OTTAWA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

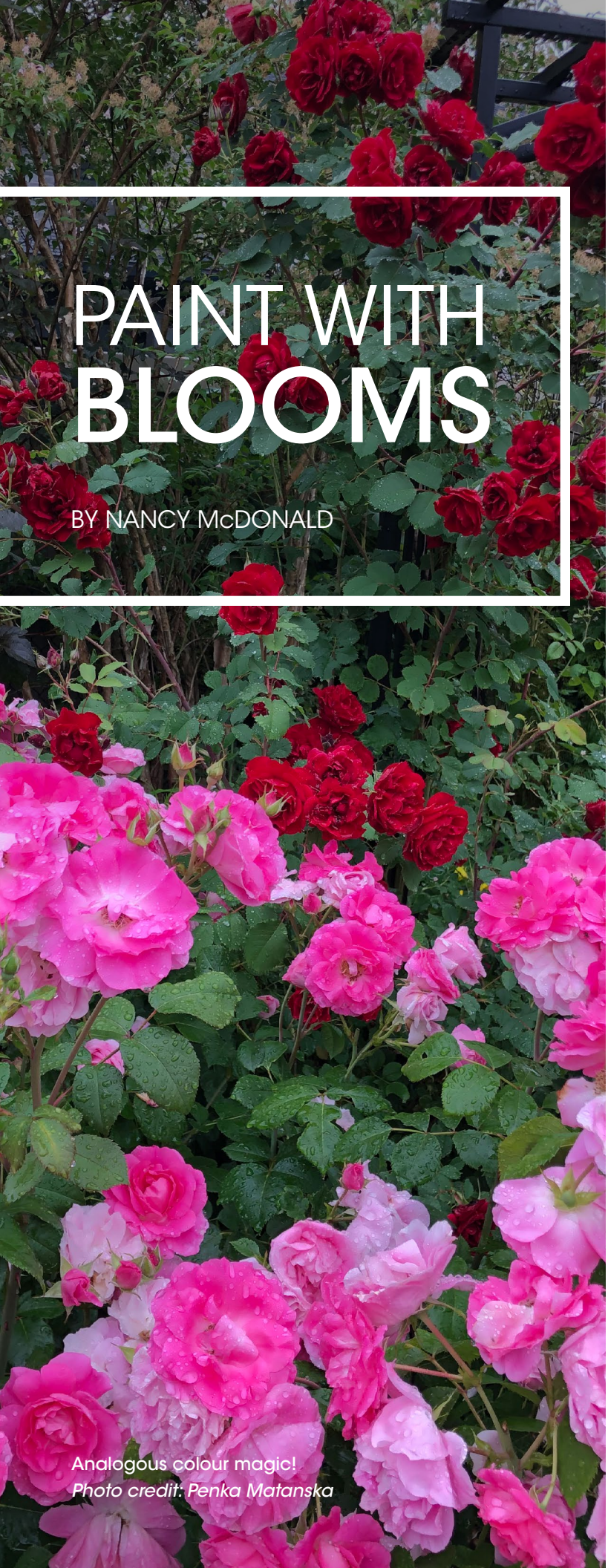
JUNE 2023

Table of Contents

SAVOURING SUMMER

PAINT WITH BLOOMS

BY NANCY McDONALD



Analogous colour magic!
Photo credit: Penka Matanska

When I am walking the neighbourhood or on garden tours, what draws my eye first in garden plantings is colour. Being a self-described plant collector, I am looking at what is in bloom and colour combinations.

When we think of colour in a garden, it usually means flowers in bloom. And gardeners want to see beautiful flowers consistently from spring to fall. Now for some self-reflection: is your garden living up to your expectations? Are there gaps in flowering and times when the flower bed is mainly green?

A gardening journal or calendar is a simple tool to help you plan a colourful perennial garden. I keep both a journal for written notes on garden activities and a calendar for bloom times. This helps track when plants are in bloom and checks if my plan to have three or more plants blooming at the same time is happening.

A garden plan helps you choose plants that will give a succession of flowering in spring, summer, and fall. Choosing long-blooming perennials such as cranesbills 'Rozanne' or 'Azure Rush', *Heliopsis, Coreopsis, Rudbeckia, Echinacea purpurea, Corydalis lutea, Monarda* and *Sedum*, to name a few examples, helps ensure colour is always present.

Planting a wide variety of perennials to flower constantly through three seasons provides nectar and pollen for beneficial insects and birds. I am adding more native plants to encourage these garden visitors. Delight happens when I see a yellow swallowtail butterfly on *Oenothera*, bees all over *Solidago flexicaulis* or a hummingbird exploring a native *Monarda* as well as the exotic *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer'.

Success when growing perennials starts by planting in the right location. If the tag says full sun, a part-sun location will not give abundant blooms. Improve the soil with organic material, mulch, and be attentive to watering and maintenance requirements such as deadheading, cutting back and division.

It is easy at the garden centre in springtime to decide on colour combinations with annuals, as they are usually fully in bloom. However, it is more difficult when choosing perennials for colour, as plants are not often in bloom at the time of purchase and colour is dependent on light levels, shadows, and background environment. I enjoy pairing plants which bloom at the same time to increase colour interest by utilizing the gardener's colour wheel. Some of my perennial plants have racked up 'frequent flyer miles' as I move them to locate these pleasing combinations. I enjoy this aspect of playing in my garden and for me the garden is never finished. And ask yourself from time to time might the reason you enjoyed the plant in your friend's garden more than in your garden be its companion plant?

Start by visualizing yellow, orange, and red as warm colours and green, blue, and violet as cool colours. Warm colours give energy and appear closer when viewed in the garden. The cooler colours tend to draw the eye farther and make a small space feel larger.

A gardener's colour wheel found in gardening books or online can help you choose colour combinations. Primary colours are red, yellow, and blue. Using these three colours together ensures high contrast and energy. I find I am ready to enjoy these colours in my spring garden with blooming tulips, poppies, daffodils, and irises.

Top: Contrast of blue and orange in planter with blue colour echoed in decorative teapot *Nancy McDonald*
Bottom: Unplanned monochromatic colour with obedient and aster plants *Nancy McDonald*

Complementary colours are opposite each other on the colour wheel – red and green, yellow and violet, orange and blue. Think of the yellow black-eyed Susan mixed with the violets of *Liatris* or *Echinops*. The effect in a complementary planting combination is an intensification of each individual colour, which always brings success.

Analogous colours sit next to each other on the colour wheel. One warm analogous colour scheme is red, yellow, and orange; e.g. *Gaillardia, Asclepias tuberosa* and *Hemerocallis*. A cool analogous colour scheme could be blue, lavender and pink together; e.g. *Phlox paniculata, Monarda, Echinacea*. Keeping the colour concentration similar in analogous plant choices results in a more successful blend.

