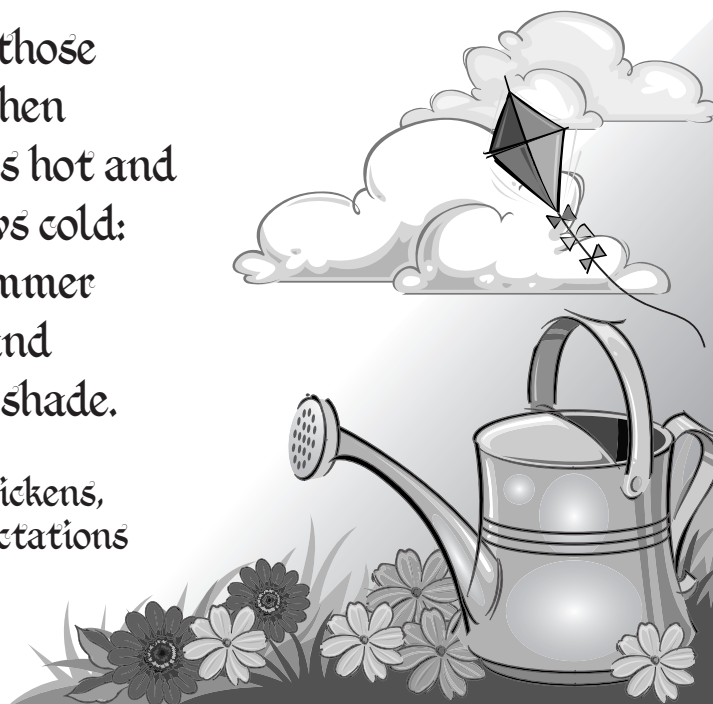


March 2014 Newsletter

It was one of those
March days when
the sun shines hot and
the wind blows cold:
when it is summer
in the light, and
winter in the shade.

Charles Dickens,
Great Expectations



Save The Date 5th April, 2014

PDHS will be hosting the District 2 Annual General Meeting at Glad Tidings Pentecostal Church on Wayside Drive. Please support PDHS and count on joining us for a day which promises to be memorable on many levels. Spend the day improving your garden knowledge, feeding your mind, body and soul, connecting with old friends and meeting new ones.

With your help, we can make this event a huge success!

Kemptville Society Special Speaker

The Kemptville Horticulture Society is having a special speaker on March 19 – Joanne Plummer of Manotick's Mill Street Florist.

She is well known in the area for her floral arranging. Joanne will be bringing all the materials to demonstrate several current designs and we will auction these off at the end of the evening. We are charging guests \$10 to cover the additional fee for the evening. We are extending an invitation to nearby societies to join us for this event. As a member of an OHA society, we will ask for a \$5 guest fee. If members of your society are interested, we would like to know ahead of time who will be coming so we can identify the members of nearby societies at the door. If a list is not possible, tell your members to bring their 2014 membership card with them.

The information on our location, etc., is on our website: <http://www.gardenontario.org/site.php/kemptville>

Hope to hear from you,
Diane Partlo, President



Lanark Orchid

Renals

Perth & District
Horticultural
Society

P.O. Box 494
Perth, ON, K7H 3G1
www.gardenontario.org

District #2 of the
Ontario Horticultural
Association



President: Madeline Archer
Vice President/Secretary: Margo Fulford • **Newsletter:** Irene Hofmann

Starting Seeds Indoors

Growing your own vegetables is the most rewarding form of gardening—the plants are beautiful and you can eat the results. Starting your vegetable transplants from seed kicks all of these rewards up a notch. Every time I pick up a tiny tomato seed and imagine the bushel of tomatoes it will produce, I am amazed. Also, starting your own vegetables indoors lets you get your hands dirty earlier!

To grow seeds, you need growing medium, containers, water and light. I typically purchase a soilless mix to start my plants. You can make your own using equal quantities of good garden soil, clean, coarse builders sand and peat moss. The garden soil should be sterilized by spreading in a shallow pan and baking at 275F for 30 minutes. Moisten your growing medium before planting. When watering is required, stand each container in a tray of water to dampen, until the medium is moist but not wet.

I like to start my seeds in seed trays or flats. I can start all the tomatoes I want in one tray and they come with a handy clear dome cover. Be sure to label the type of tomatoes. They will all look the same in a few weeks. While the trays are quite flimsy, if handled carefully they will last a long time. Once the tomatoes have germinated, I transplant into small pots—3" (7.5 cm). Tomatoes and peppers love to be transplanted. Each time I move them up a pot size, I plant them as deep as I can. Roots will form along the planted stem, making the plants hardier. They also like to be tickled. Every time you walk by your seedlings, wave your fingers through your plants. Your fingers will smell like tomatoes—bliss!

