliage—even if there isn't a single flower in bloom. Spring bulbs added to perennial borders boosts early-season colour, but keep in mind that their foliage takes a long time to mature (midsummer for most daffodils and tulips). Lately, I've taken to planting most of these bulbous plants in groups scattered throughout my lawn, mowing around them until their leaves die back.

Some gardeners like a riot of colour, others prefer to plant within the boundaries of a colour scheme. The choice is yours, but always try to plant in drifts (buy perennials in threes, fives and sevens) to avoid a spotty patchwork of botanical orphans. Single "specimen plants"—those with unusual growth forms or leaf colours—may be used as accents or punctuation points within the border. Vary plant heights so not all the short perennials are at the front and all the tall ones are at the back—bays of low growers juxtaposed with promontories of taller ones make for more dynamic displays.



6. Planting day — at last!

The rest is easy, not to mention huge fun. Wait for an overcast day, then place the plants in their pots on the soil surface, allowing for their eventual width at maturity, and remembering to group like plants together in drifts. This may take you several hours, and will involve a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing, and very likely a glass of wine or two. Once everything has been placed the way you want it (for now at least!), you can begin digging your planting holes. At this point I always add extra organic matter to the bottom and sides of the hole, being careful to mix it together with the native soil.

Place plants at the same depth as they were in their pots, press into the earth firmly and water thoroughly. Transplanting solutions won't be necessary if you mixed in sufficient organic matter with your existing soil.

Once all the plants have been installed, cover the exposed soil surface with a three-inch (8 cm) layer of organic mulch to help conserve moisture and discourage weeds. Water perennials regularly during dry spells until they're well established, and enjoy non-stop flowers every year.

Foliage is forever

A perennial border based solely on flowers is a missed opportunity. Look for perennials with interesting leaves: fuzzy, spotted, striped, purple, glaucous, chartreuse, silver or bronze. The following perennials excel in the foliage department and are hardy to Zone 3:



Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost' for your perennial border by Walter Gardens, Inc.

- ▶ Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*)
- ▶ Artemisia
- ▶ Bergenia
- ▶ Siberian bugloss (*Brunnera*)
- ▶ Heuchera
- ▶ Hosta
- ▶ Ligularia
- ▶ Lungwort (*Pulmonaria*)
- ▶ Sedum
- ▶ Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*)

Also: ferns and ornamental grasses

Perennial border plants with no dividing necessary

Reduce border maintenance by including perennials that seldom need dividing. All are hardy to Zone 3.

- ▶ Monkshood (*Aconitum*)
- ▶ Columbine (*Aquilegia*)
- ▶ Goat's beard (*Aruncus dioicus*)
- ▶ False indigo (*Baptisia australis*)
- ▶ Black snakeroot (*Actaea racemosa*)
- ▶ Gas plant (*Dictamnus albus*)
- ▶ Globe thistle (*Echinops ritro*)
- ▶ Cushion spurge (*Euphorbia polychroma*)
- ▶ Cranesbill (*Geranium*)
- ▶ Hosta
- ▶ Peony (*Paeonia*)
- ▶ Balloon flower (*Platycodon grandiflorus*)
- ▶ Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*)
- ▶ Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum aquilegiifolium*)

May 11 Zoom Meeting Dazzling Hydrangeas - Lynn Lavoie

Hydrangeas are among the most popular flowering shrubs and it's easy to understand why. Hydrangeas are showy, versatile and adaptable. However, to get the best out of your hydrangeas there are a few factors to consider - most importantly, the variety that you are growing. We will discuss the main types and how to maintain them, for a recurring dazzling display!

BIO: Lynn Lavoie is an avid plant enthusiast, who owns and runs Monarch Garden Design. Her botanical fervour led to a late career change. In her fifties, after a long career as a chemist, Lynn went back to Guelph University to study horticulture. During school, she worked as a seasonal gardener at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. Since graduating, she has learned lots from staffing the perennial and nursery sections of three garden centres, working in landscape maintenance and installation and launching her garden design business.



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Stretches for Gardeners Really Help

By Garden Making in partnership with the
Ontario Chiropractic Association

After winter, it's hard for gardeners to resist the urge to rush outdoors as soon as the weather warms. But you want to try to go slow. Do some warmups. Stretch before tackling any big jobs. Here's some advice about stretches before you spring into action in the garden.

These how-to tips come from the professionals who end up treating gardeners who over-exert themselves in the spring: chiropractors. As someone who has benefited from chiropractic treatment, I've observed how the spring season can be hurtful for some — and lucrative for the practitioners who treat their aches. This year, spend your money on plants, not therapy, by doing some warmups first.



The following advice is from the Ontario Chiropractic Association Plant and Rake Without the Ache program:

Warmups

Warm up with a short walk, then gently repeat each of the following stretches five times. Hold all stretches for 15 to 20 seconds. Stop if it's painful.