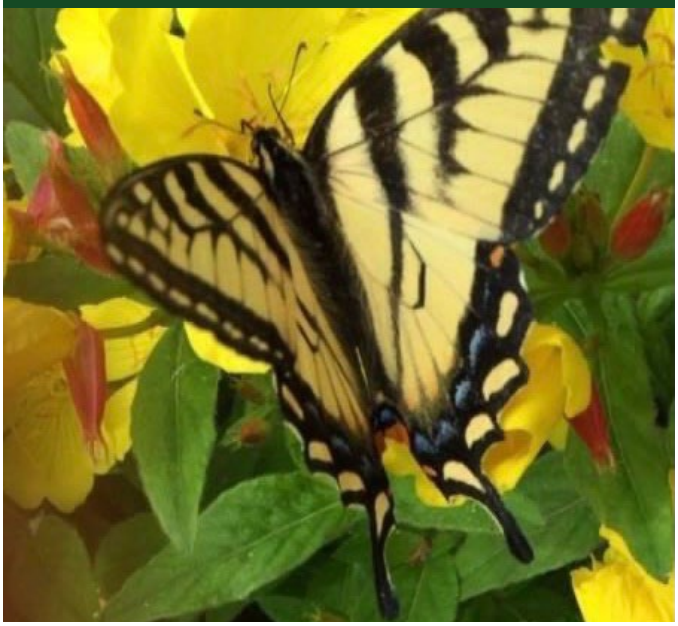
Other gardeners want a monochromatic colour scheme using just one colour. Employing texture and shape with plant choices in this colour scheme guarantees that the uniqueness of each plant is recognized. A monochromatic late-day garden of white flowers and silver-foliaged plants will sparkle and catch the eye at dusk e.g., *Aruncus dioicus, Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost.' I unintentionally planted two fall asters one spring in front of *Physostegia virginiana* 'Variegata' and have been very pleased with the resulting monochromatic combination.

"It's not easy being green" Kermit sings and goes on to say that green can be cool and friendly. Green, with its many hues, is a garden constant and delivers nature's delight in the garden. *Aralia cordata* 'Sun King' planted in a partial shade garden has outstanding yellow-green foliage. Plants that will amaze you with their great green leaves are *Rodgersia podophylla, Crambe cordifolia* and various species of *Ligularia, Brunnera* and *Hosta.*

QUICK TIPS

- Visit public gardens to see what's in bloom and get ideas for planting combinations.
- Join a garden club or horticultural society and tour members' gardens.
- Take pictures of toured gardens and of your garden.
- Pay attention to plant labels. With so many cultivars to choose from, it's important to ensure you purchase the one you really want.
- Most perennials bloom three to four weeks.
- White seems a safe choice but is a powerful colour in the garden as it quickly attracts the eye. White flowers planted in a west- or south-facing sunny garden bed can reduce the vibrancy of other plants.

And we can learn from master painters, such as Monet, how to use colour in our home gardens. Enjoy this short read and be inspired. Lessons from Monet's Garden - Monet's Garden at Giverny (Plants) - Research Guides at New York Botanical Garden (nybg.org)



Eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly visiting *Oenothera* sp.

Garden centres offer plants with foliage other than green. These foliage plants offer creativity in a colour scheme and possible solutions to garden design dilemmas. For example, grey-foliage plants such as species of *Artemisia* act as a neutral and can help separate changing colour combinations.

If you have a part-shade garden, utilizing plants of different textures and leaf shapes adds interest. For example, add drama and colour by planting *Allium* 'Globemaster' with *Hosta*. Likewise, yellow or gold foliage in the shade garden will fool the eye into thinking the sun's rays have filtered through.

Colour echo is another fun matchmaker activity. By picking a colour hue in one plant that is echoed in its neighbour, a pleasing match can be found, such as the pink stamens in the *Geranium x cantabrigiense* 'Biokova' echoed in *Heuchera* 'Plum Royale,' which I have in my garden.

A great gardening strategy with colour is the repetition of those reliable performance plants throughout your garden. This repetition will entice and draw the eye through the garden, a very satisfying experience. Colour success relies on having at least three varieties of plants in bloom at one time to provide a fullness of colour. Colour in your garden is like colour in your home, a personal choice. The bottom line is do what pleases you and enjoy creating your canvas.

Enjoy your perennial creation!

The Book Nook

26 TITLES SUGGESTED BY THE OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR OHS MEMBERS

Ottawa Public Library / Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa

The Collection Development staff at the Ottawa Public Library have specially selected a list of books for OHS members. The list features titles in English and French recently added to the OPL's collections

Among the titles for this issue are materials relating to:

- ✓ Biological pest control
- ✓ Vegetable gardening and veganic growing
- ✓ Propagation techniques
- ✓ Murderous plants
- ✓ Wild plants of Quebec
- ✓ Flowers and their meaning
- ✓ Gardening and climate change
- ✓ Planting for pollinators
- ✓ Hedges and living boundaries
- ✓ Growing wild food
- ✓ Rock and water gardening
- ✓ Attracting birds
- ✓ Raising butterflies and moths
- ✓ England's gardens
- ✓ Grasses
- ✓ Seeds

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/2299794309_ottawa_horticultural_society_summer_titles

COMMUNITY GARDENING

BY REBECCA LAST

Whether you have a small garden, or no garden at all, a community garden is a great option. I've been growing tomatoes, garlic, potatoes, and a variety of other food plants at my local community garden for about a dozen years now.

Ottawa's Community Gardening Network, which comprises over a hundred gardens, is run by Just Food Ottawa. Their website features an interactive map *(https://justfood.ca/community-gardening-network/community-gardening-network-guide/)*, so you can find a community garden near you.

A seasonal coordinator organizes "how to" workshops for those seeking to establish new community gardens. There is an ongoing need for new gardens because almost all have a waiting list. The coordinator also oversees small grants so existing gardens can purchase tools, soil, and other materials. Gardens also have the option to apply for larger grants for bigger purchases such as buying a new tool shed.

While business models vary from place to place, most community gardens feature one or two common areas plus individual plots that are rented to individuals or families each year. At Michele Heights, my community garden, the rental prices are tailored to income. People who live in Michele Heights City Living pay less than those who are more affluent. We also have two sizes of garden plots – smaller plots that are about 1.5 x 4 meters for individuals or beginner gardeners, and larger plots that are 3 x 6 meters. Priority goes to renewing members. This works well because it means that I can plant garlic in the fall and be assured that I can keep the same plot the next year, provided I pay my annual dues on time.

Strawberries from Rebecca's community garden. *R. Last.*

Newly mulched garden paths at Michele Heights Community Garden, fall 2022. *Michael Brownell.*

Each year when I pay my annual rental fee, I also sign a contract that specifies my commitment to the community. Like all the other gardeners, I am required to contribute at least five hours per year to maintaining the common areas. This might include mowing the grass between the garden plots, turning the compost, doing small repairs, or pruning the shrubs around the garden. In addition to the work requirement, other garden rules include no permanent fencing or woody plants in the individual plots. The main purpose of the community garden is to grow food so, while many of us grow some annual companion flowers, ornamental plants are generally discouraged. Use of any kind of chemical, be it fertilizer, herbicide or pesticide, is strictly prohibited.

