

DECEMBER 2022

Table of Contents

- 2 **De-Mythifying the Christmas Tree**
By Blaine Marchand
- 4 **The Book Nook**
The Ottawa Public Library
- 5 **Spice Up Your Holiday Feasts with Botanicals**
By Lori Gandy
- 8 **Houseplant Spotlight:**
Pilea peperomioides
By Tuula Talvila
- 10 **The Japanese Stewartia: A Little Tree with Big Promise**
Paul Boulton
- 12 **Ilex on the Farm**
By Robert Glendinning
- 14 **The World of Gesneriads: African Violets & Their Cousins**
By Maureen Mark
- 19 **These are a Few of my Favourite Things: Gifts for the Gardener in Your Life**
By Rebecca Last
- 21 **Places to Beat the Winter Blues**
- 25 **Quiz: Test Your Knowledge**
- 26 **Tree Planting Honours**
Queen Elizabeth II
By Julianne Labreche



DECEMBER
TIDINGS

DE-MYTHIFYING THE CHRISTMAS TREE

BY BLAINE MARCHAND

Christmas is a time of year filled with good cheer, family and friends. Some say all this hoopla and joyfulness is a myth. And yet, year after year, we continue to take time out of our busy schedules to celebrate old customs and legends.

Central to the home festivities is the Christmas tree, which glows brightly, the floor beneath it a bounty of gifts. Over the arc of history, plants and trees that retained their leaves and needles despite winter's onslaught were seen as having special significance. People, as we still do today, placed evergreen boughs over their doors and windows; they believed these garlands would keep at bay witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness.

As is well known, Germany is where the Christmas tree tradition began. It is said that Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, was actually the first to decorate the Christmas tree with lighted candles. He drew his inspiration one night when, out for a walk, he noticed stars twinkling amidst evergreen boughs. But its wider popularity is thanks to Queen Victoria's consort, Prince Albert, who was German and who introduced the idea in the royal household. In 1846, the *Illustrated London News* featured a drawing of the regal



couple and their children standing next to a decorated Christmas tree. The idea caught on and soon spread through the British Isles and in Empire countries such as Canada.

In recent years, a number of myths have emerged on how to ensure that your Christmas tree remains picture perfect throughout the holiday season. To ensure lasting freshness,



the suggestion is offered that adding molasses, sugar, soft drinks, or aspirin to the water will achieve this goal. But, in reality, using additives actually increases needle loss. The best way is the simplest - plain water.

Another suggestion is to add a preservative to the water at the base of the tree. The thinking behind this is based on the way cut flowers are kept fresh. But a Christmas tree is not the same at all. Cut flowers produce a carbohydrate, called callose, that seals the stem. Christmas trees, and other woody plants, do not produce callose. So, for an evergreen, a preservative simply does not work because the resin secreted seals the cut within 10 days, which is why they stop the intake of water.

Everyone, of course, wants the perfect green tree. Some advice claims that spraying anti-transpirants will prevent water loss through the needles. It is true that the application will clog the stomata, the cell structure in the epidermis of the evergreen's needles which are involved in the exchange of carbon dioxide and water between plants and the atmosphere. But only for a brief time. Stomata are resilient and quickly overcome the spray so they can continue opening and closing as they need.

Another myth is that the base of the tree should be cut diagonally, rather than perpendicularly,

so it can absorb more water. On paper, this seems to make sense. But in reality, the logic behind a diagonal cut is not worth the paper it is written on. It is the diameter, not the shape of the cut, that allows more water to be drawn up in those first 10 days. The time to make the cut is within 12 hours prior to setting up the tree. A cut of 0.635cm or 1/4 inch is optimal.

There is much to-ing and fro-ing about the practice of cutting down Christmas trees. Some recommend that rather than killing a live tree, a potted one is the way to go. The rationale behind this idea is that once Christmas is over, you can plant the tree in your garden. But evergreens need a cool period during the winter to grow properly the following spring. Being in your house, where it is warm, causes the tree to grow. If placed outside once the festivities are a memory, any growth during that period will be severely damaged by Ottawa's January deep freeze. And, I hate to ask this, but do you really have space in your back or front garden for a full-grown tree, which it will become?

Others who are concerned about harvesting trees claim an artificial tree is the better way to go. Yet most artificial trees are made from PVC plastic and manufacturers add lead to make the plastic flexible. Is this something you really want in your home, especially as the season is

a time when the youngest generation comes to visit their grandparents?

Christmas trees are a farmed crop, grown specifically for harvesting. And tree farms replace those they cut down with seedlings, with an eye on future sales. Remember, the forest is an ecosystem and trees do die to be replaced by new growth.

Another reason why people are told to use artificial trees is the claim about allergies. But evergreens don't produce pollen in winter and pine pollen is not a known allergen. The truth of the matter is that more people are likely to have allergic reactions to the mold and dust found on reused fake trees stored in the basement, the attic or the garage.

While real Christmas trees can end up in landfills, Ottawa collects trees as part of their recycling program. And local farmers ask people to drop them off, as goats love to eat evergreens, which are good for their digestive system, just as fibre is important in the human diet. But, as in nature, Christmas trees can be left in woods or fields to decompose on their own.

Of course, over the holiday season, there always seem to be stories of Christmas trees causing house fires. When it does happen, it is with tragic consequences. Caution, as always, is the best prevention. Trees should be well away from heating vents and fireplaces, they should be kept hydrated, and the lights should be turned off when you head up to bed.

This brings us to the final myth. You need to go to bed early, so Santa can come down your chimney and leave your presents. Hmm, what to say about that one? But then perhaps each of us is not quite ready to let go of that childhood belief, which brought us such delight that we continue to pass it along to the next generation.

Inspiration for this article came from <https://www.gardenmyths.com/myths-christmas-trees/> and <https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas-trees>

The Book Nook

21 TITLES SUGGESTED BY THE OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR OHS MEMBERS



The Collection Development staff at the Ottawa Public Library have provided a list of recently added titles to the OPL's collections.