- ▶ **Thigh stretch:** With one hand on the wall or a tree, bend your left knee and then reach back and hold your ankle with your right hand. Pull your heel toward your buttocks and hold for 30 seconds. Relax and repeat with the other leg. To stretch the back thigh muscles (hamstrings), place one hand on the wall or a tree, and put one foot on a chair, stump or step. Slowly bend forward from the waist until you feel the pull at the back of your thigh. Hold for 30 seconds. Relax and repeat with the other leg.

- ▶ **Back stretch:** Sit on a chair and slowly bend your body forward from your hips, putting your head down and resting your hands on the floor. Hold, then relax.
- ▶ **Shoulder rolls:** With your arms hanging loosely at your sides, slowly rotate your shoulders in a circular motion forward, then backward.
- ▶ **Wrist extension:** While holding one arm straight out as if you were giving a “stop” signal, use your opposite hand to hold this position. Repeat with the other hand.
- ▶ **Wrist flexion:** Hold one arm out in front, palm down. Bend your fingers until they point toward the ground. Use your opposite hand to hold this position.

Lifting tips

Heavy lifting is no easy feat. The following back safety tips can help you when lifting on your own:

1. Stand close to the load to be lifted.
2. Place your feet shoulder-width apart.
3. Keep your back straight.
4. Squat down to the object's level and test the weight of the load.
5. Use the strength of your leg and arm muscles to smoothly and slowly lift the load.
6. Keep the load close to your body.
7. Pivot to turn and face the intended direction of travel. Proceed with the load.
8. Avoid twisting your body while carrying the load.
9. Bend your knees and slowly lower the load to its intended place.

You can download the Plant and Rake Without the Ache brochure that has all these tips at www.gardenmaking.com.



Tools of the Month

1. The Hori Hori Knife has been recommended by PDHS board member Catherine Stephen-Dunn

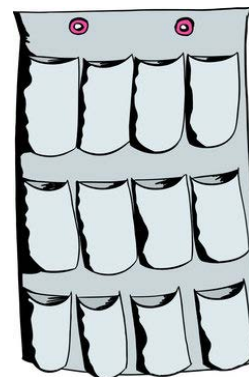
It is a cross between a knife and a trowel, this tool is useful for many tasks such as dividing perennials or planting. Traditionally used in Japan to collect specimens for bonsai (hori means “digging”), the knife has a rust-resistant steel blade that is dished, with a serrated edge on one side and a sharpened edge on the other.



About 12” overall, it has a hardwood handle and comes with a belt sheath. Made in Japan. Available at Lee Valley Tools for \$36.50

2. Organize and store your garden tools and supplies using a hanging shoe rack from the Dollar Store. This inspiration comes from PDHS board member Sandi Sissons.

Always wondering where you last left your gardening tools? Sandi recommends that you label the pockets of a hanging shoe bag, so that you will know just where to find your: gloves, three-pronged cultivator, hand trowel, pruner (secateurs) twine, tulip planter, plant markers, knife, scissors, plant ties, side cutters and miscellaneous.



Allium Tricoccum or Wild Ramps: The First Vegetable in Nature's Garden

This Dispatch is by Anne Avery, Master Gardener, from her farm at Walters Falls ON

In early May, shortly after taking possession of some beautiful land in the Collingwood area, I was walking in the woods with a friend, taking stalk of spring's early offerings. The forest was a pale yellow-green, sap running through the trees, vibrant with the promise of imminent life. The trillium (trillium grandiflorum) had started to bloom and the trout lilies (erythronium albidum) were showing themselves. My friend leaned over and pointed to another spring forest pleasure, a patch of wild ramps (allium tricoccum). He pulled one from the



forest bed, took a bite and the air was instantly filled with the stinky smell of garlic. I too took a bite and the pungent taste of onion filled my senses flooding me with the essence of spring.

What I soon discovered was that my damp, rich soiled, hardwood forest, consisting of Cherry, Ash and Maple, was the quintessential

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growing place for this spring delight, the wild ramp or wild leek as it is sometimes referred to. Interestingly, research shows conflicting information on its classification, while Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allium_tricoccum) and several other sources say Wild Ramps belong to the onion family- Alliaceae, several other references including the United States Department of Agriculture (2009) ensure that it is in the lily family, Liliaceae (George, 2005/2006; Toth-Simpson, 2005)). Either way ramps are close relatives of the onion, garlic, shallot and chive. The Ramp is hardy in zones 3-9 and native to eastern North America. (George, 2005/2006) They begin growing rapidly in April in cool shady areas with damp soil and an abundance of decomposed leaf litter or other organic matter and demand a constant supply of moisture throughout the year. Often, they will grow in patches of hundreds, if not thousands. In late winter or very early spring, each bulb sends up two or three broad, smooth, ovate leaves that survive for a relatively short duration. Once the foliage of the forest canopy has formed they wilt and disappear. Single greenish-white globe florets are borne in the summer on a thin, leafless nine or ten-inch magenta stem, which give way to tiny steely blue-black buckshot-like seeds in the fall. Ramps reproduce by both bulb offsets and seeds (Greenfield and Davis, 2001).