The gardeners are as diverse as the crops we grow. My neighbour to the west is a lovely elderly lady from Russia. While we cannot speak each other's language, we always exchange friendly greetings. She has shared her strawberry plants with me, and I shared cosmos and marigold seed with her. To my east is a lady from Nigeria who grows spectacular amaranth. The Vietnamese family a few plots over grows bottle gourds that are bigger than I am tall, and I traded tomato seedlings for a lemon grass plant from the Filipino lady who gardens at the end of my row. We all communicate via sign language and a shared love of gardening.

We organize communal work parties twice each season in spring and fall. The garden opening day is traditionally held Mother's Day weekend and includes activities like bringing the hoses out of the shed and attaching them to the taps, making sure the compost beds are in good order, and tidying up any debris left over from winter. This is also a social occasion when members greet each other after the long winter and compare notes on what they plan to plant for the coming season.

The fall workday, usually either the weekend before or just after Thanksgiving, is when we close the garden. We unplug the hoses, turn

Amaranth and squash growing at Michele Heights community garden. *R. Last.*

off the water supply, remove any fencing from around the private plots, clean up dead plant material, turn the compost piles and use any finished compost to top dress the garden beds. It's also another social occasion, sometimes including a communal meal, or just a shared coffee and chat as we work.

Some years we also organized special work parties for big projects. For example, about 4 years ago, we had a workday to replace the wooden siding on many of the raised beds. Last year, we brought in a truckload of shredded cedar mulch and then spent a productive autumn morning spreading it over the narrow paths between the garden beds so these will (hopefully) no longer require mowing.

Other than the pathways, common areas at Michele Heights Community Garden include a small pollinator garden, a communal raised bed that is used by people waiting to get their own private plot, a row of raspberry canes and a berry patch containing currants and gooseberries. Over the years, problems with theft and vandalism have been a perennial challenge. Signage has helped somewhat, but our garden, like most community gardens, is located on City property at the edge of a popular park where kids play, and people walk their dogs.

Since the City prohibits erecting any kind of fence, and since our budget is far too small to afford fencing anyway, we are currently working to develop a living barrier made up of edible plants. The first step is to ask the City's permission to slightly enlarge the overall footprint of our garden. We made that application back in March, so now we wait with fingers crossed…

Meanwhile, I am rooting cuttings of a hardy pear tree and two hazelnut shrubs, which I will be ready to transplant when we get permission for our expansion. We will probably also apply to Just Food for one of those larger grants so we can purchase materials to create raised beds, an arbour for grapes and perhaps to purchase other woody food plants, such as serviceberry, plum and crab apple trees.

I look forward to helping to build our community fruit orchard and to another year of productivity and fellowship!

The Best Bargain

that the City of Ottawa provides

BY ROB BRANDON

On my 50th birthday, which was Christmas Eve 1998, I was taken out in our car to see my birthday present. I was blindfolded and this was taken off with me looking out on a large field covered in snow. "So, have you bought me a property?" I said to my family. "No, silly - your allotment is out there under the snow somewhere" was the reply.

Gardening at the Kilborn allotments has given my wife Laura and me a lot of pleasure over the years. When I started gardening, there were many plots that were not being used. Now, with food insecurity, there are waiting lists for spaces. There are over one hundred community gardens in Ottawa and the organisation Just Food manages the Community Garden Network for the City; new community gardens are being made every year. In my case, I have always regarded the City fee of $109 a bargain as this gives me an allotment plot of 25 x 50 feet, access to a water stand pipe and piles of wood chips that appear from time to time to be used for path building. When one goes out in summer in the early morning with significant birdlife active, I think one can get most of the benefit of a country cottage without the maintenance worries.

In a large community garden such as Kilborn, the quality of soil and drainage on the plots varies greatly and so it is worthwhile checking the garden areas carefully before agreeing to take on a suggested plot location. When I started, I chose a vacant plot surrounded by actively worked ones. My choice turned out to be a plot that had been worked on for many years by an elderly couple. The sandy soil was in good condition but rather weed-infested after some years of neglect. The plot was also slightly higher than others, so it did not suffer from flooding.

A new allotment gardener must expect to have a multi-year battle with weeds such as thistles and comfrey before an annual stalemate situation between the gardener and unwanted plants is achieved. Take care to remove all of a weed root to avoid the plant re-growing from the root pieces.

One's gardening neighbours likely consist of many new Canadians from all parts of the world and with many different gardening styles. Most employ the deep-digging style each spring or fall. I personally find the no-dig approach more successful, working from the premise that the soil contains billions of weed seeds that digging brings to the surface to germinate.

Each fall I clear off all the old growth of plants and spread garden compost from our home composter on the garden beds. These beds are 2 to 2.5 feet wide and run North-South across the plot. In the spring, more compost from the allotment composter pile is spread on the beds. Walking on the beds must be avoided to prevent compacting the soil. We started off growing

vegetables using either seeds or seedlings from Ritchie's, with many growing failures, often in the spring when hot and dry periods spelt doom to small plants with weak and shallow root systems.

About 15 years ago I discovered the use of horticultural fleece. This is a white lightweight polyester material (available from Lee Valley) that can be used in a variety of ways in an Ottawa climate. I use it to prolong the gardening season in the spring and the fall. For early lettuce and spinach, I often prepare a section of a bed, sow seed in the late fall and cover the bed with the fleece, held down close to the soil with stones or wood. Even the strongest winds have low windspeeds at ground level. Snow will cover the fleece during the winter and water passes through the fleece in the spring. The material helps the soil retain moisture during the drying spring winds, sunlight warms the soil and so, with moisture and warmth, seeds germinate and grow, giving at least two or three weeks extra growing time during the uncertain spring weather with its frosts. Carrot seeds benefit from starting under fleece due to their slow germination and early growth. One does need to take off the fleece on a fine day and take out the few weeds that also like the warm and moist conditions. In early summer, the fleece is used over hoops to protect tomatoes and leek seedlings. Where rabbits are a problem and one is growing a row of peas from seeds, a fleece covering can discourage nibbling. In the fall, the fleece can again be used to keep the soil moist by condensing night dews and by protecting late lettuce and spinach from frosts. I have kept the same fleece material for 3-4 growing seasons.

From the early days, we grew raspberries, black currants and gooseberries which Laura would freeze for the winter or make into jams or jellies. For the last three years we have expanded the soft-fruit bushes to include blueberries and haskaps as we find that growing only fruit and a few vegetables such as leeks that are expensive works the best for us. This focus on soft fruits decreases the amount of time doing weeding and watering but increases the time for fruit picking (more enjoyable).

We gave up growing potatoes in the early days, as the Colorado beetle was a constant problem, stripping the plant leaves unless one picked all the pests off. Celery was also not successful, needing too much watering. Leeks are often expensive in the shops but pots of seedlings can be divided and planted in rows. During the summer, hilling earth to encourage blanching of the root should result in sizable plants by fall. Over the years I have seen relatively few plants being taken; leeks and kale seem to be favourites for the night-time visitors but I have never felt the need to fence in my plot as some of my neighbours have done. My advice is also to start the fall clear-up early in the vegetable garden so that it is completely ready for the next season and little work is needed in the spring other than watching early lettuce and spinach growing under the fleece. My favourite lettuce is Black Seeded Simpson - it's never bitter.

THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN OF OLD OTTAWA EAST

OTTAWA'S FIRST DEDICATED CHILDREN'S GARDEN

(Based on two articles published in the Old Ottawa East Community newspaper "The Mainstreeter" - August 2022 and April 2023)

BY LORI GANDY

On the corner of Main and Clegg streets in Old Ottawa East (OOE), there's a welcome respite from the asphalt and cars streaming past - The Children's Garden at Robert Legget Park. You can't miss it with its gorgeously colourful painted pickets and welcoming entrance.

A veritable oasis of green and growth, the Garden represents a true community effort, as a number of organizations had a hand in its creation: The Ottawa East Community Gardeners, Sustainable Living Ottawa East, The Community Foundation of Ottawa, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, Community Activities Group, the Main Farmers' Market, students at Lady Evelyn School, and TD Friends of the Environment. The Garden is managed by a dedicated volunteer advisory board, a summer coordinator and many volunteers.

As is appropriate for a Children's Garden, students at Lady Evelyn Alternative School undertook research and design work, which resulted in the garden plan. As well, each fence picket was painted by a student at the school.

The garden includes raised beds, wide paths for wheelchairs and strollers, a sandbox, a "Little Free Library" and interactive signs explaining, for example, the composting process and the life cycles of insects and plants. There is also a perennial bed featuring a host of different plants including flowering vines, native shrubs, fruit trees, herbs and pollinator-supporting flowers, many of which were donated by members of the OOE community.

MEET THE GARDEN MANAGER

Marianne is now in her second year as the Children's Garden manager. She has a degree in horticulture and has worked in many commercial growing settings so she knows about gardens and helping people enjoy them.

The best part of her job is working with all the people who come into the Garden: "It's very fulfilling in that you get to see the results of your efforts, and bring people into the garden and explain to them how things grow. There is nothing more cool than showing a kid how peas grow."

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE GARDEN THIS SUMMER?

As any gardener knows, there is always something to do in a garden: planting, transplanting, weeding, staking, and – the best part – harvesting.

Information, including dates and times for 'garden days' and what tasks will be done throughout the season, is available on the Garden's Facebook and Instagram sites and in the weekly newsletter. You can sign up to receive the newsletter at ottawachildrensgardeninfo@gmail.com. You can also check out the latest news on the website: www.ottawachildrensgarden.org.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

Volunteers are needed throughout the season to help with garden tasks, and children are especially welcome to join in and learn. Marianne encourages people to come to the garden when she's there (her schedule is posted in the newsletter and on social media).

"Especially if it's your first time in the garden," says Marianne. "I'd like to be able to introduce you to the garden and answer any questions."

If you would like to become a volunteer, contact Marianne at: ottawachildrensgardeninfo@gmail.com.

NEW THIS YEAR

Marianne has exciting plans for this year. "We really want to encourage people to experiment in their own gardens. We'll be growing new varieties of vegetables, including multi-coloured cauliflower and tomatoes." As Marianne says: "Why grow red tomatoes when you can grow purple, or orange or yellow ones." Why indeed!

Other plans include vertical gardening to maximize the use of the garden space. "We'll be making use of trellises and also growing potatoes in bags. We're excited to show people what they can do in small spaces."

EDUCATION AND EXPLORATION

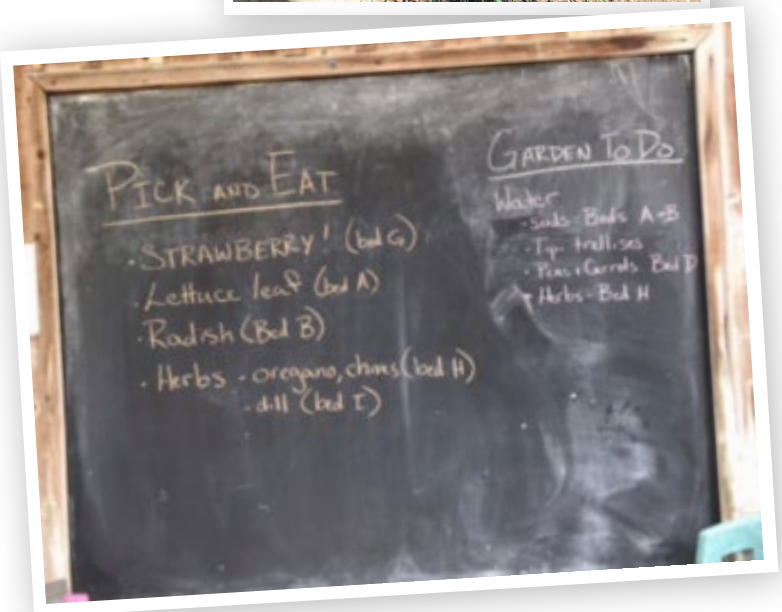
A key objective for the Garden is education. As in the past, the space will be open to various organizations to run their science and nature programs. Children participate in fun activities and learn about gardening and how to appreciate the natural world.

Says Marianne: "The more people we can get to come to use the space, the better for all of us. We want the Garden to be a community place for learning and fun.

A SUSTAINABLE, HEALTHY GARDEN

Keeping the garden healthy and sustainable is another important focus. This is something all visitors to the garden can help with. Knowing what is ready for harvesting and how to harvest it is critical to any plant's health. For example, you should not pick the leaves from the broccoli and cauliflower plants, because they will then struggle to survive and produce their fruit.

"We love that people come to taste the vegetables and fruit. We just want people to be aware of how and when it is appropriate to harvest," says Marianne. Visitors can check the large blackboard in the shed to see what's ready for picking.



Last year, the garden had some issues with plant destruction from little critters that nibbled and grazed at will. Marianne will be taking corrective action involving netting and strategic planting of ground cherries to attract squirrels away from the other produce.

But as Marianne says: "A garden is a living space, supporting people as well as the wild life that visit regularly. We are happy to share with the critters, but we also want to enjoy it ourselves."

GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

A garden is truly a delicious gift from nature and the Children's Garden shares that gift by donating produce to the Sandy Hill Community Centre (the Garden's sponsor) for distribution in the community. The donation harvest takes place on Thursday mornings, after which Marianne delivers the produce to the Centre.

EVENTS IN THE GARDEN

Besides the programs mentioned above, the Garden is available for events such as home-schooling classes or even birthday parties. The Garden has a large round table, a picnic table and some benches to accommodate groups. Email the Children's Garden and they will arrange for people to show your group the garden and help them harvest what's ready.

When you are responsible for a garden, you are always learning, always trying new things, always growing yourself. All good things that can serve us well – in the garden, and in life.

Come to the Children's Garden this summer and see for yourself what a wonderful place it is.

THE OHS & GARDENS FOR CHILDREN

In 2015, a valued member of the Ottawa Horticultural Society, Virginia Peck, died. She had been a member of the OHS for 50 years, and had been active as a board member, the coordinator of various activities, a volunteer at numerous events, as well as an exhibitor in shows. Among other things, she organized flower arranging classes for junior members on Saturday mornings.

