



# The Ladyslipper



Perth & District Horticultural Society

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Est. 1984

P.O. Box 494  
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March 2021

## President's Pen

It was great seeing everyone last month at our AGM and presentation on dahlias. I am working on the video of our speaker so I can share it with all of our members. I will do this for every presentation, as long as I have the speaker's permission.

It is hard to believe that we are already in March. Did you know that March is named after MARS, the Roman god of war. Mars is also a planet of little green people who are obviously gardeners. The March flower is the violet.

Spring is just around the corner. Time is just moving along. Next Sunday we move forward an hour to Daylight Savings time. I am looking forward to the brighter evenings.

I want to thank Jane Avery, our newsletter editor, for her tremendous work in organizing the articles for each of our newsletters. Please share any ideas you may have for our newsletter, including your gardening questions so we can get them answered for you.

On to my next rambling about March. St. Patrick's Day. The day the Irish plant their potatoes and peas. Wherever you are, whatever your nationality, on March 17th, raise your glass to toast the Irish. Sláinte!



## CHANGE YOUR CLOCKS



*To all the days here and after.  
May they be filled with fond  
memories, love, and laughter!*

Keep smiling!

Linda

We have received great support from 11 of our corporate sponsors so, we will be putting our sponsor business cards throughout each edition of our newsletter and we will do a profile or two of each business as well. This month we are profiling Hillside Gardens and Perth Motors.

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## PDHS ROSE MIX

by David Archer

First, a little history as to how this recipe came to us. Many years ago, we had a speaker named Paul Fritz, who enlightened us on growing roses in our Canadian climate. After seeing the pictures and hearing the descriptions, like most gardeners, we wanted to know how it was done and what fertilizer he used. He quite openly told us that it was a traditional heritage recipe before mass-produced compound chemical fertilizers.

The following summer, a garden tour was arranged, and a number of us descended on his old house and garden near Athens. We were not disappointed. Paul and his partner had created a wonderful mixed garden interspersed with shrub roses. The board then decided to make a batch of fertilizer so that our members could benefit from this fertilizer. And so a tradition began.

Being made of natural ingredients, it contains not only the three major nutrients required by plants but also many minor nutrients that chemical fertilizers don't provide. It is broken down in the soil, releasing the nutrients gradually and feeding the plants through the growing season. This also prevents shock to the plants.

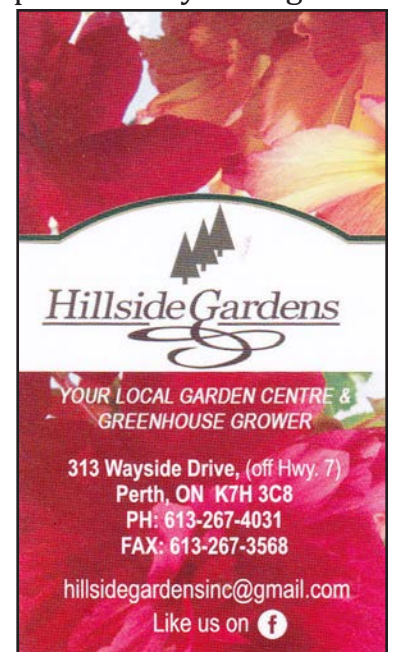
Although we call it rose mix, it can be used for other plants as it is a complete fertilizer. We package it in bags to feed one average shrub rose, which would have a foliage and root spread of at least 1 meter. If feeding other plants use at the same rate. As I have had reports of rabbits and squirrels enjoying a free meal, I recommend mixing the fertilizer into the soil surface with a hoe or shallow cultivator and watering the soil unless rain is in the forecast.

We plan to make another batch this year and have it ready for pick-up at the plant sale on 22nd May. More details will follow when available.



### Hillside Gardens Inc.

Hillside Gardens is a full service garden centre off Highway 7 just east of Perth. It is owned and operated by Carol and Bruce Onion. They bought it from Carol's parents 33 years ago and the business is now 51 years old. The business has grown over the years and is the go-to place in the region for their wide selection of annuals, perennials, shrubs, trees and garden supplies. They grow their own bedding plants as well as their spectacular hanging baskets and planters. Carol's sister Jackie also works in the garden centre.



