

# Jan.-Feb. 2018 Newsletter

It takes a while to grasp that not all failures are self-imposed, the result of ignorance, carelessness or inexperience. It takes a while to grasp that a garden isn't a testing ground for character and to stop asking, what did I do wrong? Maybe nothing.

~Eleanor Perényi, *Green Thoughts*, 1981

## Seedy Saturdays (And Sundays)

*Dale Odorizzi*

*Master Gardener of Lanark County*

Seedy Saturdays are a remarkable and growing phenomenon. They take place across Canada, not as one event but as a series of separate events, usually in February and March. Each one is individually and uniquely organized by the host community. They have the same general theme and that is to encourage the use of open pollinated and heritage seed, and facilitate local seed exchanges. Typically, there is an educational component, teaching the public about seed saving and environmentally responsible gardening practices.

The events are fun, inexpensive events where you can swap and exchange seeds, get exciting "new to you" varieties that other seed savers are sharing. You can attend workshops and talks, meet with vendors and buy seeds. Master Gardeners are often available at these events, conducting presentations, hosting educational displays and ready to answer any of your gardening questions. To find an event near you, visit:

<http://www.seeds.ca/events>.

Some "Seedys" offer expanded exchanges, such as a seed ex-

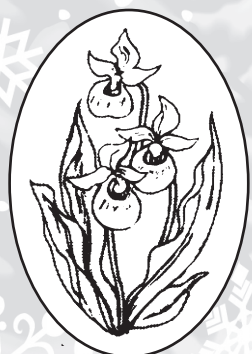
change for seeds and extra plants, cuttings, books, magazines, pots, trellising, tools and/or gardening supplies. In the exchange, for each item donated another can be taken home. Larger items equate to a few extra goodies per item. If you forget to bring exchange items and still want to partake, a small donation (\$1) is welcomed.

## Terrarium-riffic

*Submitted by Lynda Haddon*

Terrariums are making a comeback. If you would like to try one of these fun little (or large) easy-care gardens, here are some guidelines:

- Pick a glass container that makes you happy. Fill it one-quarter to one-third with soil.
- Choose several mini plants (around 2" tall) that appeal to you.
- Place in indirect, not direct, sunlight.
- Usually water every two weeks. However if the soil turns a light brown, it is dry and needs to be watered.
- Use a turkey baster to water the base of each plant. If your terrarium has an African Violet, the leaves should not get wet or the drops will leave a mark. If this happens, dab the wet spots with a Kleenex to absorb the water.
- If a plant dies, remove and



Lanark Orchid

Renals

Perth & District  
Horticultural  
Society

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District #2 of the  
Ontario Horticultural  
Association

**President:** Robin McIntosh • **Newsletter:** Irene Hofmann

replace it. If a plant grows too tall, pinch it back.

- You may wish to add interesting size-appropriate rocks, shells or ceramic collectables for interest.

## Lighting For Seeds

*Susan Bicket*

*Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

One of the conditions needed for starting seeds indoors is adequate light. Without it our young plants become elongated and spindly, weakening the plant.

The most obvious sources of light are the windows, but often we don't have enough room by the window, or don't want seed trays cluttering up our living spaces, or the light just isn't adequate – many windows are coated with energy-saving window films which cuts the light. So, we often need to supplement. Grow-lights give more control over available light, heat and location.

Ideally the light fixture needs to be positioned 7-10 cm, 30 cm at the most, above the seedlings – closer is better – and it can be raised as the seedlings grow. Alternatively, the seedlings can be lowered. A timer ensures the plants will have the necessary night period of 6-8 hours. As lights generate heat that could potentially burn seedlings when close, choose lights that give out less heat. As the light gets further away from the seedlings the amount of light available for growth decreases.

Fluorescent light bulbs are the most readily available and affordable. For the tube form of bulb—T5 is considered to be the most efficient for plants—a special light fitting is needed which is suspended over the plants. It needs to be close and only light the area under the hood. Ordinary CFL—compact fluorescent lights—can be used with reflectors for very small numbers of seedlings.

Purposed fittings come in the form of shelves with fitted lights to modest stands that come with propagation kits. There is also the DIY solution where you purchase the fitting from a local hardware store and mount it yourself.

Bulbs or tubes labelled “white daylight”, “cool white”, “cool” whose spectrum tends slightly towards the blue wavelengths or “daylight” will work for seedlings.

Using reflective surfaces such as the shiny side of aluminium foil around the seedlings will

help concentrate the light.

