

October 2019 Newsletter

In the world at large, people are rewarded or punished in ways that are often utterly random. In the garden, cause and effect, labour and reward, are re-coupled. Gardening makes sense in a senseless world. By extension, then, the more gardens in the world, the more justice, the more sense is created. Andrew Weil



Upcoming

**Nov. 19 - Christmas Potluck
and AGM - 6:00 p.m.**

Guest Speaker: Jamie Roy, Acanthus Florals, Almonte, speaking on "Creating a Plant Terrarium."

We will have our Christmas Social Pot Luck, Annual General Meeting, and the election of Board members at our November 19th meeting (this is the 3rd Tuesday instead of usual 2nd Tuesday of the month). We are looking for a few members to join the Board, so if you are interested or want more information, please see Robin McIntosh or Richard Catchpaw at our meeting on Tuesday.

Editor Needed

After 21 years of producing the PDHS newsletter, the current editor would like someone else to take on the task. There are 8 editions a year and you would be collecting articles that you feel would be of interest to the membership and any upcoming events and then producing a 4-page newsletter as well as sending the files to be photocopied. If you can pick them up and take them to the meeting that would be a bonus. You should be familiar with some sort of page

layout software. If you would be interested, please contact Linda Bartlett or Madeline Archer.

Compost, Don't Burn

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

You may like the smell of burning leaves, but did you know you were sending an excellent soil conditioner up in smoke? Instead of burning leaves or stuffing them in garbage bags for the trash haulers to take away, compost them.

Compost improves garden soil by increasing its organic matter. This, in turn, improves soil drainage. Organic matter is especially beneficial in heavy clay or light, sandy soils. Organic matter reduces soil crusting and helps soil hold water and nutrients. Decomposing leaves in your compost or garden feed earthworms and beneficial microbes. Leaves also supply a small amount of nutrients, including those trace elements and minerals that trees have mined from deep within the soil. Between 50 and 80 percent of the nutrients that trees extract from the soil end up in leaves, ready to be recycled



Lanark Orchid

Renals

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Horticultural
Society*

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Ontario Horticultural
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Co-Presidents: Linda Bartlett, Madeline Archer • **Newsletter:** Irene Hofmann

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when the leaves fall (IF left on the ground or put into compost).

Microorganisms are what decompose materials to make compost. To do their work they need carbon sources for food, and nitrogen for proteins. They are most effective when the ratio of carbon to nitrogen (C:N) is an average of 30 to one, by weight. You don't need to weigh what you add to the compost pile, just be aware of approximate amounts that you're adding. Generally, two to three parts (by volume) of brown to one part green materials works well. Some gardeners add an "activator" to help the microorganisms, which provide a source of protein and nitrogen. You can buy these commercially, or use alfalfa meal from garden or feed stores.

In general, coarse woody material (sawdust, leaves) is high in carbon. Moist, dense material (manure, grass clippings, non-meat kitchen scraps) is high in nitrogen. Too much carbon materials and the compost pile will decompose slowly. Too much nitrogen and you may smell ammonia gas.

To compost leaves, alternate leaves with layers of soil or manure. Make layers of leaves six to 12 inches thick, layers of soil or manure about one inch thick. To hasten decomposition, shred leaves first with a rotary lawn mower or shredder. Moisten each layer. Finish the compost pile by slightly rounding the top to help the pile hold water. Cover with an inch of soil. Some also alternate layers with a sprinkling of lime and fertilizer. Some leaves such as sugar maple may be more acidic with a pH of 4.3 and so need lime added, while other leaves such as of ash have a more neutral pH of around 6.8.

Next, cover the compost pile with plastic. Hold the sides in place with wire, concrete blocks, or boards. Turn the pile every few weeks throughout the fall, adding moisture during prolonged dry periods. Both the plastic (heat) and turning (aeration) will help speed decomposition and make the final product more uniform. Unless the pile is already moist, uncover when rain is predicted.

Compost piles are simple to make, but it does take time for the process to work. If you start a compost pile this fall, don't expect to use it in the spring. However, it should be ready to spread next fall.