Hillside Gardens will open in April. Their website will be updated soon and will include their Plant Finder tool so you can get a jump on this year's gardening season. [www.hillsidegardensperth.com](http://www.hillsidegardensperth.com)

Also check out their Facebook business page.



# Growing tuberous begonias

By Judith Adam for Garden Making Magazine

If you've been to a garden centre this past week to look at the packaged summer bulbs, you might have noticed a small open bin of begonia tubers. The tubers are sensitive to humidity, and they're packed in a loose mixture of peat and straw to prevent them from developing mildew fungus. These lumpy, brown potato-like forms will grow to produce large double blooms on upright or hanging plants in many colours and styles, some with rose form flowers and others with frilled and bi-colour petals.

The tubers have a concave top with a scar where last year's stem was cut and a rounded bottom with dried root remnants. The best way to select healthy tubers is to feel their weight. Those that feel weighty and solid have good moisture content and are full of energy, just ready to grow. A comparatively lightweight tuber may have been subject to too much heat or exposure in storage and contains less stored energy. There may be tiny pink buds on the top, and those are the beginnings of this year's leaves. If buds are present, handle the tuber carefully so that they remain in place.

Begonias are easy to grow under plant lights or near a bright window, starting in mid to late March. They like lots of air circulation and temperatures between 15° and 24°C. Select a pot two to three inches (5 to 8 cm) wider than the tubers and fill it two-thirds full of soilless mix. Set the tuber into the pot with the rounded bottom resting on the soil, and fill with more mix to cover the tuber—water the begonias just enough to keep the soil moist but not noticeably wet. In two to three weeks, you'll notice the soil surface crack, and soon small leaves will emerge. When roots fill the pots, transplant them into six- to 10-inch (15- to 25-cm) pots, using more soilless mix. You might want to mix in some time-release fertilizer granules formulated for container plants (check the package for how much to use and how long it's active). You can also use a liquid fertilizer with a higher middle number (similar to 5-15-5) to promote flower bud formation,



Male and female blooms on tuberous begonias. Photo: Gardenimports.com

applied every three to four weeks through the growing season.

Begonias grown outdoors in summer should be protected from the hot sun and prefer a cool location with morning light. Light breezes keep air circulating the plants and help to prevent mildew. Remove the flowers when petal edges are brown, rather than allow the aging flowers to shatter and fall into the pot, where they will rot on the soil surface.

Begonias are monoecious, with (double) male and (single) female flowers on the same plant. Each double male flower has two single female flowers (sometimes referred to as pseudo flowers), one on each side of the double blossom. The double male flower is always in the middle, and will appear larger. Removing the smaller female flowers (similar to disbudding chrysanthemums) prevents seed formation and directs more energy to enlarging the remaining double male flower. Do this as early as possible when the flowers are still in the bud stage, using a small, sharp pair of pointed scissors (such as embroidery scissors). You might want to let

the first set of male and female buds grow a bit larger before attempting to disbud the set, just to get a good look at what their arrangement is. After that, you can continue disbudding through the summer as more flowers are produced. But even if you don't bother with the disbudding process, you're going to really enjoy growing begonias!

Garden Making Magazine: Inspiring & informing home gardeners <https://gardenmaking.com>



## March Gardening Priorities

Recommendations from our PDHS Master Gardener: Dale Odorizzi

1. Stay off the lawn until you can step on it without leaving footprints. You will compact your soil.
2. Start to remove some of the leaf litter directly from your plants. Insects will still be hibernating there, so take it easy.
3. Prune deciduous shrubs that bloom later in the year.
4. Check out your hardscaping to see if anything needs repair.
5. Clean your garden tools if you did not do so in the fall.
6. Purchase seeds: vegetables and annuals.
7. Start your annual flowers and vegetable seeds indoors.
8. Time to increase water and feeding as houseplants start actively growing.
9. Clean and repair birdhouses for spring nesters.
10. Put up any trellis or stakes to support your plants. (Now is a great time to put in your Peony supports)



## Off to a Good Start- Getting Tools Ready for the Season

By MG Allyn Walsh of Halton Master Gardeners

At this time of year, we are all dreaming about our gardens: the blooms, the pollinators, the scents, and the sounds. Few of us visualize the tools in our sheds and basement and look forward to getting them in top shape for the season. However, for the healthiest garden as well as the most beautiful one possible, now is the time to take stock of our tools and ensure they are ready for the hard use they receive.