Among the titles for this issue are materials relating to:

- How plants solve crimes
- Sustainable living: plants for clothes and cooking
- Germinations et pousses
- Gardening on a gradient
- Plants that feed birds
- Japanese Zen gardens
- Flower pressing
- Compost science
- History and habitat of the most-loved garden plants
- Weird and wonderful plants and fungi

There are books on fuchsias, tropical plants, ground covers, and trees, as well as garden design and inspirational gardens.

Click on the link below to see the complete list from the Library. This also allows you to view availability and place a hold from the link.

https://ottawa.bibliocommons.com/list/share/354296247_collection_development/2198123911_ottawa_horticultural_society_winter_titles



SPICE UP YOUR HOLIDAY FEASTS WITH BOTANICALS

BY LORI GANDY

December is the month of festivities, and with festivities come food and drink, dressed up for the occasion, or plain and simple - but still delicious.

Botanicals refers to almost anything you can find in a garden. If you are a cook as well as a gardener, you'll know that anything that grows in your garden is fair game for the dinner plate.

While researching botanicals, I came upon a fabulous book by Elly McCausland, entitled *The Botanical Kitchen - Cooking with Fruits, Flowers, Leaves and Seeds*. (The book is out of print, but the Kindle version is available.)

Besides presenting an amusing and fascinating history of botanicals of all sorts, McCausland provides several creative recipes after each chapter. Pumpkin, fig & goat's cheese tart with candied pumpkin seeds caught my eye, as did lavender, lemon and goat's cheese focaccia, and blue cheese risotto with toasted pine nuts & sweet balsamic pears, all of which I plan to bring to my table during this holiday season.

As McCausland says, botanicals such as seeds, leaves, spices, flowers and fruit have the power to transform and enhance your food. They are not usually the stars of the show; their role is to quietly coax out the flavours of whatever they are accompanying, adding complex layers of flavour and aromatic surprises to a dish.

All manner of botanicals can be used to adorn cakes and cupcakes too. This photo shows a delicious array of savoury and sweet - kiwifruit, oranges and cinnamon, spices, cranberries, along with rosemary, thyme, sage and lemon balm.

DURING THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, WHY NOT WORK SOME OF THAT MAGIC INTO YOUR FOOD AND DRINKS BY EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL FOR BOTANICAL TWISTS IN YOUR HOLIDAY FARE.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL FLAVOURS OF CHRISTMAS

The rock-star spices and herbs for the Christmas kitchen are well known:

SPICES

GINGER

Used in everything from holiday drinks to cookies. Here's a new twist you might want to try: gingerbread cheesecake dip.

RECIPE <https://foodfolksandfun.net/gingerbread-cheesecake-dip/>

CINNAMON

Indispensable in the holiday kitchen, it is so delicious and it adds a touch of warmth to everything. Try cinnamon honey butter with homemade bread.

RECIPE <https://thefoodcharlatan.com/cinnamon-honey-butter-recipe/>

CLOVES

Along with cinnamon and ginger, cloves create that rich holiday flavour. But the clove can be a star on its own, in your own chai tea mix. Or try making a spiced orange Moscow mule cocktail to serve your guests.

RECIPE <https://www.aboutamom.com/spiced-orange-moscow-mule-cocktail/>

NUTMEG

Where would eggnog be without that sprinkle of nutmeg? A warm and sweet addition to food and drinks, it was once used to ward off the plague, and was renowned back in the day for having hallucinatory powers. It was also once thought to be more valuable than gold.

HERBS

If your garden has been stripped of edibles by the time you read this, you can, fortunately, buy all manner of herbs, leaves and seeds at the grocery store all year long. Some of the star herbs of the season are rosemary, thyme and sage.

ROSEMARY

Is a natural with roast lamb or a lemon rosemary chicken, but did you know it also pairs well with cranberries? Try adding rosemary as a garnish in these festive drinks:

CHRISTMAS SANGRIA (<https://www.cakenknife.com/christmas-sangria/>)

HOLIDAY PUNCH (<https://www.nestofposies-blog.com/2017/10/the-perfect-holiday-punch-recipe-for-the-entire-family/>)

THYME

Gives a great punch of flavour to everything from chicken and beef to the humble carrot. I picked loads of thyme in September and made thyme butter which I will enjoy throughout the winter with steamed carrots and other vegetables.

SAGE

Has a wonderful earthy smell and flavour and it will enhance any dish. It is especially delicious paired with butternut squash, as in this recipe: **BUTTERNUT SQUASH, APPLE AND SAGE SOUP** (<https://thenovicechefblog.com/butternut-squash-apple-sage-soup/>)

OTHER WAYS TO INCORPORATE BOTANICALS INTO YOUR RECIPES INCLUDE:

- adding chopped herbs to softened butter and freezing in small pats to enjoy throughout the winter;
- infusing your cooking oils with aromatic botanicals to bring a unique depth of flavour to sautéed, roasted and pan-fried dishes; and,
- incorporating different botanicals to add beautiful colour and flavour to your dough blends.

SEASONAL COOKIES

For a twist on the ordinary (but oh so delicious) shortbread, why not give them a savoury botanical bite by adding some rosemary, thyme, lavender or fennel. With the mild, mild autumn we've had, it is possible (wishful thinking, I know) that there are still some herbs lingering in your garden just waiting to adorn your cookies. Pick off a few leaves or stems to decorate the cookies once they come out of the oven.



COCKTAILS

While nibbling all these goodies, why not try your hand at a drink or two (alcoholic or not). Mulled apple cider, a traditional festive drink in many a home, can be spruced up with a few additions such as cinnamon, cloves and a scraping of nutmeg.

Don't forget about delicious mint - try this Cranberry Mint fizz:

<https://simplydarrling.com/cranberry-mint-fizz-christmas-cocktail-recipe/>

Check out these links below for more festive drink ideas with inspired uses of botanicals:

<https://botanicalpaperworks.com/blog/three-delicious-christmas-cocktail-recipes/>

<https://theherbexchange.com/have-yourself-some-cocktail-herbs-this-christmas/>



FEEDING BIRDS IN WINTER

And while we're busy preparing and consuming seasonal delicacies with our families and friends, let's not forget our feathered friends who could use a mid-winter treat when Mother Nature is throwing her worst at them.