Over time, the amount of light emitted declines so replacing after about 6-9 months of use is a good idea

## New Vegetables To Grow In 2018

*Dr. Leonard Perry, Horticulture Professor Emeritus  
University of Vermont*

Each year the best of the new annual flowers and vegetables are judged nationwide, and the winners are given the All-America Selections (AAS) designation. To be an AAS winner, plants must show improvements over any similar existing cultivars (cultivated varieties). This year's eight vegetable winners include a corn, pak choi, three peppers, and three tomatoes.

Sweet American Dream corn has large ears with bicolor kernels that are super sweet and tender. In addition to being eaten fresh, this variety is good roasted, grilled, canned or frozen. Plants grow six to seven feet tall, and ears mature about 77 days after sowing the seeds in the garden. Thin seedlings to about eight inches apart in rows.

Asian Delight Pak Choi (or Bok Choy) is a Chinese cabbage with yields twice or more than other varieties. This is due to the fact that it is much later to bolt (produce flower stalks and stop growing). The small to mid-sized heads (five to seven inches high and across) have a tasty and tender white rib which contrasts nicely to the dark green leaves. When planting out seedlings or sowing directly to the garden, space plants eight to ten inches apart. Figure on 30 to 50 days from sowing seeds to harvest, or 25 to 40 days to harvest from setting out transplants.

The first of the three pepper winners is the cayenne Red Ember. It is earlier to mature than many varieties, making it a good choice for us in cooler climates with shorter growing seasons. It produces many thick-walled fruits with rounded ends, about four inches long and an inch wide, and bright red when mature. It is described as spicy but tastier than the traditional cayenne. Plants are compact, under two feet high, and bear 25 to 50 or more fruits. Plants should be spaced 12 to 18 inches apart in rows. Since it needs about 130 days from sowing until fully ripe, with our short and sometimes cool summers it might be better to start them indoors and then set out transplants. If doing this, figure on about 75 days to fully ripe from transplanting.

Roulette is the next pepper winner—a habanero type that resembles one in all respects, except it has no heat. Instead it has a tasty citrusy habanero flavor. A plant will produce about 10 fruits at a time, and up to 100 total for the season. The bright red fruit (when ripe) are acorn shaped, three inches long and a bit over an inch wide. Plants are bushy, growing up to three feet high, so space them about two feet apart in the garden. Once again it may be best to start these indoors, then transplant out. For this, figure on 85 days from planting to fully ripe, or 120 days from direct sowing in the garden.

Mexican Sunrise is a Hungarian pepper and the third AAS pepper winner this year. In the AAS trials, it performed best in the Southeast and Southwest regions. Fruit are attractive in various colours, conical to six or so inches long, and hanging on bushy plants about 20 inches high. They can be used ornamentally as well as for eating or pickling. Fruits turn from lime green to yellow, then orange and finally red when ripe. The thick-walled fruit can be eaten, though, at any stage and are semi-hot. When planting, space about 12 to 15 inches apart. Figure on 80 days or more to fully ripe from sowing directly, or 60 days or so from transplanting young plants into the garden.

Chef's Choice Red tomato is the fifth member of the Chef's Choice series, and is a red beefsteak type tomato. What makes it special is its firm flesh, good balance of acidity to sweetness, many fruits (30 or more, a half-pound each) on strong plants (five feet tall and indeterminate), and some disease resistance. Space plants about 18 to 24 inches apart, and figure on about 80 days to bearing from transplanting young plants into the garden. The second winning tomato this year is a cocktail type, Red Racer, which has resistance to several common diseases. Fruits mature in clusters, about a week earlier than similar varieties, are a uniform size, and are slightly larger than cherry tomatoes (about two ounces). They have a good balance of acidity to sweetness. Space plants about two feet apart. They're determinate and will grow about three feet high. Figure on about 57 days from transplanting young plants out until they start bearing.

Valentine is the last tomato winner, a deep red grape tomato which is very sweet, and can last quite well on the vine without cracking or losing flavour. It has some resistance to early blight disease. Indeterminate plants are vining, growing to six feet high and so needing staking,

and produce fruit earlier (about 55 days from transplanting) than similar grape tomatoes. You may get 100 or more fruit per plant. Space plants about two feet apart in the garden.

Since most of these new varieties won't be at garden stores, you'll need to buy seeds (either locally or from catalogues) and start them yourself. You can find out more details and photos on these and other past AAS winners, both vegetables and flowers, from the AAS website ([all-america-selections.org](http://all-america-selections.org)).