**Shine 'em up!** Well, perhaps that is an exaggeration! Certainly, the shininess is long gone from my secateurs, spades, and hoes. In an ideal world, we would all have attended to regular tool cleaning, particularly when storing them in the fall. In that case, all the cleaning needed now is a quick wipe with disinfectant. For those of us who last used tools on a miserable cold, damp fall day, it is possible that there may be more than a hint of dried soil and garden debris stuck to the blades. Get out the hose and a scrub brush (wire ones are great) and clean them well prior to disinfecting them.



At the time of writing, **disinfectant solutions** have become easier to come by, including the commonly recommended isopropyl alcohol and disinfectant prepared wipes or spray such as Lysol. The advantage of a 70% alcohol solution is that the solution is stable and doesn't corrode metal tools. It can be wiped on with a clean cloth without soaking required. Household bleach is quite inexpensive and is also commonly recommended. Preparing a batch of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water is easy and inexpensive



(note that this is considerably stronger than the formula we have been using to disinfect our houses during the COVID emergency). Unfortunately, bleach can cause corrosion, and tools must be well rinsed after a 30-minute soak. Worse, the solution can't be stored for future use since it degrades rapidly and must be prepared freshly. It is, however, VERY effective at eliminating pathogens clinging to our tools, thus avoiding spreading disease from one plant to another.

**Lookin' sharp!** We all have our favourite tools, and the hard use we put them to means that they must be sharpened certainly at the start of every season and likely more often. Dull blades and badly mended tools may allow disease entry and damage to both plants and gardener!



The ease of using sharp tools compared to those which have been allowed to become dull is nothing short of astounding. Many gardeners are intimidated when it comes to sharpening tools and are concerned, and they may do more harm than good to their tool. In fact, it is quite easy, as many online videos demonstrate. A metal file or sharpening stone slid along the edges of the blade, angled according to the bevel, will quickly sharpen the blade. It is possible to purchase sharpening tools designed to make this job even easier, and there are usually videos to accompany them. Examples include the *AccuSharp* and *Speedy Sharp* tools. Generally, shovels, spades, and hoes benefit from sharpening using a hand file. Most of us have appropriate files or whetstone lurking in the workshop already.

This video shows how easy tool sharpening is:

[How to Sharpen Tools](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZQ8ZUtyydl) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZQ8ZUtyydl>)

**Maintain, maintain, maintain!** Make regular cleaning and disinfecting easy and convenient, and you are much more likely to do it after each use. The garden hose is a standby for rinsing tools after using and keeping a clean rag and brush near to hand to facilitate thorough cleaning and prevent rust. A spray bottle of disinfectant will ease a quick wipe down after each use. A look at the internet demonstrates that there are diverse opinions about how to keep garden tools oiled. It is not uncommon to recommend pushing tools in and out of a bucket of sand with motor oil added to it. The organic gardener shudders at the thought. Alternatives include using a spray of cooking oil or application of boiled linseed oil. Silicone spray is also suggested. Household oil in small amounts can be dropped into the mechanism of secateurs or shears. Wooden handles can benefit

Further reading Tool maintenance review from Fine Gardening Excellent review from U. Wisconsin March 2021 and Speedy Sharp tools. Generally, shovels, spades, and hoes benefit from sharpening using a hand file. Most of us have appropriate files or whetstone lurking in the workshop already. from beeswax or linseed oil. When tool parts start becoming loose, tighten them before damage occurs, either to the tool or the user. Finally, store tools safely and appropriately. They should be put away clean and dry to prevent rusting and hung up to avoid damage.



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## Early Spring Gardening To-Do List

from Halton Master Gardeners

Thanks to Dale Odorizzi for recommending this resource.

