

# September 2017 Newsletter

Arrayed in gypsy dress of pink and gold,  
Crest of crimson tint and folds of fading green,  
Stand the woods in tranquil beauty as of old,  
Stretching into vistas dim and opaline;  
When the Year is ripe and mellow it is meet  
Earth should echo, "Peace is blessed; rest is sweet."

~C.B. Galbreath, "Autumn Afternoon"



## Upcoming

**October 10:** Small Water  
Features on Residential  
Properties. Speaker: Richard  
Inchley, Ponds and Aquaria

**November 21:** Christmas  
Potluck and AGM - 6:00 PM  
Guest Speaker: Krista Mackler,  
Kelly's Flowers

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**Where to find free gardening  
advice from Master Gardeners:  
Telephone Help Line:**

613-236-0034, Wednesday and  
Thursday 1-3 pm (all year)

**E-mail Help Line:**

mgoc\_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily

- send photos of garden pests,  
diseases or plants for ID

## Tums For Tomatoes?

*By Larry Hodgson,  
The Laidback Gardener*

There is no limit to the human  
imagination ... nor to far-fetched  
ways to treat our plants. Here's  
one example among many, the  
belief that giving antacid pills,  
specifically Tums, can be useful  
to tomato plants.

The tip suggests placing a  
Tums antacid pill at the base of

the tomato plant, then watering  
well afterwards. Exactly what  
this is supposed to do to help the  
plant is rarely mentioned. Just  
do it: it's good for your plant.  
And I'm sure plenty of people  
blindly follow this advice.

I can, however, tell you where  
the idea originally came from  
and also why giving Tums or  
any other calcium-rich antacid  
tablet to your tomatoes won't  
work.

Tomatoes often suffer from  
blossom end rot. The tip of the  
fruit becomes brown and sunken  
and the fruit begins to rot. And  
blossom end rot is known to be  
caused by a calcium deficiency.  
And that's why Tums pills are  
supposed to come to the rescue,  
as they are mostly composed  
of calcium carbonate. Calcium,  
in other words, and in a highly  
soluble form to boot. That should  
solve the problem, shouldn't it?  
But that's misunderstanding  
the situation. Blossom end rot is  
rarely caused by a lack of calcium  
in the soil, but rather by a lack  
of calcium in the plant. Calcium  
is abundant and available in  
almost all soils, even in artificial  
soils or poor quality ones. In fact,  
it's one of the most abundant  
elements in soils all over the



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

world. Almost any soil contains more than enough calcium to satisfy a tomato plant. And essentially all fertilizers also contain calcium as well. As a result, the average tomato plant has an abundance of calcium in the soil in which it grows: you don't need to add more.

In fact, blossom end rot is really due to the inability of the plant to absorb the calcium present in the soil. And this is related to moisture stress and uneven watering. If the plant lacks water during the critical period of fruit formation, the roots can't absorb all the minerals that are available and therefore what little sap now reaches the fruit will be carrying less calcium than it should. Since the fruit isn't getting sap of the quality it requires, a calcium deficiency occurs ... and blossom end rot sets in.

So, if you water your tomato plants more regularly, thus avoiding moisture stress, the fruits won't suffer from blossom end rot. Applying Tums won't be necessary, nor will using a fertilizer rich in calcium. Just keep the plants evenly moist and all will be fine.

So, if you apply a Tums to the soil at the foot of a tomato plant and you water it, as the garden myth recommends, true enough, that will cure future cases of blossom end rot ... but because you watered, not because of the Tums. Just skip the Tums and go straight to step 2, watering. It's as easy as that!



## PDHS Flower Show for October

- Class 1** Last rose of summer – single boom
- Class 2** Any perennial – 3 stems
- Class 3** Any annual – 3 stems
- Class 4** A collection of gourds – minimum 3
- Class 5** Squash – 2 – same or 2 different cultivars – named if possible
- Class 6** Pumpkin – 1

### Section II: Design

- Class 7** Well Preserved – an arrangement using dried material
- Class 8** Harvest Festival – a design incorporating a pumpkin
- Class 9** Pik'n Plunk – an arrangement using fall flowers

## Bring Your Plants Indoors... Without The Bugs

*By Larry Hodgson, The Laidback Gardener*

I know, I know, it's only the beginning of September, your outdoor gardens are thriving and autumn seems soooo far away, but... the time has nonetheless come to think of bringing the houseplants you placed outside for the summer back indoors.

