

October 2016 Newsletter

I don't think we'll ever know all there is to know about gardening, and I'm just as glad there will always be some magic about it! - Barbara Damrosch



From the President's Pen

I was driving home from the cottage and I realized how beautiful the fall colours are at this time of year. The reds, oranges and yellows show Mother Nature at her finest. How I enjoy the warmth that the day offers and the cool nights for easy sleeping. No bugs...bonus!

It's also time to plant our spring bulbs, trim down our gardens and start to prepare for cooler weather. Take a good look at your gardening tools and see what needs to be repaired or discarded and perhaps use this inventory time to put together your Christmas list. Gardening tools and decorations make great gifts.

We welcome ideas from our members on speakers for next year. If you have any ideas on how we can improve our meetings, please see any of your Executive. We are starting to work on our Yearbook for 2017 so think about how we can make our 150th anniversary of Canada as a nation a very special year.

November is our Annual General Meeting and our potluck. Please think about helping us out by running for the Executive. We would welcome some new ideas and new members.

Enjoy our autumn weather and the beauty it provides.

Jane Law



Upcoming Meetings

November 22 is the Potluck and AGM with a guest speaker, Elizabeth Otonicar, demonstrating "Decorating with Nature."

Many, Many Thanks

on behalf of Madeline Archer

Once again members of the Perth & District Horticultural Society pulled out all the stops in helping to host the 2016 District

2 Flower and Edible Show.

We received many many compliments on the Show's exhibits, educational elements, tea room and over all organization. It was a fun show.

So many members contributed to our show in so many different ways. Some worked on display set up and take down, other members made tasty squares and cookies. There were members who took care of the money, show stats, preparing class cards, record keepers, silent auction, ar-



Lanark Orchid

Renals

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ranged for the flower arranging challenge, and advertising.

I could name lots of names, but do not want to in case I missed someone, you all know who you are. You are such wonderful volunteers when it comes to putting on a show or an AGM, you all deserve a pat on the back and to be very proud of yourselves. Thank you once again for all your contributions.

Storing Geraniums Over The Winter

Submitted by Lynda Haddon

There is a very easy way to store geraniums over the winter should you wish to do so. Of course they can be potted up, put in a window, watered and they will bloom for you all winter. Another way is to pull the plants, shake off all the dirt, place them in a cardboard box and store in a cool location for the winter months. Not the garage unless it is heated or the plants will freeze.

At the first sign of growth on the plants in the spring, bring them out and place the box in a sheltered place, say front porch, to acclimatize. Leave for about 5 days. Then each needs to be trimmed of any dead limbs and leaves, down to the new growth, planted in a sunny spot and watered regularly.

I have about a 90% success rate. Geraniums are expensive and it is very satisfying to bring them through the winter and watch them flourish each year.

When Conifers Lose Needles In The Fall

Larry Hodgson, The Laid-Back Gardener

Often gardeners are worried when they see needles of their conifers turn yellow in the autumn and drop off the plant. After all, aren't conifers supposed to be evergreen?

Well, sort of...

First, let's eliminate from this discussion the conifers that lose all their needles in the fall and from which even beginning gardeners expect nothing less, a very small group that includes larches (*Larix* spp.), bald cypresses (*Taxodium* spp.) and the dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*). The vast majority of other conifers are indeed "evergreen".

However, conifers are evergreen in the sense that most keep enough needles through the winter that they seem fully covered, but even so, old needles do fall off throughout the year, mostly abundantly in the fall.

How long needles remain on the plant depends mostly on the species, although environmental conditions are also a factor. In some species, needles last 2 or 3 years, while they remain on the plant for 4 or 5 years in others. The bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva*) has the longest lasting needles: they can stay on the plant up to 45 years!

Usually old needles turn yellow first, then turn reddish brown before falling, but this varies by species. And since it is the older needles that drop off, that is those on the inside branches of the tree, the loss is partly hidden, so it's not something you always notice.