- ▶ **General Pruning** - Use clean, sharp tools. Remove dead, damaged, diseased wood. Cut back branches to just above another branch or a bud. Do NOT prune spring-flowering shrubs until after they bloom.
- ▶ **Evergreens** – Prune for health and to shape only if needed. Arborvitae, junipers, and Chamaecyparis will not form new buds on old wood. Learn how to prune and remove multiple leaders and encourage the growth of firs, Douglas firs, spruce here: <https://www.finegardening.com/article/pruning-arborvitae-junipers-and-chamaecyparis>
- ▶ **Hydrangea arborescens** – (Smooth Hydrangea or ‘Annabelle’) Prune before new growth appears. Remove old, weak stems, leaving about 1/3 of stems 30 cm long for structure and support. More info here. <https://www.torontogardens.com/2009/04/pruning-annabelle-hydrangea.html/>
- ▶ Apple, cherry, plum, pear trees – Prune before flower buds swell. Remove any dead, diseased twigs and prune for open shape. Pear trees generally don’t require pruning, except for shaping. <https://extension.umaine.edu/fruit/growing-fruit-trees-in-maine/pruning/>
- ▶ Raspberries –prune your summer-bearing raspberries, cutting last year’s fruiting canes down to about 10 cm. Leave the young canes to bear a crop this July.
- ▶ Blueberries – Early March, prune out dead, damaged, diseased wood to an open shape to increase air circulation. More info here about blueberries. <https://learn.orchardpeople.com/>
- ▶ Amaryllis - After the flowers have faded, cut the flower stalk to within 1” of the top of the bulb. Give plants a maximum of sun and feeding to produce a large healthy bulb & flowers for next year.
- ▶ Read The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty & Biodiversity in the Home Garden <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6vX2WfZ7Bo>
- ▶ Garden Tools – Get ready for spring!



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## Go Green Indoors to Help Lift Lockdown Blues

By David Domeneq for The Sunday Times  
(Article provided by Jane's friend, Di Ferguson  
Ross in Surrey, England)



My first house plant arrived in my life when I was eight. My parents had volunteered me for one of our church's charity stalls at the annual summer fair. I was to help to sell potted plants with my mum, Jean. Several hours later, I received a tiger aloe pot plant as a reward for my services. There was an immediate connection. I was responsible for caring for something and keeping it alive – a big step in growing up. To this day, 48 years after that fair in Birmingham, every time I come across one of those little plants, it fills me with happiness.

That is how plants have the ability to remove us from the stresses and strains of life. We experience the power of plants often. The scent of a potted gardenia might transport us back to the Mediterranean holidays. Cut grass triggers the memory of school playing fields being mown. The crisp fragrance of spruce makes us feel cozy and in the Christmas spirit.

When I went to college to study horticulture, I unpacked my belongings – my house plants took their place on the windowsill. In an instant, this strange new room had come alive and made the setting familiar and homely.



This may seem a small thing, but it had the power to turn my attitude into a positive one because my plants are living companions. (Some plants have air-purifying abilities, removing toxins from the atmosphere.) The plants you have had for years are really members of the family.

During the lockdown, our homes have become more than just places to sleep and eat. They have also become our fortresses, a place of safety from the pandemic.

During this winter lockdown, I have found the four walls can move inwards quickly, giving feelings of being trapped and constrained. I find the peaceful regularity of nurturing and caring for indoor plants gives a sense of purpose and achievement. Caring for house plants can uplift us, reduce stress and defog the mind.

It might sound strange, but I like buying ever so slightly over-the-hill house plants from the discounted sections of the supermarket or garden centre. It's not about saving money. Instead, the challenge of bringing them back from the brink. Doing this will give you a sense of accomplishment as you water, trim and spray. Then,

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Having indoor plants gives you the opportunity for that connection, but on a much more personal level.

as each new leaf grows and you watch them thrive each day, you will be overwhelmed by the simple pleasure that will uplift you from the lockdown blues.

My children love getting involved with house plants. Between home schooling on the tablet and Zoom calls, they crave something interesting. Real-life experience engaging with nature is incredibly popular. Each of them has their own plants to grow, just as I did all those years ago with my mum at the church fair.

My top five house plants:

**Jade plant** - These can be propagated by taking a leaf or stem cutting and potting them up in soil. Before potting up, let the cuttings dry out on a windowsill to allow them to callous over.



**String-of-pearls** - These need plenty of sunlight. Try to mimic their natural habitat of warm days and cool nights. When in bloom, enjoy their cinnamon fragrance.