Why so early? Because plants adapt better to the transition from outdoors to indoors when conditions are similar. Presently its fairly hot and humid outdoors and fairly hot and humid indoors: your plants won't feel the change! If you wait until cool nights set in or, worse yet, frost threatens, the shock of leaving a damp (as outdoor temperatures drop, humidity tends to rise) and cold outdoor environment to a warmer, drier indoor environment can easily lead to a massive drop of leaves and flowers. At the very least, plants so treated will tend to sulk and look unhappy. So, it's better to start soon, before mid-September in colder areas, and before mid-October in milder ones, even though outdoor conditions may still seem nice and warm.

But how can you bring houseplants indoors without bringing unwanted critters in along with them? But it's actually not that difficult. Here's what I do... and I bring in literally hundreds of houseplants: about 300 or so.

Most plants – the ones I don't feel are likely to host bugs – simply get a thorough rinse with a garden hose spray gun, plus a good wipe-down of their pot.

For plants that I know have chronic insect problems, like fuchsias and pelargoniums (whiteflies love them!) or hibiscus and palms (prey to spider mites), just dousing them with water will not be enough. I give them a thorough spray with an insecticidal soap solution too.

Then come the hard cases. If I have any doubt the plant may infested with something more serious, such as mealybugs or scale insects, I carefully wash them leaf by leaf with a cloth soaked in a solution of insecticidal soap, then I rinse well. Plus, they go straight into quarantine indoors.

As for controlling soil insects, I just immerse the pot in a large bucket of soapy water

(insecticidal soap is less harmful to plant roots and therefore the best soap to use) and let the root ball soak for half an hour. If you try this, note that it may be necessary to put a brick or rock on top of the rootball to keep it underwater. Afterward, remove the pot from the bucket and let it drain well. Combining 30 minutes of drowning with the presence of insecticidal soap ought to overcome even the toughest pests.

Make sure you wash the pot, not only the sides but also underneath, with soapy water to remove soil, algae and foreign matters. And pick off yellowing leaves and anything that has fallen into the pot (dead leaves, small branches, etc.) Finally, since many plants grow considerably while outdoors, you may need to do a bit of pruning to bring them under control or repotting, if you feel they've become too big for their pots.

And there you go! Just a few efforts as you bring your houseplants back indoors and you'll find they'll grow happily and insect-free in your home right through the winter!

## Fall Landscaping And Other September Gardening Tips

*Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor  
and Lisa Halvorsen, Garden Writer*

Labour Day, a time for barbecues, family get-togethers, and back-to-school activities, heralds the end of summer. For gardeners, it also kicks off the "labour-saving" season.

In the vegetable garden, as the season winds down, so do the chores. Although you should continue to weed to prevent these invaders from going to seed, for the most part, the only real work you need to do this month is to harvest.

For carrots, turnips, beets, and parsnips you can even skip the harvest for now. Instead, cover these root crops with about 18 to 20 inches of straw, hay, or dry leaves to protect them from frost and cold temperatures. At temperatures of 28 to 34 degrees F, the starch in these crops will turn to sugar. By covering with a thick mulch, you prevent the ground from freezing and can continue to harvest these vegetables through mid-winter.

Because grass is growing more slowly, you won't need to mow the lawn quite as often as you did in the summer. However, don't stop altogether. You should mow as long as the grass continues to grow, setting the blades of your mower to cut the grass to a height of about two inches. Save the grass clippings to mulch flowerbeds.

Dead leaves also make an excellent mulch. Shred (a lawn mower does a good job) and add to your compost pile or set aside to spread around landscape plants in mid-November. Applying mulch too early in the fall can inhibit the hardening-off process, causing a higher likelihood of winter injury to plants.

You also save on labour at this time of year because of the things you don't have to do, such as pruning or fertilizing shrubs, trees, and fruit trees. Doing so now may encourage your plants to produce tender, new growth, which will be killed by the winter chill and will only delay the hardening process needed to allow the plants to overwinter successfully. You should, of course, prune away any dead or diseased wood that poses a safety hazard.