Wild Ramps can be easily transplanted to home gardens, or direct seeded, but need a place to grow that replicates the moist organic rich soils of their native environment. It would also appear that calcium is an important nutrient for their success (George, 2005/2006). While I have not seen insect problems on my treasured crop, Elise George (2005/2006) states that Septoria leaf spot has been observed in wild and cultivated ramps, not affecting yield but causing unsightly foliage. A more imminent threat to the plant is over harvesting. It is suggested that no more than 10% of any population be harvested to avoid losing the species altogether. According to the Wild Ramp entry on Wikipedia, in Quebec the commercial harvest is now illegal but a personal harvest of less than 50 stalks is allowed.

The reason for over harvesting seems to reflect the “vogue” reputation of the plants in today’s gourmet world. Long relished for their adaptability to any food style, the bulbs and leaves were often the first vegetable of Indians and other rural settlers to break the bland dried diets of winter. Native medicine understood that ramps were high in Vitamin C and often incorporated them as a spring tonic to treat colds, croup and worms (McCormick, 1991). Recent studies have also proved that the genus, Allium, can be used to reduce blood cholesterol and are currently investigating their cancer fighting potential (Novak, 1998)

This spring as I wander through my woods foraging for leafy green patches of wild ramps to concoct a tantalizing spring meal I will be sharing a tradition with thousands of Eastern North Americans. Ramp Ramps celebrate a vegetable known as the “King of Stink” but they are anything but unpleasant, they herald the return of life to the woods and to the dinner plate.



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Wild Ramps/Leeks

By Anne Avery, Master Gardener

They tend to be out from mid-April to mid-May and found in the hardwood bush in southern Ontario.

The first truly local wild food crop that we have to look forward to. They have a particular affinity with eggs and, when young and tender, they cook in moments. The entire plant is edible. They can be added to sautes and risottos, letting them wilt in the heat of the dish before serving.

As the season progresses the leaves begin to look less appealing and the white base becomes more bulbous. This is the perfect time to pickle them for later.

Be careful not to over harvest your crop. Best to take a foot wide swath from the middle of the patch, making sure to leave some mature plants.

If you want to have the leeks spread in your woods. In the fall, rake away the fallen leaves from the base of the plants, exposing the rich loamy soil beneath. Then scatter the small black seeds from the single white flower that bloomed in early summer, and push them into the earth with your feet, covering them back up with the leaves.

Wild Leeks and Eggs

This simple dish makes for a great late breakfast or early lunch and, as everything is cooked in one pan, cleanup is simple, too. If you want to make this recipe foolproof, use a non-stick frying pan, though any large shallow pan will do. And no need to wash a lid: select a round plate that completely covers the pan to act as a cover and serving dish.

Prep Time: 10 Minutes

Cook Time: 10 Minutes

Ready Time: 20 Minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- ¼ cup double-smoked bacon, diced
- 1 shallot peeled and thinly sliced
- 12-16 small wild leeks, washed and trimmed
- 4 extra-large fresh eggs
- Freshly ground black pepper



Method:

Heat the pan over medium heat and add the oil, when it is shimmering, add the butter, then the bacon. Cook the bacon until lightly coloured and fragrant.

Add the shallot and leeks. Cook until the leeks are just wilted.

Turn down the heat as low as possible. Spread the bacon and leeks into a relatively even layer. Break in the eggs, as if cooking them sunny side up and season with the salt and pepper. Cover with a plate and continue cooking on a very gentle heat until the eggs are just cooked. The white will be very white and tender but firm and the yolk will be warm and still runny.

Carefully slide the contents of the pan out on to the warmed plate and serve with thick slices of hot buttered toast. Serves 2.

Pickled Wild Leeks

Ingredients:

- 3 pounds cleaned wild leeks, white part only
- ½ cup kosher salt
- 2 cups sugar
- ½ teaspoon whole celery seeds
- ¼ teaspoon whole cloves
- ½ teaspoon mustard seed
- 4 cups cider vinegar

Method:

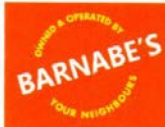
Cover leeks with cold water, add ¼ cup salt. Leave for 24 hours in refrigerator.

Drain off water and rinse leeks.

Combine all remaining ingredients in a stainless-steel pot, bring to a boil, add leeks, return to a boil, lower heat and simmer for about 5 minutes.

Pack in sterilized jars and place in a warm bath.

Cool and refrigerate until ready to use.



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