Click on the link below to learn how to make a decorative treat. Try this with your family and the birds will reward you with visits throughout the winter to brighten up the garden and your view from the frosty window.

<https://www.botanicaltales.com/journal/winter-bird-feeder-project>

Or try your hand at making **SUET BALLS** to festoon your yard and feed the birds. Instructions can be found at: <https://www.nature-and-garden.com/gardening/feed-birds-winter.html>



Whenever and however you celebrate this time of the year, I wish you a warm and delicious botanical holiday season!


SOURCES

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- The Botanical Kitchen: Cooking with Fruits, Flowers, Leaves and Seeds by Elly McCausland
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HOUSEPLANT SPOTLIGHT:

PILEA PEPEROMIOIDES

BY TUULA TALVILA



Twenty-five-odd years ago, when my mom gave me a cutting from a cute-looking houseplant she had got from an old friend, I never could have imagined that these “Chinese money plants” would one day become Instagram famous! (Of course, I couldn’t really imagine the internet back then either.) But do an internet image search for “cute,” “trendy,” or “hipster” houseplant and you’re sure to see the lilypad-like, bright green leaves of *Pilea peperomioides* pop up.

Despite being knowledgeable plant people, my parents didn’t know the name of the houseplant their friend had given them. It was the early days of the internet though, and I eventually found a story online about the plants and was able to share it with my parents. **The plants have an interesting history behind their global dispersal.**

In the 1970’s, specimens of the plant had periodically been brought in to the Kew Gardens inquiry desk but no one was able to identify it until 1978. *Pilea peperomioides* had first been collected and described in 1906 by George Forrest, who had found it in the high mountains of Yunnan province in southern China. This plant, which had been unknown to western scientists until the Kew identification, had been for several decades a popular houseplant throughout England, with cuttings being shared and passed from person to person or bought at local sales.

To figure out how the plants had travelled from the mountains of China to England, Kew published a newspaper article with pictures in 1983, hoping to hear from people who had the plants. A twenty-year-old link to Scandinavia was discovered: a family in Cornwall had had a Norwegian *au pair* and the family’s daughter had received a *Pilea* from the *au pair*’s family on a visit to Norway. Still, it turned out that the plant was unknown to both the Norwegian and Swedish botanic gardens and horticulturists. Another plea to the public was made: the plant was presented on a popular Swedish television program. The resulting flood of 10,000 letters from people who had it as a houseplant included, at last, the final missing step linking the plant from China to Scandinavia. In 1946, a Norwegian missionary had brought a *Pilea* home with him when he returned from China. He had shared cuttings of his plant all around Norway and so

began its spread from windowsill to windowsill throughout Scandinavia and eventually on to England and the rest of the world.

At past OHS plant sales, I've often donated baby *Pilea* from my plants; one year someone even contacted the OHS beforehand to find out if there would be any at an upcoming sale! In recent years I've seen *Pilea* for sale in local florist shops. I'd be curious to know if the shop owners are growing them themselves or if they're buying them wholesale from somewhere. **Now even the big-box stores carry them.** Having them mass produced and commercially available seems less fun to me, skipping the pleasure and connection of passing something cherished between friends or family.

REFERENCES

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Cribb, Phillip. (no date). *A Chinese puzzle solved: Pilea peperomioides.* http://www.wildchicken.com/nature/garden/ga008_a_chinese_puzzle.htm

Pilea peperomioides: Garden plant information. (2005). http://www.wildchicken.com/nature/garden/nature_200_040.htm

CARE TIPS FOR *PILEA PEPEROMIOIDES*

LIGHT

Leaves may scorch in bright, direct sunlight. Light shade will encourage larger leaves. Does well with morning sun.

SOIL

Any fertile, moist, well-drained soil.

TEMPERATURE

Can be grown outdoors in summer (but not in full sun). May be hardy to 0°C if well-drained. More likely to flower if given cool winter conditions.

MAINTENANCE

Trim back leggy old growth, and repot in spring. Remove old leaves as necessary. Needs regular watering in warm weather. Feed regularly in growing season. Generally easy to grow and problem-free as long as it's kept fed and watered and is re-potted every other year or so.

PROPAGATION

Remove and pot up basal shoots. Stem cuttings are also possible.





THE JAPANESE STEWARTIA: A LITTLE TREE WITH BIG PROMISE

BY PAUL BOULT

I guess there's truth to the old saying that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And that certainly applies to what each gardener might be looking for in a 'perfect tree.' Some may seek beauty in form and foliage, others in flowers and fruit. And for that reason, asking for the 'perfect tree' may be a tall order for Mother Nature to fill, and end up being a bit of a horticultural holy grail.

This is not to say that some plant marketers haven't tried to convince us that their latest offering is the gardening silver bullet. Extolling all virtues, it seems the plant of the month is now every gardener's dream come true. But as a self-professed plant collector, I have to say that I've often been sorely disappointed after falling for some of these tall promises, much like when I ordered the 'sea monkeys' from the back of Archie comic books as a kid. Things just didn't pan out as advertised.

But despite all those dashed hopes, I'm pretty sure I've settled on one tree that checks off every qualifier on my pretty demanding list. *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, the Japanese *Stewartia*, native to Japan and Korea, has been mostly ignored by gardeners in the National Capital Region and its many virtues form an impressive list of attributes for all seasons. The *Stewartia* genus is a member of the Theaceae (tea plant) family, which also includes camellias and hails from Eastern Asia and North America. Most in the Theaceae family are broadleaf evergreens, but *Stewartia* (along with *Franklinia*) is a deciduous outlier. It was named for John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute in 1753 by Carl Linnaeus, but it seems something got lost in transcriptions over the years!