Keep in mind that you

are not limited to leaves for composting. You can use any plant material that's not diseased, doesn't contain mature weed seeds, and hasn't been treated with pesticides. In addition, non-meat kitchen scraps can be composted.

Plant materials and products that are easy to compost, and which generally decompose most rapidly, include coffee grounds, pine needles, fruit peels and rinds, paper, sawdust, straw (not hay, as hay often contains weed seeds), vegetables, tea bags, wood ash, and wood shavings. Materials that are slow to decompose and may take two years to break down include coarse wood chips, branches, corncobs and corn stalks, and nut shells. Breaking these materials into smaller pieces, and adding high nitrogen materials will speed up their composting.

If you don't have room or time to compost all those fall leaves, you can put a pile aside to add to a compost pile when you need brown carbon material this coming season. Or simply rake the shredded leaves to use to mulch around perennials and shrubs. Mulch helps conserve moisture in summer, keeps soils warmer in fall and spring, and reduces frost heaving in winter. Just don't use too much of this organic mulch (a couple inches a year is good) or you'll smother your perennials, and provide a habitat for mice during winter which can chew bark off of trees and shrubs.

For vegetable gardens and flower beds, once they're cleaned out in fall, you can cover the soil with a couple inches of shredded leaves. Then sprinkle on some organic fertilizer, top with a half-inch or so layer of compost, and roughly mix all this into the soil. A shovel or spading fork works well. Your beds will then be rich with this simple compost, and ready for spring planting.

Maintaining Tools

Amanda Carrigan, Master Gardener

Maintaining garden tools can be a task that's easily put off, forgotten, or dismissed. But there

are good reasons to invest the time, both during the garden season and over the winter.

Firstly, lifespan. Taking care of tools helps them last longer. If you store tools wet and dirty, metal rusts, and

When I go into the garden, I forget everything. It's uncomplicated in my world of gardening. It's trial and error, really. If something doesn't work, it comes out, and you start all over again. Emilia Fox

wood can rot or splinter. Result: secateurs that don't open and close easily, and shovels that break when you're trying to dig something out of the garden. Rust can form quickly – it's best to clean and dry tools after use, especially if you've been working in rain and mud.

Next, function. Sharp edges on tools makes the work easier on you. So does having handles that are smooth and secure, and moving parts that move properly. All these aspects should be checked and repaired as needed. Sometimes yearly is enough. But if you do a lot of pruning, for example, you might want to do some sharpening during the season, especially if you notice pruning seems to be getting more difficult.

Finally, there's health. Badly-maintained tools have greater potential to injure the gardener – think splinters, cuts, strains, even falls and flying debris if something breaks abruptly. And for plants, pruning or sawing with dull tools causes more damage to plants than a clean cut with sharp tool, and makes it easier for disease to get in. If you don't clean tools after pruning diseased plant material, you can transfer the problem to other plants. In this case, you want to disinfect blades before using again. Alcohol, bleach, and household disinfectants are most often recommended. Bleach can be corrosive to tools, though, and requires longer soaking to work well. I personally find having a tube of disinfecting wipes, such as Lysol, is the easiest way to clean tools on the go.

So for the sake of your plants, your pocket-book, and yourself, it's important to keep your tools in good shape.

Garden Myth: Plants Love Classical Music

By Larry Hodgson

This horticultural myth was really big in the 1980s when I first started gardening seriously. Plants, I heard, love classical music and grow better when you play it. And they absolutely hate acid rock which can actually kill them. Gardeners everywhere began piping Beethoven into their plant rooms or singing opera to them. Plant music records were even launched on the market. And you still hear the idea today: just check out the Web (I found 246 million results when I typed "plants like classical music" into Google)

and you'll see. It appears everyone believes it. But it's largely false.

The neat thing about this myth is that you can actually trace it back to its beginnings. In 1973, graduate student Dorothy Retallack published a paper in which she stated that her experiment showed plants grow better when exposed to classical music than when exposed to acid rock. The information rapidly went viral (to use today's term) ... or at least, as rapidly as it could in the pre-Internet 1970s.

However, there are all sorts of things wrong with the initial experiment: too small a sample group (only 4 plants), unequal care in the 2 groups (they were grown in separate rooms with no special control of watering, fertilizer or even temperature) and could you even extrapolate from testing 4 plants that all plants like classical music?