Seedlings can be grown in a sunny window. If you decide to grow more seedlings than your window will hold, you may have to resort to using fluorescent lights. You can purchase tiers of grow lights or create temporary shelving from planks stacked on bricks with your lights propped on top. Special "GroLight" tubes are available but are very expensive. They add little to the health of your plants. We have found that using one "warm" tube and one "cool" tube ordinary fluorescent provides the full light spectrum at a much reduced cost.

The back of your seed package will tell you how deep to plant your seeds, when to plant and

anything special you must do to get the seeds to germinate. They often refer to "the average last frost date for your area". In Eastern Ontario, that is May 5th. A rule of thumb is seeds should be covered to 3 times their diameter.

Damping off is one problem with starting seeds indoors. To avoid, sterilize all seed containers. Use only sterile growing medium and sow seeds thinly. Do not allow your containers to be overcrowded. Water the seed trays from below. Damping off can be stimulated by nitrogen so make sure your seedlings develop 3 true leaves before fertilizing. You will recognize damping off if your seedling flops over. If this happens, remove it and its neighbours immediately. If the soil appears too moist, move the container away from other seedlings. Although not scientifically proven, many gardeners have had success watering their plants with chamomile tea or sprinkling cinnamon on the soil.

For years, I have started my own peppers and tomatoes from seeds indoors. All other vegetables, I have simply planted seeds in the ground where they would grow. This past autumn, our Master Gardener group visited a local greenhouse that grows greens for local restaurants and one of the presenters at our Technical Update indicated that they start all of their plants indoors to transplant out. Their rationale is that they have better plants, they can germinate cool weather crops (such as lettuce) all year long and they can plant what they need each month.

Dale Odorizzi, Lanark County Master Gardeners

Easy-Care Plants That Pay Off

Lavender - practically indestructible, genuinely deer resistant

Snapdragon "Snap Daddy" - long blooming, variegated foliage, stands cool and hot temps

Cleome "White Queen" - blooms late June to frost, loves the sun

Caladium - brings colour to a shady area, manages the heat

Black-eyed Susan - blooms mid-July to mid-September, self-seeding

Maiden Grass - forms light, airy 4-foot tall mound, handles tough, dry sites

Adapted from Country Living, April, 2014

April In-House Flower Show

April marks the start of flower show season here at the PDHS and we would love to see as many members as possible participating at our general meetings. Start your own collection of ribbons to show off. You don't need to be an expert - you just need to have a little daring and some imagination!

The is the schedule for our April meeting:

Section I: Horticultural Specimen

Class 1: African Violet – any colour – single flower

Class 2: Best potted plant in bloom – other than violet – named if possible

Class 3: Best potted foliage plant – named if possible

Class 4: Narcissus – any cultivar, 3 scapes

Class 5: Spring bulb – other than Narcissus – 1 stem

Section II: Design

Class 6: Novice Class: (This class is for a person who enters a competition for the first time, or who has won no red ribbons in previous flower shows.)

“Hopping Right to It” – A small design using an Easter theme, accessories permitted

Class 7: “After the Winter” – an interpretive design using what was left in your garden

Class 8: “Hope Springs” – a small design with promises for those better gardening days to come

Dividing Daffodil Bulbs

Using a fork, dig out the crowded clump of daffodils. A gentle twist is all that is needed to pull the bulbs apart from the tightly packed clump. Large or small bulbs are all OK. Dig a hole 3x the depth of your bulb, add bulb fertilizer as the label instructs. Cover the granules with a thin layer of soil to protect roots. Replant three bulbs in each hole and refill the hole. Water well to help set the bulbs.

Adapted from Garden Gate, April, 2014

Plants Deer Avoid (sometimes)

- No plant is totally deer resistant
- Damage to plants can happen as deer walk through the garden and/or as they nibble on the plants
- Deer tend to be attracted to gardens mainly in the late winter and early spring when their forest food supply is at its lowest availability
- They also munch a lot in late summer as they fatten up for winter
- Which plants deer are less likely to eat is an on-going debate. Depends upon how hungry they are and the individual deer!