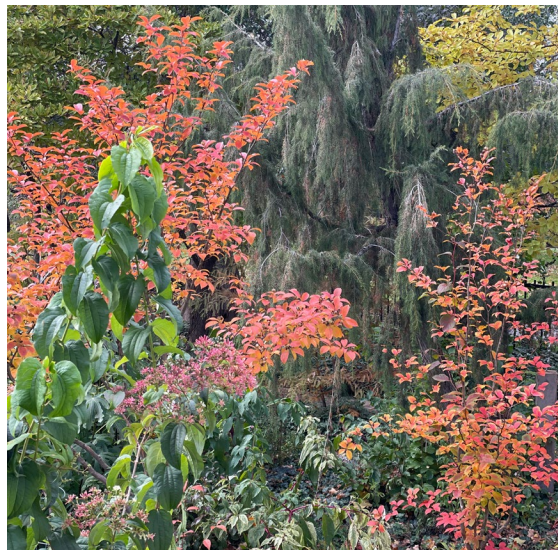
**Reminiscent
of white camellias,
*Stewartia
pseudocamellia*
flowers open over
a long period
throughout June
and July**



Heading up the list of qualities is its exquisite exfoliating bark, which reveals beautiful tones of brown, grey and orange as it flakes away year-round. In spring, buds open to reveal young silvery leaves that eventually take on a deep green colour. In June and July, the show really begins as large 6.5cm-wide white camellia-like flowers with orange anthers pop open over a period of at least 4 weeks. Then, as a season finale, the tree's 5 – 9cm long dark green leaves turn into an explosive mix of orange and red late in the fall, after much of the native plants have gone bare, extending the autumn colours until temperatures hit well below zero.

Stewartia pseudocamellia is an elegant medium-sized tree suitable for most residential plantings. A medium-slow grower, it will eventually top out at around 10 – 15m in height with a pyramidal habit when young and a wider crown when mature. With selective pruning, it can also be kept at a smaller size to accommodate smaller gardens. It is generally disease-resistant and adapts to different soil types, although it doesn't like excessively dry or wet areas.

The stuff of zone pushers in the past, given the right conditions, *Stewartia pseudocamellia* should now be accepted as perfectly adapted to Ottawa conditions. In over 20 years, it has never once suffered any winter damage in my garden despite a USDA Z5 designation in most works. I'd put *Stewartia* solidly in one zone colder as it has shrugged off -32c in my Aylmer garden. Strangely enough, the North American counterparts (*S. malacodendron* and *S. ovata*) planted in my garden at the



Brilliant autumn colours in late-October add interest to a waning garden

same time as *Stewartia pseudocamellia* have never grown well for me, being winter-damaged and killed back to the snowline in all but the mildest winters. The same goes for the other Asian species I've trialed: *S. serrata* and *S. monodelpha*.

So, for anyone longing for a small well-behaved tree with exquisite flowers and stunning exfoliating bark, look no further. *Stewartia* is the way to go. But pay no attention to me: once a marketer for 35 years, always a marketer!



The exfoliating bark of *Stewartia pseudocamellia* is an all-season added bonus



ILEX ON THE FARM

BY ROBERT GLENDINNING,
PROPAGATOR/LANDSCAPE GARDENER,
CENTRAL EXPERIMENTAL FARM

The plants in our living collection arrive in different ways. Some in envelopes or boxes. Maybe a truck pulls up from one of our suppliers. Sometimes a kind offer from a friend is the way a plant comes to find its place in our collection. Denise Kennedy offered me some cuttings of her holly. She had purchased the original *Ilex x meserveae*, which are assumed to be 'Blue Princess' and 'Blue Prince,' from Artistic Landscape Design twenty years ago. The plants had thrived in her garden and she wanted us to try them in our collection. I rooted a good number of cuttings from the generous quantity she had given me. They then went into our nurseery and did quite well.

A couple of years before I received Denise's cutting material, I had taken cuttings of *I. x meserveae* 'Blue Princess' and 'Blue Prince' from struggling plants that were in the collection; both plants have since died. These cuttings struggled like their parents. Soon the plants from Denise's cuttings surpassed the other cuttings.

Our pair were purchased in 1998 from one of our suppliers. The mystery for me is that they should be genetically identical. The vigour of the mother plants can be explained by different planting conditions or levels of care, but the cuttings taken from genetically identical plants should eventually behave the same when given the same treatment.

We eventually planted Denise's *Ilex* out in the collection in 2015. They can be seen from the road near Building 72 in the Dominion Arboretum. They are in an area where historically the first plantings were done. The *Ilex* is on the outer perimeter and in a site that I would say is fairly exposed. In the tradition of the Dominion Arboretum, a tree or shrub is planted, mulched, watered, fertilized and then we let nature decide whether it will stay.

The first winter was not too hard on them. Over the years they have experienced a variable but limited degree of winter-kill and, with a little bit of pruning then some vigorous spring growth, you quickly forget about any dieback. One criticism is that often the berries are buried under the snow so you do not

get the maximum seasonal display. We have tried multiple plants which I would consider a 'classic holly' and this group is the only one that has thrived. Our intent is to trial more of the *I. x meserveae* cultivars.

Ilex are dioecious, meaning they have a male and a female plant. One issue I have discovered while growing this plant as well as other *Ilex* is that the male plant, although required to produce fruit, is inferior in almost every way. Male cuttings root at a slower rate than the females. The actual plants are less vigorous and of course no berries.

In the Ottawa climate there are not a lot of fully hardy options, but I thought I would quickly mention a few of the ones we are currently growing. *Ilex verticillata*, winterberry, is one you can find growing wild around the Ottawa area. It is deciduous so the berries are very visible, unlike an evergreen holly. It has been the subject of a lot of breeding in recent years and you can find many cultivar options locally. We have the common/classic *I. verticillata* 'Winter Red' growing on the farm with her trusty companion *I. verticillata* 'Southern Gentleman.' I have this growing in my garden as well and it always receives positive feedback especially when there is snow on the ground. The red berries just pop. It should be noted too that 'Southern Gentleman' in my experience is one of the more vigorous males. We also have *I. verticillata* 'Red Sprite' or 'Nana.' As you would expect, it is a dwarf and we planted a few in the same bed as *I. x meserveae*. It is perfect for a smaller garden and it has *I. verticillata* 'Jim Dandy' as its companion. We also have BERRY HEAVY® Gold Winterberry or *I. verticillata* 'Roberta Case' which, as its name suggests, has gold berries.