But the most telling is the following: no one has been able to faithfully replicate the experiment! Many studies have since been done and the results are all over the map. Sometimes plants seem to grow better with classical music, sometimes they prefer hard rock, or maybe Chilean folk music, or when you talk to them, but most of the time, if the test is carefully done, the results are not significantly different.

Now, it does appear that plants react somewhat to music, positively or negatively, but it doesn't seem to matter what kind, and just about any noise, including street sounds or a thundering jackhammer, will give similar results. Apparently, it's the vibrations that can help or hinder growth. In all cases, growing conditions in the test area had far more effect on plant growth than noise or music, so give your plants good growing conditions and they will thrive, no matter what music you do or do not play to them.

You can still play Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D minor to your plants if you want to, just don't expect amazing results ... and if your tastes instead run to blasting heavy metal day and night, it probably won't bother them in the least!

*It is only the farmer who faithfully plants
seeds in the Spring, who reaps a
harvest in the Autumn.*

B. C. Forbes

Protecting Roses

And Other fall Gardening Tips

*Leonard Perry, UVM Horticulturist
and Charlie Nardozi, Garden Consultant*

Protecting roses for winter, draining hoses, and wrapping young tree trunks are some of the garden activities for this month.

Once the ground begins to freeze and you have consistent temperatures in the low 20s (F), it's time to protect modern hybrid roses from winter's wind and cold. The simplest method is to mound bark mulch around the base of the rose (soil or compost is less attractive to field mice), covering the graft union (the swollen part of the stem near the ground). The mound should be about one foot tall. Wait until spring to cut back the canes above the mound.

If a plant is rated for a zone warmer than the one shown for your site, you might consider mulching. An example of a "tender perennial" is crocosmia—a summer bulb producing spikes of red (usually) flowers in mid-summer. Although usually listed as hardy to zone 6 (average winter minimum of 0 to -10 degrees), these can be grown even in a cold zone 3 (-30 degrees and below winter minimum) with plenty of mulch or snow cover. Some plants are better off without any mulch, especially in winter, when it can compact and encourage rotting of the crowns. These include coral bells, delphiniums, oriental poppies, iris, violas, and sedums.

Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti develop buds when night temperatures are 55 to 60 degrees. If nights are warmer, place your plant where it receives no light from about 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. (such as in a closet) for 30 days. Don't forget to move the plant to light during the day.

It's time to bring hoses inside, or drain them if you leave them outside. If the ground is frozen, the water in your outdoor hoses will be too. If this happens, bring them into a garage where they can warm up enough for the ice to melt. Then, coil them and store for the winter. Avoid hanging them on a hook, which can cause

kinking. Make sure outdoor faucets are drained as well, and wrap them for winter. Otherwise, they will freeze and may crack, or may leak next spring.

Ceramic and clay pots left outside can crack when the soil inside, or water absorbed into the clay, freezes and expands. Empty them and bring them into a shed, garage, or basement for winter. Also bring in ceramic birdbaths and statuary. If too large to move, empty pots and cover them with a tarp.

Plastic spiral tree wraps and brown paper wraps can protect tree trunks from sunscald and gnawing by rodents. Put them in place before the snow falls so they will extend all the way to the ground, or else the critters can sneak underneath the snow and feed on the exposed lower bark.

This is a good month to stock up on bird seed to keep your birds around during winter, and nourished. Although some birds favour some seeds more than others, you can't go wrong with black oil sunflower seeds which most like and which you often can find on sale in large bags. Avoid the "filler" seeds found in the cheaper mixes that birds don't eat. Peanuts out-of-shell are another food that is a favorite of bluejays, woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees. These are usually provided in a mesh tube feeder, which these birds can cling onto.

Other gardening activities for this month include cleaning and getting garden tools and equipment stored for winter, planting spring bulbs and garlic if you haven't already, checking houseplants for pests, and planting some paper-white bulbs in pots for holiday blooms indoors.



Master Gardener Seminar
ONTARIO NATIVE AND INVASIVE PLANTS:
FRIENDS AND FOES

Saturday October 26, 2019 • 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

For further information, go to:
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