Before jumping to the conclusion that your conifer is dying, let's look at the other possibilities. Here they are, more or less in order of probability:

It's losing a normal number of needles, but you simply never noticed it before. (Many people, possibly even most, are "plant blind": they don't much notice the plants around them unless they begin awakening to the nature that surrounds them.)

- Your conifer is one of those whose needle drop is naturally quite visible (the various white pines, like *Pinus strobus*, yellow much more noticeably than other pines in the fall).

- It produced more needles than normal 2 years ago (or 3, 4 or 5 years ago) and so when it's time for the old needles from that year to drop, the sudden loss can be quite striking.

- It produced fewer needles than normal during the current year and therefore the needle drop is not as well hidden as it usually is.

- It recently suffered from some sort of stress. (Anything that increases the stress in a conifer, such as an exceptionally dry or hot summer, will lead to greater-than-usual needle loss.)

- It really does have a problem.

Even if you do believe your conifer really has a problem, generally there is not much you can or should do in the fall, other than watering if the soil is dry. Otherwise, it's best to wait until spring to decide what should be done (insect- or disease-treatments, fertilizer application, correcting the soil pH, transplanting to a more suitable location, etc.).

And very often in the spring, even though you

were sure you had pinned down the needle loss to something important the previous fall, you discover that, ultimately, when the new needles grow in, the plant really didn't have a problem after all.

A simple tempest in a horticultural teapot!

Fall In The Perennial Garden

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

Fall is the time to start getting your perennial garden ready for winter and next spring. If you've planned your garden well, there still should be some plants flowering such as sedums and fall asters. A garden that has been well-maintained all summer shouldn't require much work in the fall. However, if your garden has become overgrown and weedy, now is the time to clean it up I like weeding this time of year, as the weeds won't grow back.

Continue to keep up with dead-heading (cutting off spent flowers), de-leafing (removing dead or diseased leaves), and weeding. If possible, it is best to wait until spring to cut back perennial leaves and stems. Many have a nice fall and winter effect (many ornamental grasses and bee balm), may provide seeds (asters, Joe Pye weed) or habitats (grasses) for wildlife, and will recycle nutrients back into the soil. Since spring is usually very busy, you may want to cut back in late fall just to save time, which is what I often end up doing. Especially cut back any perennials, such as some daylilies, whose foliage has become unattractive.

You may have noticed that some of your spring and summer flowering plants have grown a clump of green leaves at their base (called rosettes) after they were done blooming. Plants of this type include asters, tickseed, perennial sage, and beardtongue. Don't cut those small rosettes back for the winter as plants will grow from these next spring.

There are certain perennials which are considered evergreen and also should not be cut back in the fall. These include bugleweed, rock cress, sea thrift, wormwood, heart-leaf saxifrage, pinks, barrenwort, spurge, hellebore, coralbells, dead nettle, creeping phlox, some primrose, lungwort, saxifrage, creeping sedum, hens and chicks, and thyme.

In early fall, spring flowering (and maybe some summer flowering) plants can be divided and transplanted. Don't wait too long, though,

because plants need to become established and well-rooted before the winter. If you didn't get to it in late summer, you can divide your Oriental poppies, bearded iris, and peonies now.

Now that the heat of summer is over, it is a good time to plant if you didn't get it all done in spring, or if you bought more! Don't forget to plant some spring flowering bulbs now too. Most hardy ones are perennial, except for most tulips. If you want tulips that will last several years, look for ones marked as perennial such as the Darwin hybrids. Daffodils are a good choice if you have deer nearby, as they won't bother these bulbs or flowers.

Take a walk around your gardens and write down ideas for next year and plants that will need dividing in the spring. It also might be good to notice what plants worked and which ones didn't do so well, and note what the environment was like for that plant (dry or moist soil, sun or shade, etc.). If a plant really didn't do well and you know you want to get rid of it, throw it out now to allow room for something new in the spring.

If you want to create new beds next year, now is a good time to cut the sod. If the area is small you can probably dig the sod yourself. For larger areas, a sod-cutter might be helpful. Check rental shops for these. Add compost to this new bed and work it in to start preparing the soil for spring planting. Add lime if called for by a soil test.