Both of the above *Ilex* are ones you should be able to obtain in some form locally but, being an arboretum, we have or had a couple of the more obscure hollies. I was initially going to dive in with a list of what has been tried here, but that would take too long. There

are two interesting plants I will mention. One is *Ilex* 'Sparkleberry' which is a cross between *I. verticillata* and *I. serrata* developed at the U.S. National Arboretum in 1960s and released to the trade in the 1970s. The *I. serrata* genes gives us a plant with a slightly finer texture. The fruit, although plentiful, is a little smaller than the *I. verticillata* cultivars we are used to. Our specimen is declining, but thankfully the rooted cuttings are coming along. Its male companion is 'Apollo.'

The final *Ilex* that I want to mention is one that is no longer with us, but one high on my wish list. It is *I. crenata* 'Mentor Glossy' which is supposed to be hardy here, although the fact that it is not still here makes me a little suspicious. It looks like a small shiny-leaved boxwood. I have talked to various individuals who feel that it should do well here, unlike the species. Like many other plants in the collection, it is seemingly no longer available commercially. I am trying to track it down and hopefully it will turn up.

The Arboretum is happy to have offspring from Denise's hollies grow here. She also gave me cuttings from her *Callicarpa*, but that is a different story. Spoiler alert - there are a few specimens happily growing in the ornamental gardens.





THE WORLD OF GESNERIADS:

AFRICAN VIOLETS AND THEIR COUSINS

BY MAUREEN MARK

You may think that you can't grow indoor plants and certainly not flowering ones. Think again! Consider the common understanding that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert at anything. I consider myself an expert at growing as I have killed more than 10,000 plants, both indoor and outdoor varieties. Through all this carnage, I have learned what works for me and what doesn't. And then when I moved my indoor growing area and shifted to some LED lighting, I went through it all again.

But you don't have to kill 10,000 plants to find ones that might work for you. As you experiment, consider all your new plants to be annuals. When they grow well for you, they are reclassified as perennials. And when you experiment, don't lump all African violets into "can grow" or "can't grow." As children need different nurturing techniques to thrive, so do plants in the same family.

WHERE AND HOW TO BUY GESNERIADS

I have nothing against buying African violets from the supermarket or that lovely hanging basket of goldfish plant from Home Depot. *Saintpaulia* (African violets), *Aeschynanthus* (lipstick plant), *Nematanthus* (goldfish plant), *Sinningia* (florist gloxinia), and *Streptocarpus* (cape primrose) are readily available at grocery stores, garden centres, large hardware stores, florists, and farmer's markets. Just remember that these plants are usually selected for their ability to be shipped and arrive in good condition. The plants are also often prepared on a schedule and pushed to produce showy blooms for the peak sale period, e.g., Easter, Mother's Day.

I highly recommend looking for local growers who are often happy to share cuttings or starter plants. And for plantaholics, I suggest attending flower shows and conventions. At these events, you are more likely to see the uncommon and unusual. I thoroughly enjoy attending national and international conventions where I get to trade plant material with other members.

HOW TO CHOOSE A GESNERIAD

There is a gesneriad for just about every growing condition. Consider the light, heat and humidity in your growing area. Then do your research. Variegated leaf plants need more light. African violets need more heat than *Streptocarpus*. Most *Gesneria*, micro *Sinningia*, and pink *Episcia* need high humidity and do best in terrariums.

Check out popularity and vintage lists. The African Violet Society of America polls its members every year for favourites and keeps a list of vintage varieties. These are tried and true varieties and do well for many people.

	HIGH LIGHT (T5)	MEDIUM LIGHT (T8)	LOW LIGHT (T12)
Normal humidity & temp	<i>Kohleria</i>	<i>Petrocosmea</i>	<i>Saintpaulia</i>
Tolerates heat	<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>Percea</i>	<i>Episcia</i>
Tolerates cold	<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>Nematanthus</i>	<i>Streptocarpus</i>
Higher humidity	<i>Gasteranthus</i>	<i>Gesneria</i>	<i>Nautilocalyx</i>

TYPES OF AFRICAN VIOLETS

There are so many types of African violets. There is bound to be at least one that you will love. They are classified in accordance with size (large/standard/semi-miniature/miniature) and growth habit (single crown/trailer). Descriptions of African violets will not only include the colour of the blossoms (pink/blue/white/purple/yellow), but also shape (pansy/

star/wasp/bell/ruffled), type (single/semi-double/double) and patterns (solid/fantasy/chimera/two-tone/edged/thumbprint). There is also variation in the leaf colour (green/variegated with white/pink/beige) as well as leaf shape (plain/scalloped/ruffled/spooned/pointed/quilted/serrated/bustle-backed).



Jersey's Girl Trail is a semi-double standard trailer with girl foliage



Rob's Combustible Pigeon (love the name) is a semi-miniature with semi-double pink pansies with blue fantasy speckles and white edging. The foliage is crown-variegated. I love growing this one.



Windy Day is a vintage violet. It is a standard violet with very ruffled semidouble medium blue blossoms with a thin white and often green edge. (Green edges often mean longer lasting blooms.) And check out the wavy ruffled foliage. I grew this one for almost 10 years. I only stopped growing it to make space to try newer varieties.



Irish Flirt is one of my favourites, but it can be fussy. It doesn't always grow symmetrically but is always covered in blooms. It is a semi-miniature violet with double blossoms with variable amounts of white and green. The wavy foliage can sometimes be unruly.



Mac's Pure Poetry is one of my favourite miniatures. I just picked it up again at the Toronto African Violet show in the Spring. Lovely single pansies with pink thumbprints over plain green foliage are a delight.



Winter Smiles is a relatively new variety from a Russian hybridizer. Lots of new cultivars are coming from Russia and Eastern European countries. This standard violet with the amazing blossoms was very tricky to grow. On the third try, I was able to get a decent blooming plant and it petered out the next year. New is not always better but always worth trying.