Annuals: Ageratum, Alyssum, Delphinium, Dusty Miller, Marigold, Nicotiana, Parsley, Periwinkle, Sweet Pea, Wax Begonia, Verbena, Zinnia

Perennials: Astilbe, Balloon Flower, Bee Balm, Black-eyed Susan, Chives, Chrysanthemum, Dianthus, Gaillardia, Globe Thistle, Lamb's Ear, Lungwort, Mint, Oregano, Oxalis, Primrose, Salvia, Sedum, Spiderwort, Sunflower, Tansy, Thyme, Yarrow

*Adapted from Fact Sheet
prepared by Hyams Garden
and Accent Store, Charleston, SC*



**Seen on a
nursery sign:**
*Spring is here and
we are so excited
we wet our plants.*

Shamrocks For St. Patrick's Day

*Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor
University of Vermont*

You don't have to be Irish to wear green on St. Patrick's Day, nor do you need a green thumb to grow shamrocks indoors. This plant, which is associated with this March 17 holiday, is quite easy to grow.

Shamrocks are a member of the Oxalis (wood sorrel) family, which contains more than 300 species. Most of these grow from small bulbs although some have tuberous roots. The distinguishing characteristic is the three rounded or triangular-shaped leaves at the end of delicate stems. Most oxalis plants fold up their leaves at night, hugging them tight to the stems until daylight “wakes them up”



again—described botanically as “nyctinastic movement.” Due to oxylates in plants, they may be toxic to cats, dogs, and horses if ingested in large quantities.

The familiar St. Patrick’s Day species (*Oxalis acetosella*) is available at florist shops and many grocery stores this time of year. It has tiny, dark green, triangular leaves and grows to a height of about six inches. This variety hails from Europe, Iceland, and Asia. It is not the official Irish shamrock (*Trifolium dubium*) – a yellow-flowered clover or trefoil – which is what the majority feel is the authentic species. That clover is difficult to grow indoors, so nurseries and florists sell *Oxalis* plants instead.

If you are wondering how the shamrock became part of Irish history, there are many explanations going back to the significance placed by the ancient Celtic peoples in the number three. The most popular story is that St. Patrick, who is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland in the second half of the fifth century, once plucked a shamrock from the grass at his feet to illustrate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to his congregation. St. Patrick’s Day, which is celebrated on the anniversary of his death, also heralds the arrival of spring. The shamrock was adopted as a symbol of both this patron saint and the “season of rebirth,” and can be seen on ancient coins and medieval tombs.

Shamrocks like cool air, moist soil (except in their dormant period), and bright light. Ideal temperatures are between 50 and 65 degrees (Fahrenheit), and over 75 degrees may cause plants to become dormant. Soils should not be kept too wet or waterlogged. If the plant yellows, it may be getting too much water and roots may rot. Too little water and it obviously wilts. Too little light, or too much warmth, and plants may get tall and lanky.

They do not have an extensive root system, so unlike many plants, actually prefer to be crowded in a pot. However, if the plant dries out too quickly, you may need to move it into a larger pot. Fertilize every two to three weeks while the

plant is actively growing or flowering, using regular houseplant fertilizer. For application rate, follow directions on the container.

Be aware that no matter how much care you give this plant, at times it will look sick and lose its leaves. This dormant period, which often occurs during summer, is part of the growing process common to all plants grown from bulbs. During dormancy, stop watering. Let the leaves die back naturally, then remove dead, brown leaves. Place the plant in a cool, dark place while it goes through its dormancy period. Plants generally “sleep” for about three months. New green shoots signal that the plant is waking up and needs to be moved back into the light.

To divide your shamrocks, wait until the bulbs reach the end of a dormant cycle. Take them out of the pot, and remove small side bulbs. Then replant, just under the surface, in a mix of potting soil and sand. Place in a non-south facing window. Water, keeping the surface just moist to the touch, until plants become established.

Other *Oxalis* varieties have similar growth requirements though many go through a shorter, or no, dormancy period. Depending on the variety, the plant may have yellow, white, pink, purple, or red flowers and grow as tall as 10 inches. Leaf color ranges from dark green to deep red. Those with dark red or purplish leaves only need about a month of dormancy.

Whether you are giving or getting shamrocks this St. Patrick’s Day, there’s one more thing to keep in mind. Because these plants go dormant, shamrocks are not suitable for growing with other houseplants in mixed pots or planters. If you get a mixed basket of plants, after the holiday, separate the shamrock from the rest and replant in its own container. Don’t wait until the plant turns yellow or sickly looking. By then, its roots will be deeply intertwined with the roots of other plants and will be difficult to transplant.

By giving your Shamrock plant bright light, even moisture, and cool temperatures, and letting it go dormant during summer, it should provide years of enjoyment.



Gardening:

The art of killing weeds and bugs to grow flowers and crops for animals and birds to eat.