It is probably best not to fertilize herbaceous plants in the fall as they don't need to get any extra boost in growing (unless they were stressed during the summer), but adding compost may be a good idea. Compost adds organic matter to the soil, helping to create a healthy environment for your plants, as well as adding some nutrition. Perennials going into winter in good health and vigorous will have a better chance of surviving than those that are weak.

Sometimes stores will have left over mulches or bulk compost and sell it cheaper than they would in the spring. You can buy some and spread it now, or pile it up and save it for spring.

If you like to give your plants extra winter protection, that should be done later in the fall before the snow begins. In areas that get ample snow cover, winter covering probably is not necessary. Snow acts as a natural insulator and will keep the plants near freezing. If you've chosen the right plants for your climate, they should make it through the winter with little

or no injury. If you have tender plants that you want to give a little added protection, you can cover with straw (not hay which usually has weed seeds), pine needles, leaves (shredded, or else they may compact), evergreen boughs, or wood chips.

Still have some time? Then you could even edge your beds now to be ready for spring. Finally, clean and store your tools and roll up your hoses (make sure to get all the water out). Sharpen hoes with special files you can find at hardware stores, complete garden stores, or online. Make sure you've cleaned and properly stored power equipment as well. The more you do in the garden in fall, the more ahead and less stressed you'll be in spring.

Storing Winter Squash

Edythe Falconer

Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

- Squash is ready for winter storage when tapping the shell sounds "hollow". This is likely to be around the time of the first frost.
- Squash should be clean and free of plant parts other than the stem.
- Leave 5-7.5cm of stem firmly attached (Don't pick them up by the stem!).
- Store winter squash in a cool, dry and well-ventilated area.
- Winter squash can be stored for up to six months. This has been my experience with pumpkins, acorn squash and butternuts. However 3 or 4 months is more common.
- Squash with blemishes and/or damage should be used as soon as possible as they will not keep well.
- Constantly monitor conditions.

Gardening: A New Olympic Sport?

Submitted by Lynda Haddon

I recently read an article by Mark Cullen* and he was sharing a report from Iowa State University indicating the physical benefits of gardening as exercise. What Cullen didn't explain (although maybe the Iowa State University research did) is the calorie-burned differences between men and women for doing the same activity. It would be interesting to know why the differences. All

activities are in a 30-minute time frame.

- Digging: A woman burns 150 calories and a man 197.
- Mowing the Lawn: (With a push-type mower) A woman burns 181 calories, a man 236. With a rotary power mower: A woman burns 135 calories; a man 177.
- Transplanting shrubs and trees, trimming and pruning: A woman burns 135 calories; a man burns 177.
- Weeding flower/vegetable gardens: A woman 138 calories; a man 181.
- Raking the lawn: A woman 120 calories, a man 157.

Cullen goes on to say that 30 minutes a day of gardening helps increase flexibility, strengthen joints, decrease blood pressure and cholesterol levels. In addition, it lowers your risk of diabetes and heart disease and slow the advance of osteoporosis. All good things.

Will gardening ever become an Olympic Sport? Probably not, but taking advantage of gardening is something that can really grow on you.

**Ottawa Citizen, 18th June, 2016, Mark Cullen article.*

A Little Houseplant Fertilizer Goes A Long Way

Larry Hodgson,

<https://laidbackgardener.wordpress.com/>

With houseplants, a little fertilizer goes a long way. After all, unless you're growing yours in a greenhouse or under high intensity lights, they're not getting growing conditions anywhere close to those they would receive outdoors in the tropical climates where they originate. Yet the amount of fertilizer recommended on the product label is based on what the plant would need under ideal conditions. That's why you're more likely to find your indoor plants suffering from too much fertilizer than too little. You can use almost any fertilizer on houseplants, but just do so at a much reduced rate while they are indoors: usually about ¼ of the amount recommended. And only feed them when they are in active growth. Most indoor plants slow down or stop growing when days are short, so unless you're supplying them with artificially lengthened days, most won't need any fertilizer from the end of October to the end of February or early March.