TYPES OF OTHER GESNERIADS

Gesneriads are classified into three groups. The most populous group are the **fibrous rooted** genera which include *Episcia*, *Streptocarpus*, *Primulina*, *Columnnea*, *Aeschynanthus*, *Nematanthus* and *Gesneria*. Once the roots die, the plant dies. These are propagated by leaf or stem cuttings.



Primulina 'Piccolo'



Columnnea 'Aladdin's Lamp'



Streptocarpus 'Dale's Polar
Canary' broke new ground with the
combination of bicolour blooms
and yellow variegated foliage. It was
judged the best new hybrid at the
Gesneriad convention in 2014.

The **rhizomatous gesneriads** are among the most forgiving. These include *Kohleria*, *Achimenes*, *Amallophylon*, *Smithiana*, *Diastema*, and *Eucodonia*. When the plant begins to die back, rhizomes form to conserve the plant. When the conditions are right again, the plant emerges from the rhizome. So if you grow any of these, don't throw away the plant until you have checked to see the plant has made rhizomes.



Kohleria 'An's Nagging Macaws'

Achimenes 'Glory'

Tuberous gesneriads include *Sinningia*, *Chrysothemis*, and *Nautilocalyx*. These plants grow from a tuber much like a tulip or daffodil. The tuber may go dormant for one or more seasons before sprouting again.



Sinningia 'Ozark Rosy Cheeks'

Sinningia 'Kevin Garnet'

RESOURCES

Ottawa African Violet Society <http://www.oavs.org>
 African Violet Society of Canada <http://www.avsc.ca>
 African Violet Society of America <http://www.avsa.org>
 The Gesneriad Society <http://gesneriadsociety.org>
 The Gesneriad Reference Web <http://www.gesneriads.ca>

THESE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS

GIFTS FOR THE GARDENER IN YOUR LIFE

BY REBECCA LAST

We gardeners can be a prickly, self-sufficient lot, so non-gardeners may be challenged to know what gifts will be welcomed. Here, just in time for your Christmas shopping, are some suggestions from among my favourite things.

TOOLS

Every gardener has their favourite tools, usually tried and true items that see years of wear. Gift givers are advised to avoid trendy gadgets and select well-made classics instead. For example, I'm always in need of new snippers and secateurs and it's hard to find quality light-weight by-pass pruners. This relatively inexpensive stocking-stuffer is sure to please.

In my small garden, I use a lot of hand tools. A well-balanced trowel with a comfortable handle is indispensable. The hand-held, three-pronged cultivator (AKA "the Claw") is another classic. If the gardener on your gifting list already has both these items, consider the hori knife – a nifty Asian invention that combines the qualities of both a trowel and a cultivator.

I always bring a bucket or trug when I go into the garden for the weeds that I know I will inevitably pull out. A colourful trug is so much more appealing than the 5-gallon food buckets I used to use. And because I do so much gardening on my hands and knees, a kneeling pad is another essential in my arsenal of garden tools.



A trio of colourful trugs or a terrific trowel might please the gardener in your life. Photo by R. Last.

CLOTHING

To me, gardening is a "full contact sport" so having the right clothing is important. A long-sleeved cotton shirt protects my skin from the sun, and from scratches. A sun hat with a wide brim and a chin strap to keep it in place on windy days is another necessity for my fair skin. However, I'm still looking for a hat that is crushable and washable. My current hat is neither and is now beyond disreputable from years of sweat and hard wear.

I used to love plunging my hands into warm soil, but a bad case of hand eczema means I now need to wear gloves. Even without this nasty skin condition, some garden jobs require going gloved. Tough, elbow-length leather gloves are pricey but will be a welcome gift for the rose-grower on your list. Also elbow-length but softer, more flexible and much less costly, Foxglove brand gardening gloves have a deservedly good reputation. For my money, I like the grip I get from a glove with a woven back and latex or Nitrile palms.



Great gardening gloves and nifty nippers are potential stocking-stuffers for the gardener on your gift list. Photo by R. Last.

ACCESSORIES

My friend Josie has a knack for giving me things that I didn't know I needed or wanted but then wonder how I ever lived without. Two of these are a table-top tarp which is incredibly useful for my late winter seed starting, or any time I'm potting up something indoors; and a trug that doubles as a colander, allowing me to wash produce I've just pulled out of the ground.

Great gifts from a good friend include a table-top tarp and a perforated trug that doubles as a colander. Photo by R. Last.



GARDEN ART

For some reason, my family has always had a fascination with garden gnomes. In the early years, we received many of them, some appearing anonymously out of nowhere. We were at risk of being overrun by garden gnomes and had to declare a moratorium!

Art is so personal that a gift of garden art is a potential minefield. However, a tasteful, well-made durable piece may well be welcomed. Stay away from brightly coloured and tacky plastic items. A nice compromise is something both practical and decorative, such as a garden stake that has an ornamental element or a solar-powered garden light.

A visitor surrounded by too many garden gnomes. Photo by R. Last.



PLANTS

Finding the right plant for “plant-aholic” gardeners can be challenging, especially in winter. However, cut flowers and a nice vase to put them in will always be welcomed. Bulbs such as Amaryllis, which can be counted on to bloom in mid-winter, are another good choice, as are seeds of the latest annual cultivars. One of the nicest stocking-stuffers I got last Christmas also came from my good friend Josie. It was several packages of sprouting seeds that I was able to grow in a glass jar. Thanks to this thoughtful gift, I was able to satisfy my growing impulses in mid-winter and add freshly grown sprouts to salads and omelettes. While gift certificates may seem like the last resort of the unimaginative, a gift coupon from one of the local speciality nurseries is a great idea. It keeps money in the local community and could include an offer to accompany the recipient or drive them for a special outing to one of the farther-flung local nurseries.

Cut flowers and a nice vase to put them in will always be welcomed. Photo by R. Last.