There are a few tasks you can do now to save on labor in the spring, such as having your soil tested. If the recommendations call for lime, you can add it now to give it time to neutralize soil acidity and enhance decomposition of crop residues, thus improving the soil by spring.

The experts at your nursery or garden centre also will have more time now to answer your questions and work with you to plan out next year's gardening needs from landscape design and plant selection to new equipment.

Since everyday gardening chores aren't as labour-intensive, this is a good time to tackle new projects, such as putting in a new garden path or perennial bed. Plants added in the fall often get a better head start than those planted in the heat of summer. Not only are the temperatures cooler, but rainfall is generally more reliable, so the soil doesn't dry out as quickly.

You still will need to water new plantings, of course, but may be spared the task of frequent watering if rainfall is adequate. In addition, pest populations decline in the fall, so not only will the plants have a better chance of survival, but you won't have to spend much time or expense to control invading insects.



O' pumpkin pie,  
your time has come  
'round again and I  
am autumnrically  
happy!  
~Terri Guillemets



Other activities for September: buy fall mums and ornamental kale for fall color; install rodent guards around fruit trees to prevent girdling; plant garlic; buy spring bulbs such as tulips and daffodils for planting later in the month.

## In Praise Of Weeds

*Rebecca Last, Master Gardener*

There are no bad plants, just unsuitable locations. The simple definition of a weed is, any plant growing where you don't want it. The inverse is also true: if you like that plant growing where it is – it's not a weed.

Because I garden for wildlife, I often acquire plants that others might consider weeds. Some are welcome volunteers and some are paid help.

Volunteers that appear uninvited include native and introduced wildflowers. Two of these – blue weed (*Echium vulgare*) and black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*) – are biennials, so can easily be eliminated in their first year, long before they flower and set seed.

Blue weed was introduced from Eurasia and is often seen growing along roadsides. I value its long-lasting deep blue flower spikes, which start in mid-summer and continue until fall. Butterflies and pollinators of all kinds find them irresistible. They are also good in bouquets, the flowers' delicacy belied by how long they last. But wear gloves to pick them, because blue weed has very prickly stems and hairy leaves.

Black-eyed Susans are native to eastern North America and grow wild along the banks of the Ottawa River. Years ago, some of their seeds migrated into my garden and I've had them ever since. Their cheerful deep yellow daisy-like flowers add long-lasting colour from late summer until the snow flies. I leave them standing all winter to add interest to the garden and to attract goldfinches and house finches which feast on the seed heads from late winter until early spring.

A similar native perennial, purple cone-flower (*Echinacea purpurea*) also has good food value for small migratory birds and self-seeds prolifically. In parts of my garden it has achieved weed status.

Another migrant from the river's edge is the native common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*). I was happy to welcome it as an important food plant for monarch butterfly larvae. I was surprised to discover that the milkweed blooms, although not spectacular-looking, have a delightful sweet fragrance. They attract pollinators, including the adult monarchs, and hummingbirds. Apparently, they are also nice as dried flowers. Milkweed is perennial and spreads by both rhizomes and seeds dispersed on the wind by silky filaments. Rigorous discipline may be needed to keep it under control in some gardens, but it struggles in my poor-quality sandy soil.

Among my "paid help" are cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) and pickerel weed seen above (*Pontedaria cordata*). Both plants enjoy the moist environment around my pond. Cardinal flower's lovely spikes of scarlet flowers brighten the bog garden in mid- to late-summer and attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Pickerel weed lives right in the pond, where it provides shelter and shade for the goldfish. The blue flower spikes appearing in late summer add colour and attract pollinators. In the wild, water fowl eat the seeds.

So, before you pull another weed, stop and think about its place in the eco-system of your garden. It might be some creature's home or dinner. If you decide it is not a weed, you could save yourself some unnecessary work.



*Is not this a true autumn day? Just the still melancholy that I love — that makes life and nature harmonize. The birds are consulting about their migrations, the trees are putting on the hectic or the pallid hues of decay, and begin to strew the ground, that one's very footsteps may not disturb the repose of earth and air, while they give us a scent that is a perfect anodyne to the restless spirit. Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.*

*~ George Eliot, letter to Miss Lewis,  
1st October 1841*