**Dragon tree** - When the old leaves of this plant droop or fall, this is normal. New leaves grow from the top, pointing up, and the leaves that are at the bottom point horizontally, then downward, then fall.



**Cape jasmine** - Our indoor jasmine plant can benefit from a holiday outside. In the summer, place them in a partially sunny

position outdoors. This will encourage buds to form.

**Living stones** - These can be propagated. Once a cluster is formed the roots can be cut so each part has a section, and potted individually.



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## Garden Tools Recommended

### The Ho-Mi Digger

The Ho-Mi digger (pronounced Hoe-Mee and meaning “little ground spear” in Korean) was first made in Korea during the Bronze Age. The tool has been a standard for 5000 years.



Strong, yet light, it is hand forged from steel with a sturdy tang well fixed in the handle. Two handle sizes are available: a short 5” handle for single-handed use and a long 5’ handle for use while standing (the long-handled digger is 63” overall).



The miniature plowshare design makes it perfect for opening the soil for seeding or setting out transplants, for weeding and for planting bulbs. The unique shape allows you to do many tasks (hilling, digging, weeding, and planting) with only one tool.

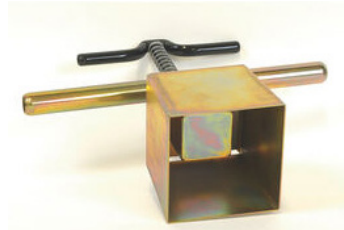
Blade is 6 1/2” long. Made in Korea.

Available at Lee Valley. Check out their quick how-to video!

<https://www.leevalley.com/en-ca/shop/garden/garden-care/cultivators/10519-ho-mi-diggers>

### Soil Blockers

Soil Blockers are used to create free standing blocks of soil into which seeds can be sown one by one. The soil block can then be transplanted into a larger soil block or directly into the garden when the time is right. Soil Blockers do away with seedling trays and plastic pots, so they present an eco-friendly alternative for home gardeners or small-scale organic growers. Our soil blockers are the best quality, made in the UK by Ladbrook.



Learn more at:

<https://www.johnnyseeds.com/tools-supplies/seed-starting-supplies/soil-blocking/>

## April 13 Zoom Meeting - Herbs - Rebecca Last

This talk and demonstration describe ways to preserve the harvest and includes: drying (drying herbs; dehydration of fruits and vegetables); cooking; canning (preserves – jams, jellies, chutneys); vinegars; freezing; and curing.

BIO: Rebecca Last has been gardening on and off since age 8, and has been a member of Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton since 2005. Her small suburban garden is certified by the Canadian Wildlife Federation as wildlife habitat. Rebecca grows a dozen or more varieties of heritage tomato every year. Her garden design includes elements of permaculture and she has recently begun experimenting with biodynamic gardening techniques. Rebecca has been honoured by the Ottawa Horticultural Society with: the Mary Bryant Award for use of native plants in garden design (2014); the Members’ Appreciation Award (2015); and the Ontario Horticultural Association Service Award for meritorious service to horticulture (2017). In 2018, Rebecca received an Ontario Volunteer Service Award in recognition of her ten years of service with Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton. Rebecca’s gardening addiction is enabled by her loving husband Richard and a collection of very spoiled rescue cats.



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## How to grow a lemon tree in a pot



Even if you live in a cold climate, you can grow citrus in containers. Learn from Jessica Walliser as she shows you how to grow a Meyer lemon tree in a patio pot and get oodles of homegrown fruit.

Check out the video:

[Grow your own lemon tree video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNuGKPhKSFw)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNuGKPhKSFw>

## Perth Motors

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## Kids' Bean Project



From Garden Making Magazine  
<https://gardenmaking.com>

Who doesn't remember growing a marigold or morning glory in a paper cup in elementary school? Here's a variation on that simple project using a few bean seeds, paper towels, a plastic sandwich bag, and a few popsicle sticks. The idea is from Community Playthings. It reminds me of ant farms, only this time with bean roots and shoots.

Community Playthings | Growing beans in a bag

<https://www.communityplaythings.co.uk/learning-library/articles/growing-beans-in-a-bag>