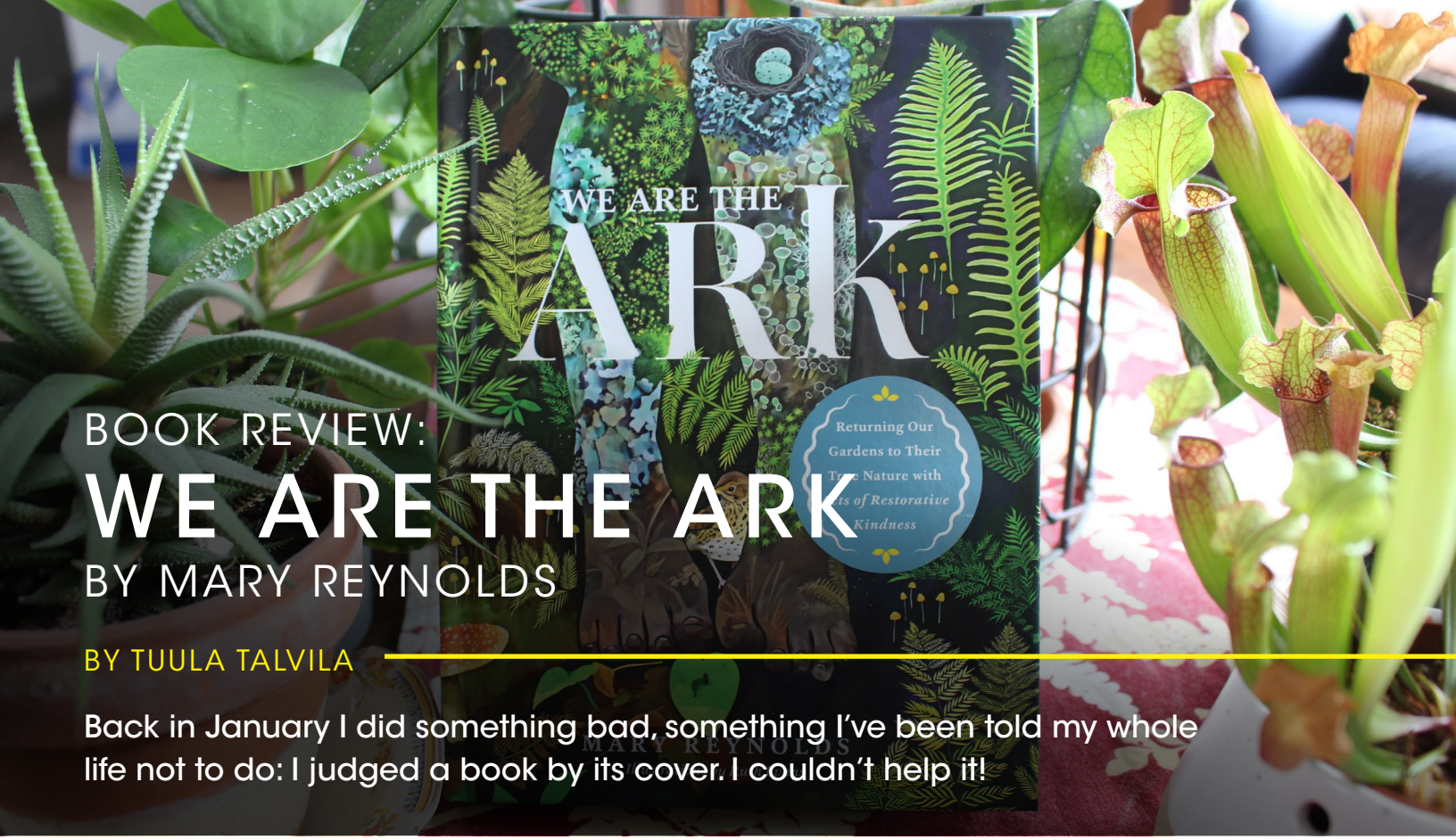
In her will, Virginia left a generous bequest to the OHS. Rather than have this money go into general revenues, it was agreed that the money would be designated to support initiatives involving young people, a theme that was near and dear to Virginia. The idea was to spend a certain amount on various such initiatives each year, thereby spreading the capital, and accrued interest, over a period of time.

Money from this bequest has been used to fund a speaker on fairy gardens and to help sponsor a garden at a school in Ottawa. It was also used to augment the prizes sponsored by the OHS at the Ottawa Regional Science Fair.

In 2023, the Board of the OHS agreed to use money from the bequest to make a donation to St. George's School in Westboro, part of the Ottawa Catholic School Board. Last year, the students and their teachers enthusiastically raised funds to create a beautiful courtyard garden full of native plants and a "Peace Path." The OHS donation will be used for the purchase of more native plants. The garden is carefully tended by the students and their families.

Virginia Peck lived not far from the Children's Garden on Main Street. Her generosity has allowed the OHS to assist other children's gardening initiatives, and means that her spirit lives on, and will help inspire gardeners of the future!

ABOVE PHOTO: Virginia Peck (left) in front of her vegetable garden with a garden tour visitor (Photo credit: Josie Pazdzior). Photo originally appeared in the 2016 OHS Yearbook.



BOOK REVIEW: WE ARE THE ARK

BY MARY REYNOLDS

BY TUULA TALVILA

Back in January I did something bad, something I've been told my whole life not to do: I judged a book by its cover. I couldn't help it!

As soon as I saw a picture of "We Are the ARK," I fell in love and had to have it. Bought with a Christmas gift card, when it arrived in the mail, it did not disappoint. It is beautiful.

This hardcover book somehow has just the right dimensions and heft in the reader's hand. I like to hold it and to look at it, it seems so physically perfect. The lavish cover illustration is delightful with its myriad forest elements. And the eye that lingers over the rich details may spot some subtly shiny highlights when the light strikes just so – a glossy mushroom cap here, the glint of a bird's egg there. Just like observing nature – slowness and quiet attention are rewarded.

Yes, I also did open the book and read it, and the fact that I agree with the message is icing on the cake. Irish author Mary Reynolds is a "reformed, internationally acclaimed landscape designer." Reformed meaning she went from doing traditional garden and landscape design to wanting to help "you to give any land under your care back to nature, to re-wild, to be 'ARKed'


space in their ARKs in the darkest part of their land where they can sit quietly. As your eyes adjust, if you are very quiet, you will see a whole world of creatures emerge in the safety of darkness. It is pure magic.

The solutions to deadly artificial lighting are simple.

If you absolutely *must* have outdoor lights, make sure they are switched to a motion-sensor-only system. This way, they come on only for short times when you need them and allow darkness to prevail in between.

make sure all your necessary outdoor *and* indoor amber or red in tone. These tones don't affect nearly as much as the blue- and white-toned blind them and cause most of the problems. Red the safest choice, as amber tones sometimes blind tures such as fireflies in some parts of the world.

At Christmas, use red-toned bulbs if you want to light up your house or any trees outside, not the blue- or white-toned ones. The trees and their creatures hate the blue- and white-toned ones–not that they are crazy about any of them.