READING AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

It seems almost every month there is a new gardening book in the top ten most popular reads and chances are the gardener in your life already has all the gardening books they will ever need. However, a digital subscription to a gardening magazine might be welcomed. Another option is a specialized gardening calendar such as the locally produced Earth Haven Celestial Planting Calendar, or the phenology calendar from McGill University's Morgan Arboretum. This being Canada's Year of the Garden, you also have the opportunity to buy *Gardens Canada: Living the Garden Life*, a gorgeously illustrated 18-month calendar, sales of which support horticultural societies across Canada. Gifting a gardening journal might evoke guilt, but I've sometimes used these to document family gatherings, many of which took place in the garden. More serious gardeners might appreciate one of those multi-year gardening journals, which are great tools for the gardener cum citizen-scientist.

These are a few of my favourite things. I hope they help inspire your gift-giving for the gardener in your life.



PLACES TO BEAT THE WINTER BLUES

A statue of Leda and the Swan at the Allan Gardens Christmas Show 2008 by Torontofiredancer, CC BY-SA 4.0

During Ottawa's long and often bleak winter, are there places where gardeners can go to get a "plant fix" and find inspiration? We asked OHS members for suggestions. (Please note that we have not had an opportunity to verify all of this information.)

The most recommended place was the Tropical Greenhouse at the Central Experimental Farm. Located on Maple Drive, this 1,600 sq. ft. tropical garden is found in a heritage building, built in 1928, which is notable for its beautiful lines and traditional design. Raised beds frame the circular path, featuring a variety of heat-loving plants, tropical rainforest natives, cacti, and succulents.

Entry is free of charge, and there is visitor parking beside the greenhouse. The hours of operation are:

- Monday through Friday: 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
- Sunday: 10:00 am to 4:00 pm
- Saturday: closed

Visit the website at: <https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/contact-agriculture-and-agri-food-canada/central-experimental-farm/farm-attractions#c>

There is also the Department of Biology greenhouse at Carleton University. Located in the Nesbitt Biology Building, it is open to the public Mondays to Fridays, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. See: <https://Carleton.ca/biology/facilities/greenhouses/>

Several members suggested visiting nurseries and commercial businesses that have indoor greenhouses or extensive plant selections:

- The Rona store on Hunt Club at Merivale was recommended by several people.
- The Robert Plante Greenhouses in Orleans was suggested as a great place to visit. Situated at the corner of Tenth Line Road and Navan Road, it has a large warehouse full of plants and a selection of rare house plants. See <https://www.robertplantegreenhouses.com>

There are also several greenhouses in Gatineau that may be worth checking out:

- Les serres urbaines de Notre-Dame is a social enterprise that was established to help provide fresh food at reasonable prices to residents of Old Hull; <https://www.serresurbaines.ca/>
- Les serres Bio de l'Outaouais is part of another social enterprise and CSA-based market garden farm; <https://www.serresbiodeloutaouais.com/>
- Centre Jardin Lauzon is a commercial nursery with a greenhouse. <https://centrejardinlauzon.com/boutique/>

Rebecca Last indicated that, on occasion, she resorts to virtual plant fixes, such as Taunton Fine Gardening's Garden Photo of the Day. UBC also publishes a most informative Botany Photo of the Day. Unfortunately, Daniel Mosquin, who is the driving force behind this site, has been on sabbatical for a while, so there are no new photos. The extensive archive bears exploring, however, and is a useful resource for anyone seeking more esoteric plant knowledge.

Further afield, there is the Montreal Botanical Garden and the Westmount Conservatory and Greenhouses. And in Toronto, there is the Centennial Park Conservatory, as well as the Cloud Gardens Conservatory and Allan Gardens Conservatory (both currently closed for construction/renovations).

Several places were recommended that are only open by invitation: the Bank of Canada building at 234 Wellington Street, the Agriculture and Agri-Food building at 1341 Baseline, and the Rideau Hall greenhouses.



Photos of Etobicoke Centennial Park Conservatory by Tuula Talvila



Blaine Marchand passed on the following recommendation for

“An Oasis of Peace and Calm:”

For 30 years plus, I worked across the river, in what was originally called Hull, subsequently Gatineau. The federal redevelopment of the city, close to the Ottawa River, changed the cityscape through the building of a series of grey building phases, each called Portage and assigned a roman numeral. However, amid the cluster was an architectural gem – Maison de citoyen – the city hall.

Interestingly, one of the architects for this municipal building was Daniel Lazosky who was also the architect for the bland Portage series of office buildings. For the city hall, he partnered with Gatineau architect Pierre Cayer to create a space that was bright and welcoming to all the residents of the city. Where I feel the federal buildings turned their backs to the nearby Ottawa River as well as to the city itself, Maison de citoyen embraced it.

This brick-clad building with its 20-metre high windows had at its centre an agora, named for Gilles Rocheleau, who had served the municipality both as a provincial MPP and a federal

MP and who was a co-founder of the Bloc Québécois. The agora was a truly wonderful space and was intended to be, in the Greek meaning for agora – an open meeting space.

For three decades, in winter, while winds blew from the north, bringing wind chills, and snow swirled about like a cyclone, the agora was an oasis of peace and calm, a perfect place to sit and chat with fellow employees and friends over lunch or coffee. On deeply cold but sunny days, the agora felt like a brief trip to the south.

The building was designed so that offices were located on six storeys of terraces that circled above the agora. On the first level is a walkway where numerous plants took maximum benefit from the light and sun. Often, after finishing our lunch, we would walk along that level and breathe in the humid air that the plants created. It was warm and comforting, a quick antidote before we trudged back through passageways to buckle down in an afternoon of grind.

Photo of Allan Gardens by Anneli Legault

Julianne Labreche had a few suggestions on other ways to beat the winter blues while being surrounded by plants:



1 One way to beat the winter blues is to head outside and enjoy the living forest. On some winter days, it is still and beautiful. Snow weighs heavy on tree branches. Only the sound of birds, often chickadees, bluejays and cardinals, can be heard. Bright sunlight casts reflections on shimmering spaces. It is magical and incredibly beautiful. Move through those spaces at a decent pace and your body begins to warm. The cold doesn't feel so penetrating. Getting outside and embracing winter is the best way to beat the winter blues. I enjoy the walking and snowshoeing trails throughout the region.