## Seed Viability

Waste Not, Want Not

*Dale Odorizzi*

*Master Gardener of Lanark County*

This is an exciting time in a gardener's life. The hustle and bustle of Christmas has passed. I can finally sit down and leisurely leaf through the seed catalogues that have arrived in my mail box over the past month. It is the time when my garden looks its best, at least in my mind. I dream about the beautiful new flowers I can grow or how neat and weed free my vegetable garden will look. As I look through my seed catalogues, I am struck with the thought that last year I bought a pack of cucumber seeds and of the 100 seeds in the pack, I only used 12. I still have over half a pack of bean and pea seeds left.

Can I use them? Should I run the risk of using seeds that may not produce, or should I just order a bunch more. There are various simple tests for viability.

One method is to dampen a plain white paper towel. Fold it in half and place a few seeds on one half and fold it over the seeds. Put it in a clear plastic bag and place in the appropriate seed germination environment — light, dark, warm or cool. After a week, check to see if any seeds have sprouted. Calculate the percentage viability. For example, if you started with 10 seeds and 7 sprouted, you are now at 70% viability.

Another method is the glass of water test. Put your seeds in a glass of water. Wait a couple of hours. Those that sink are viable. The seeds that float are sterile. They contain no embryo and are therefore lighter and not viable. The lower the viability percentage, the more seeds you should plant.

What you will likely find is that the older the seeds are, the lower the germination rate is likely to be. The first year that you have your seeds,



fresh from the supplier, the germination rate is likely to be 95%. Year 2, it might drop to 85% and in the case of basil, by the time year eight rolls around, the germination rate could be as low as 20%. Much of this decrease can depend on how the seeds are stored.

While it is too late to store last year's seeds, you can plan ahead to this upcoming growing season. For you to maximize the life span of your seeds, it is important to store them properly. The number one problem is improper drying of the seeds. Typically, if you have purchased a packet of seeds and only used part of it, your seeds are likely sufficiently dry, unless you left them out in the rain or water dripped on them. If you harvested your own seeds, you must ensure they have dried completely prior to storing.

'DRY' SEEDS include beans, okra, peppers, basil and members of the onion and carrot families. Cleaning dry seeds usually involves simply drying and crumbling the pods or husks, then screening or 'winnowing' the seeds to separate them from the chaff. This can be done by laying them in a single layer on paper towel or newspaper and waiting for them to dry thoroughly. You can also use a dehydrator and follow the instructions.

'WET' SEEDS are found in such plants as tomatoes, eggplants and many squashes. Cleaning wet seeds requires washing to clean the seeds and to separate them from the surrounding pulp. In addition, in some cases wet seeds (such as tomatoes) are best fermented for several days to remove germination-inhibiting substances from the seed coats. To ferment the seeds, put them in a glass container (I use a half pint mason jar) and half fill it with water. Cover the top with plastic, held on with a rubber band. Every day or so drain off the water and add fresh water. This will smell very bad. When the seeds have fallen to the bottom, they are ready to dry. If some remain floating, they are not viable so throw them out. Put the viable seeds on a piece of paper towel and write the variety name on the towel. You will not remember if these are Black Cherry tomatoes or Brandywine tomatoes. Fermenting can also help such seeds as members of the squash family by killing molds, mildews and other disease organisms that may be present on

the seeds after growing. You can also dry these wet seeds on paper towel, but the risk of disease transfer will be greater.

Once these seeds have dried, place each variety in an envelope and clearly mark the variety of the seed and the storage date. Place these envelopes in an air tight jar and store in a cool dark place. A closet is appropriate. Some people prefer to put in the fridge, but I find a closet works well.

Now, I am not telling you to reduce your seed catalogue order. With all the money you have saved from using last years seeds, you can easily justify ordering a new variety or a completely new type of plant.

## Myth in the Mist

*By Larry Hodgson, The Laidback Gardener*

The myth that you should mist your houseplants daily throughout the winter has been circulating for a long, long time. I remember running about my first apartment with a spray bottle, misting all my plants' leaves every day so they'd be able to enjoy the humidity they needed. And if I missed a day, I felt guilty about it.

Then I read a bit more about the subject in a now-defunct houseplant magazine (anyone remember *House Plants and Porch Gardens*?) with statistics to show that it didn't make an iota of difference, that the effect of all that spraying only lasted for about 5 minutes, depending on the season, before the humidity dropped to its previous level. And 5 minutes of temporarily improved humidity didn't even give the plants enough time to open their stomata just a bit wider to reap the bonanza!

So I'd been doing all that spraying, not to mention spotting the walls, the furniture, and even the plants' own leaves with water stains, all for nothing? Yep!

Well, you can bet I immediately stopped misting my plants daily ... and true enough, it made no difference whatsoever.

I still mist plant leaves when I need to remove a bit of dust, but that's only very occasionally. I now humidify mostly by ... having a lot plants!