If you are plagued by those commonly used LED street-lights lighting up your urban ARK, write to your local government explaining the issue and asking for support to change the bulbs to amber or red tones, or ask whether filters

202

can be retrofitted over the existing bulbs. More and more good people are emerging in every organization, so you will be surprised at the help and support you will find if you ask.

The Kingdoms Beneath Our Feet

The biggest ecosystem in the whole world is living beneath our feet. The microbial realm in this vast world is invisible to the naked eye. A teaspoon of healthy soil contains more bacteria than there are people on the earth. One square foot of healthy soil has thousands of miles of mycelia, the threadlike roots of fungi, which are the earth's underground World Wide Web communication network. Soil organisms living underground play vital roles in soil aeration, nutrient cycling, water uptake, which make possible the healthy establishment of plants.

with Acts of Restorative Kindness to the earth." In a nutshell, Reynolds' message is that we are "hopelessly and helplessly dependent" upon all the other creatures of earth and that caring and providing for them "must become our reason for being here."

The first and foremost principle of ARKing is to turn over half of one's property to nature; secondly, to grow as much food as possible on the remaining half. Most of the book is devoted

to various aspects of how and why to carry out the first directive. Every small act counts, and gardeners can be key by adding to the overall area of natural habitat. In contrast to large-scale re-wilding, ARKing creates many small, possibly isolated patches of habitat restored to their native ecology. While perhaps too small to sustain keystone species (large trees, or predators, for example), they "hold patches of life that will someday be the seeds of restoration for the wider landscape surrounding them."

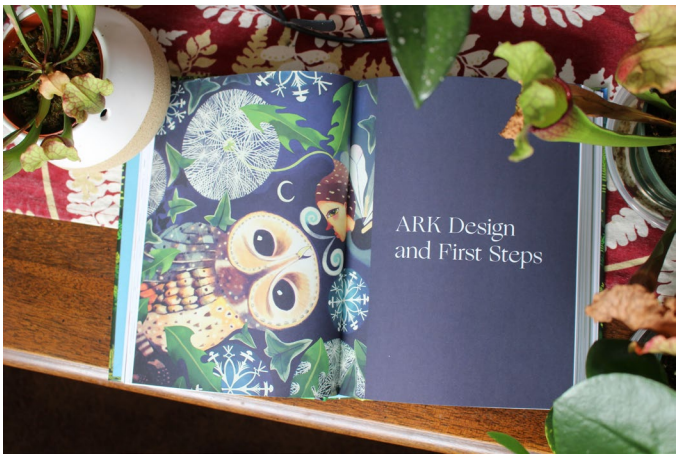
The ideas presented are high-level, broad concepts designed for universal appeal and applicability, rather than very specific how-tos, although she does use many specific examples and suggestions from her native Ireland and some more specifics for other environments. She gives shout-outs to people around the world who are doing work she admires in re-wilding and restoration. Introductory chapters outline her ARK concepts and what she calls "the great forgetting," i.e. the loss of biodiversity through our current industrial practices in forestry, agriculture, fishing, and horticulture and gardening. From there, topics covered include: why to use native plants; creating plant layers; creating meadows, woodlands, water habitats; providing for insects, fungi, soil microorganisms.

Broadly speaking, the concepts seem sound. She does go somewhat light on scientific explanation, with some ideas presented as fact that I'd like to see more evidence for, but sometimes more thorough explanations are provided. Interspersed are many 1- or 2-page mini-topics such as "Should you remove non-native garden plants if not invasive?" and "Native berries and birds." The book is designed to turn people on to the ideas, not provide a blueprint for specific situations. Many gardeners and landowners are already heading down this path, so might not get new ideas from it.

It's well-written but with a little too much anthropomorphism for my taste – comments such as animals feeling grateful to us when we provide habitat and food. It's very readable, with writing that is mostly very straight-forward but punctuated with more flowery, emotional bursts, flowing from Reynolds' heart. She refers to the denizens of our gardens as the "rooted and unrooted" creatures. The rich, imaginative illustrations by English artist Ruth Evans continue from the cover on inward. Many feature whimsical creatures such as insects with human-like faces, and lush vegetation.

While Reynolds does contend that our species is doomed if we don't provide for all the others, hers is not really a book of doom and gloom; rather, it feels like a cheerful celebration of the wonder of all life on earth with the message that "it's time to imagine and build a beautiful, gentle future. A new vision that allows us to have a future." It is a hopeful book.

To support her ARKivist movement and connect people wishing to read more, follow her guidance, and share their efforts, Reynolds has created an online community through social media and her website, where she implores **"Build an Ark and become part of the global movement to restore the earth back to health."**



REFERENCES:

- Reynolds, Mary. (2022). We are the ARK: Returning our gardens to their true nature with Restorative Acts of Kindness. Timber Press, Portland. 276 pages.
- Mary Reynolds' website: https://marymary.ie/
- We Are the ARK website (with links to various social media): https://wearetheark.org/
- Ruth Evans art website: https://ruthevansart.com/

Ruby-throated hummingbird on purple giant hyssop *(Agastache scrophulariifolia)*

HOW NATIVE PLANTS GOT ME HOOKED ON GARDENING

BY NINA FOSTER-MACLAREN

I've never been much of a gardener but I have always loved nature. Now and then I would make an impulsive plant purchase at a big box store. My selection was usually based on the plant's vibrant colour or that it reminded me of my youth growing up in England. For sentimental reasons I was drawn to plants like hydrangeas and roses. Once planted in my garden, they rarely lived past two seasons in spite of my efforts to keep them protected, and so I concluded that our Canadian winters were just too cold. The extent of my gardening activities consisted of keeping things respectably tidy but with the least amount of work required. I dutifully complied with city bylaws so as to never offend or give cause for complaint.

Ruby-throated hummingbird on cardinal flower *(Lobelia cardinalis)*

DURING COVID

At the onset of the Covid lock-down in 2020, I watched a video by entomologist Doug Tallamy. He talked about the importance

TOP: Amerian goldfinch on wild bergamot *(Monarda fistulosa)*
MIDDLE: Monarch butterfly on anise hyssop *(Agastache foeniculum)*
BOTTOM: Eastern giant swallowtail on Canadian serviceberry *(Amelanchier canadensis)*

of native plants and their relationship with butterflies/moths (Lepidoptera) and birds. He explained how Lepidoptera lay their eggs mostly on native plants and then the eggs develop into larvae (caterpillars). Birds then rely on these caterpillars to feed their young. Since most North American gardens consist of non-native (ornamental) plants, there are insufficient caterpillars to feed all of the baby chicks, resulting in fewer birds visiting our yards.