2 Christmas celebrates bringing the outside inside. I enjoy decorating my home with homemade holiday wreaths, evergreen boughs, a real Christmas tree and dried flowers and herbs. **The holidays are a great way to beat the winter blues in your own home with simple, natural plant materials.** With the fire glowing, a nice glass of wine and a good gardening book, it doesn't get any better.



3 If you're looking for a quick getaway to beat the winter blues, it's always fun to **visit the Trees of Hope at the Chateau Laurier with proceeds to CHEO.** I particularly enjoy those trees that have been decorated with homemade ornaments, natural materials and personal memorabilia. One year, there was a Christmas tree hung with small portraits of our Canadian prime ministers. My husband is a Canadian history buff and was so intrigued by it that our grandchildren gave him a small Christmas tree the following year with duplicates of those same decorations. We put it up every year now. We call it our prime minister's tree. After visiting the Trees of Hope, it's always pleasant to visit their restaurant for hot chocolate or cider. Light pours in through the windows and sometimes someone is playing the piano. It's a touch of class, a quick way to feel good when the weather is bad.



4 I have a small grow light in my kitchen that permits me to **germinate a few herbs, such as fresh basil.** It is easy to use, set up on a timer. Entering the kitchen on a dark winter's day, it is a real joy to see those seeds sprouting and growing. I also grow microgreens, which are easy to grow too. Later in the winter, I have had good success growing pansies indoors under the grow light. Sometimes they flower just in time for spring.

Many thanks to Joan Brown, Joan Darby, Edythe Falconer, Gillian Huntley, Rebecca Last, Julianne Labreche, Nora Lee, Gillian Macdonnell, Blaine Marchand, Diane Pilon, Gloria Sola, Cynthia Sutcliffe, and Drina Wetheyn for their suggestions.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

BY EDYTHE FALCONER

At this hectic time of year, grab a cup of cocoa, find a quiet spot, and settle down with our quiz. Your challenge is to indicate your understanding of each item. Match the number with the letter. Please note that there can be more than one correct answer.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Darwin | 12. Peruvian reservoirs |
| 2. Middens | 13. Nitrogen fixation |
| 3. Mycorrhiza | 14. Terroir |
| 4. Plant guilds | 15. Easter Island |
| 5. Perennial edibles | 16. Phenology |
| 6. Monoculture | 17. Anthropocene |
| 7. Baobab tree | 18. Horticultural "layering" |
| 8. Jane Jacobs | 19. When to prune/cut back spring blooming shrubs |
| 9. Tragedy of the Downs | 20. Edible ornamental crabapple |
| 10. Madagascar rice fields | 21. Plant that caused an economic crash in the 1600's |
| 11. Guelph scientist who has authored two books on Garden Myths | |

SOLUTIONS

A potential response to each item. There may be others not listed here.

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. Dunghills or perhaps landfills today. | L. A pioneer city planner who worked diligently to make cities healthier places to be. |
| B. Placing together plants that support each other (as in the Three Sisters) | M. Fungal organisms |
| C. African tree that stores tons of water aka "monkey tree", its fibre can be used to make rope and it bears edible fruit. It is very big! | N. The essence of the areas in which we live – especially from a taste perspective. |
| D. Early example of Anthropocene | O. Atmospheric nitrogen is incorporated into chemicals that can be used by plant root nodules. |
| E. Tulip | P. Rhubarb – asparagus |
| F. Dolgo | Q. A story of an ecological breakdown with no place to go. |
| G. A primitive system that works very well from seed with animals to provide nutrition and hands-on harvesting - a perfect cycle. | R. A study of times of reoccurrence of natural phenomena that influence plants and animals. |
| H. Shortly after blossoms fade. | S. English naturalist, famous for "On the Origin of Species" 1859 |
| I. Robert Pavlis. | T. The influence of human activities on the state of our planet |
| J. Built into high mountain slopes for water catchment. | U. A practical mode of propagation |
| K. Planting masses of a single plant/crop often in the same place year after year. | |

1.S 2.A 3.M 4.B 5.P 6.K 7.C 8.L 9.D 10.G 11.I 12.J 13.O 14.N 15.Q 16.R 17.T 18.U 19.H 20.F 21.E

TREE PLANTING HONOURS QUEEN ELIZABETH II

BY JULIANNE LABRECHE

A sombre tree-planting ceremony was held just days after the death of Queen Elizabeth this past September, organized by the Ontario Horticultural Association (OHA) and District Two horticultural societies. Under cloudy Ottawa skies, two young bur oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*) were planted in her honour.

Organized several months prior, this tree planting ceremony was planned originally to celebrate the monarch's Platinum Jubilee, recognizing her seventy years of dedicated service to the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries.

Her death, on September 8, 2022, changed the spirit of this event. People gathered at Canadensis, site of a proposed national botanical garden situated on fallow lands at the Central Experimental Farm, to honour her memory but also to grieve her passing. She died peacefully at age 96 at Balmoral Castle in Scotland.

Her state funeral at Westminster Abbey in London was held just two days prior to the planting that took place on September 21, 2022.

Representing the city for this event was Mayor Jim Watson who welcomed the attendees. Among the participants were District Director Anne Harbord, representing District Two, as well as Charles Freeman, President of the Ontario Horticultural Society. In attendance too were representatives from several District Two horticultural societies, including Ottawa Horticultural Society Vice President Julianne Labreche.

Notably, Canada's National Tree Day is held every year on that day. Bur oaks are large native trees, considered a keystone plant in attracting native wildlife and supporting biodiversity. The trees were generously donated by the Almonte Tree Group.

As the organizers noted in their statement, "During the Platinum Jubilee Year, the Queen's Green Canopy initiative in the UK saw over one million trees planted. The OHA encourages tree planting projects across Ontario. They provide grants to horticultural societies to plant trees in their communities."



Anne Harbord, District Two Director



ABOUT US

This newsletter is published by the Ottawa Horticultural Society (OHS) and is distributed to OHS members free of charge.

We depend on our members for ideas, articles and information about what is going on in the gardening community.

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The newsletter welcomes articles about all aspects of gardening.

A Submission and Style Guide has been prepared and is available on the OHS website:

<https://ottawahort.org/previous-ohs-newsletters/>

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