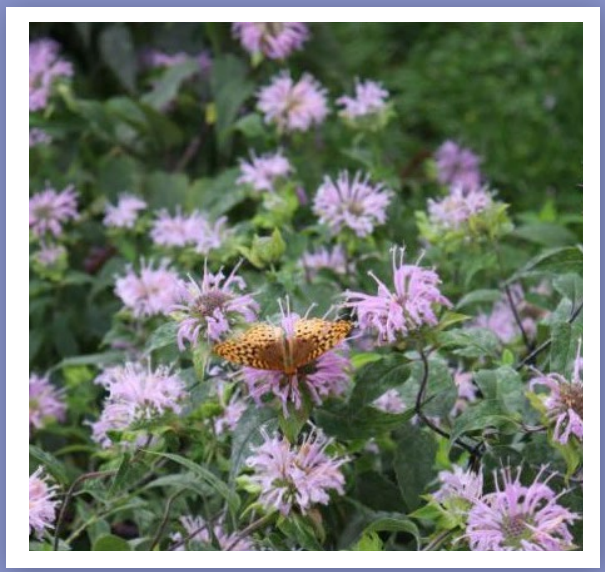
Once I realised the connection between pollinators and native plants, that was my 'ah ha' moment and I couldn't help but wonder why we all didn't know about this very important relationship. I felt as though I had just been told the world's best-kept secret on how to help pollinators and birds. This knowledge of native plants was the inspiration that motivated me to begin gardening with real purpose and to make a difference. My newly awakened motivation spurred me into action and my feelings of hopelessness about the fate of our planet were replaced with a sense of control and empowerment. I was on a mission!

The Covid lock-down enabled us all to make use of webinars and boy did I make use of webinars. And still do. They were the perfect vehicle for me to build my knowledge of native plants. The more I learned, the more I was excited to acquire these native plants and get planting.

BENEFITS OF NATIVE PLANTS

I was excited to learn all of the other benefits of native plants too. The long list includes: providing food and shelter for wildlife; no fertilizers required; no winter protection needed; water conservation; deep roots that facilitate carbon sequestration; long roots that hold soil in place and resist erosion; reduction of the urban heat island effect; helping fruits and vegetables to grow; and decreasing runoff

to mitigate flooding. Another bonus is the improvement of mental and emotional health.



TOP: Amerian goldfinch on wild bergamot *(Monarda fistulosa)*
BOTTOM: Great spangled fritillary on wild bergamot *(Monarda fistulosa)*

DISPELLING MYTHS

Some native plants are mistakenly described as 'invasive.' However, the term invasive is specific to non-native plants that spread uncontrollably in natural areas and out-compete native species, thereby causing damage to our ecosystem. Native plants, on the other hand, are indigenous to the natural ecosystem and so can never be considered invasive. There are indeed some natives that are prolific spreaders, but never invasive, and so would not be recommended for a smaller garden setting unless contained.

Another myth is that goldenrods cause allergies; they do not. Yet, they are often confused with ragweed which does cause allergies.

Some are convinced by the myth that wildflower gardens are messy, overgrown or unkempt. However, the plant choice, layout and aesthetic of a native plant garden depends on the personal taste and design of the gardener. You can choose to have a more formal design if that is your preference or an informal cottage style. It's entirely up to you.

GROWING CONDITIONS

Native plants have been here for thousands of years, prior to the settlement of Europeans. They are well adapted to thrive in all of the conditions of the Canadian climate. Some are even adapted to handle hot and drought-ridden conditions with compacted soil and road salt. These areas, sometimes referred to as "hellstrips," include boulevards or areas close to a curb or driveway. In addition, there are natives that do well in clay, sand or loam and alkaline or acidic soil. Whatever the condition, there's a plant for that - well, a few, really.

KEYSTONE NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

There are some native plants that are keystone species essential to the food web of ecosystems. The removal of keystone plants would diminish the abundance of many essential insects. There are a number of keystone native species in the Ottawa ecoregion but here are some of them: oaks, willows, goldenrods, asters and sunflowers. With this in mind, I incorporated some of the keystone species into my yard because they have the most impact to benefit Lepidoptera and bees.

BEFORE AND AFTER

We live in a detached home in Kanata with a 60 x 105 foot lot. Initially, the front and back yards were mostly lawn with a centre garden bed and border plantings of non-native/ornamental plants. Both yards looked presentable and within keeping of the neighbourhood. Unfortunately, it was a pollinator desert, whereas now, by shrinking the lawn and filling the space with native trees, shrubs, vines and other plants, the garden is a habitat for native pollinators and active with life.

PLANT IT AND THEY WILL COME

In May of 2020 I planted my first native plant into my garden. Then I wanted to attract monarch butterflies so I planted swamp milkweed in June 2020 and two months later I spotted the first monarch on this plant. I also saw a variety of bees on anise hyssop and black-eyed Susans. The following year, in 2021, I spotted a stunning hummingbird clearwing moth on wild bergamot, a painted lady butterfly on pearly everlasting, then a black swallowtail butterfly and great spangled fritillary butterflies on other native plants. In August 2021 I was thrilled to watch ruby-throated hummingbirds taking nectar from a giant blue hyssop. The abundance of pollinators in my yard was growing in leaps and bounds and soon I witnessed monarch caterpillars on common milkweed and then a chrysalis nearby. Not only was I attracting all these wonderful pollinators but, by 2022, I had two robin nests and a house wren family in my nesting box. Amazingly enough, I simply step outside my door to see all of this wonderful nature unfold before my eyes.

I have experienced a mindset shift with my relationship to insects. I used to cringe at the very sight of a bug, whereas now I usually have a camera at the ready to identify and record my observations. Later I submit my findings to citizen science projects such as www.iNaturalist.ca or www.bumblebeewatch.org

The environmental impact of native plants has transformed me from being an unenthused gardener into an aspiring steward of the land. There is a quote by John Janick that best describes how I feel about my newfound love and respect for native plants: **"There are many things I'd like to change in the world but feel powerless to do so. By planting native plants in my garden, I can make an immediate impact."**

ABOVE: Monarch butterfly on swamp milkweed *(Asclepias incarnata)*

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- *A Garden for the Rusty-Patched Bumblebee* by Lorraine Johnson and Sheila Colla
- *Bringing Nature Home* **and** *Nature's Best Hope* by Douglas W. Tallamy
- The Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library – *www.wildflowerseedlibrary.ca*
- Birds Canada – www.*birdscanada.org*
- eButterfly – www.*e-butterfly.org*

A NATIVE PLANT GARDEN FOR BIRDS

BY KATHY KEARNS

Attracting birds into your garden involves a multi-faceted approach that may require several years of garden design planning. The focus is creating a natural habitat including fruit- and seed-producing plants which will service a wide variety of bird species. It is important to include life-saving resources - food, water, shelter - to create a habitat for the birds throughout the year. The inclusion of plant life in the form of bushes, trees and flowers adds protection from predators and provides natural nesting spaces for raising the young. The addition of a water feature provides drinking and bathing needs.

Creating a habitat that promotes insect activity is probably the best way to attract birds. Most birds feed insects to their young rather than seeds and berries. Generally, to promote a diverse wildlife (including birds and insects) you should grow native plant species which provide specific nutrients that insects need for survival. Adding native plants to your garden increases insect habitation and therefore enhances the chance to attract insectivorous birds. Insectivorous birds include orioles, cardinals, chickadees, blue jays, woodpeckers, warblers, sapsuckers, vireos and others.

Choice of plants depends on where you live, the size of your backyard and your dedication to create a natural backyard for the benefit of nature. Native plants that naturally occur in your area have many benefits: they are beautiful, adapted to your soil and water conditions and don't need fertilizers and pesticides, which are harmful to birds. Native plants provide nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies and bees, seeds and fruit for birds and wildlife, and offer places for shelter.

The following is a list focusing on native shrubs and perennials that attract birds and insects into your garden.

VIRGINIA CREEPER *(PARTHENOCISSUS QUINQUEFOLIA)*
ZONES 3 - 9
Native to Ontario, this woody deciduous vine produces fruit which stays on the plant during the winter and provides a food source during those cold months of the year. It attracts a multitude of birds including robins, thrashers, warblers, waxwings, eastern bluebirds, scarlet tanagers, nuthatches, woodpeckers and blue jays among others. Caution is advised as the berries are moderately toxic to humans and dogs.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/red-leaves-fall-autumn-colors-7496359/ by Nennieinszweidrei on Pixabay

SERVICEBERRY *(AMELANCHIER SPP.)* ZONES 4 - 8

A small to mid-sized deciduous tree, native to North America. Early spring, showy white flowers attract insects and butterflies which in turn attract insectivorous birds. Early summer yields deep purple-red berries that are nutrient-dense and attract robins, waxwings, orioles, woodpeckers, chickadees, jays, mourning doves, vireos and finches. The tree also provides an attractive nesting environment for breeding birds.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/bird-cedar-waxwing-serviceberries-2451399/ by DivaDan on Pixabay

CHOKECHERRY *(PRUNUS VIRGINIANA)* ZONES 2 - 7

A small tree or bush that produces fragrant white flowers in racemes followed by bright red to black fruit. It is an important food source for native birds. It attracts tent caterpillars which in turn attract insectivorous birds. Fruit ripens from July to October and does not drop to the ground and therefore becomes a winter food source for many species of birds including robins, jays, thrushes, woodpeckers, wild turkey and scarlet tanagers.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/chokecherry-blossoms-and-leaves-2206607/ by leoleoboeo on Pixabay

HIGHBUSH CRANBERRY *(VIBURNUM TRILOBUM)* ZONES 2 - 7

A mid-sized shrub with white clusters of spring flowers, native to North America. It has rusty red fall foliage and berries that last well into winter. The fruit is fairly sour but sweetens up after a freeze/thaw. Attracts many birds including robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, finches and waxwings.

Photo by Tuula Talvila

NANNYBERRY *(VIBURNUM LENTAGO)* ZONES 2 - 7

Native to Ontario, nannyberry is an easy-to-grow shrub providing white spring flowers, burgundy foliage in the fall and blue berries that attract birds in the winter. Birds such as robins, bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds, cardinals, finches and waxwings love the fruit and also find shelter and nesting sites in the bush.

Image: https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/cedar-waxwing-chewing-nannyberry-fruit-gm183564339-27546511 by ca2hill

RED OSIER DOGWOOD *(CORNUS SERICEA)* ZONES 2 - 7

A loose, spreading, multi-stemmed deciduous shrub known for its colourful red branches. Clusters of white flowers in late May to early June attract insects and bees (that in turn attract insectivorous birds), followed by white to pale blue fruit. This fruit attracts numerous birds including robins, brown thrashers, cedar waxwings, eastern bluebirds, cardinals and the northern flicker among others. The shrub forms thickets which are used as nesting locations for migrating birds such as the goldfinch.

Image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Red-Osier_Dogwood_%283630083646%29.jpg by Jason Hollinger, CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

ELDERBERRY *(SAMBUCUS CANADENSIS)* ZONES 4 - 9

Native to North America, this deciduous shrub produces white flowers in the spring, attracting pollinating insects which in turn provides a food source in early spring for birds. Clumps of purplish-blue berries are produced in late spring to early fall and attract a large variety of birds including robins, warblers, orioles, goldfinches, waxwings and brown thrashers. The suckers of the plant provide protection and a good nesting habitat.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/plant-elder-sambucus-bloom-white-2425301/ by Oldiefan on Pixabay

JUNIPER - EASTERN RED CEDAR *(JUNIPERUS VIRGINIANA)* ZONES 3 - 9

Native to North America, the Eastern red cedar is a slow growing coniferous evergreen tree. It provides key sources of food and habitat for wintering birds - the thick foliage provides protection and nesting habitats. The fruit is not especially tasty. During the winter when there isn't much choice, however, they are devoured by many birds such as warblers, grosbeaks, jays, sapsuckers, woodpeckers, waxwings, robins and wild turkeys.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/juniper-berries-plant-fruits-tree-5831917/ by wal_172619 on Pixabay

WILD COLUMBINE *(AQUILEGIA CANADENSIS)* ZONES 3 - 7

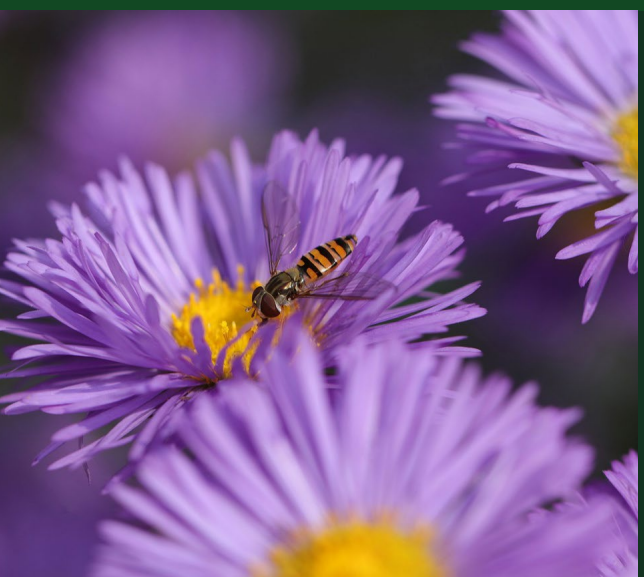
A native, herbaceous short-lived perennial, wild columbine has red and yellow flowers with nectar that attracts butterflies, hawk moths and bumblebees, and pollen for other bees which in turn attracts insect-loving birds. The flowers are an important food source in the spring for ruby-throated hummingbirds. This is a great addition to your shade garden.

Photo by Tuula Talvila

SUNFLOWERS *(HELIANTHUS SPP.)* ZONES 4 - 9

Having both annual and perennial varieties, sunflowers are the best overall flower choice for attracting birds. Native varieties include woodland sunflower *(Helianthus divaricatus)*, giant sunflower *(H. giganteus)*, pale-leaved sunflower *(H. strumosus)* and sunchoke *(H. tuberosus)*. They are excellent host plants that attract over 73 different butterflies and moths and a high number of insects - which in turn attracts insectivorous birds. Sunflowers support specialist pollinators, which means they are a host to native bees in North America that only collect pollen from one or two different plants. The seeds are favoured by a long list of birds including goldfinches, chickadees, pine siskins, downy woodpeckers, cardinals and many others.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/ladybug-insect-ladybird-beetle-3475779/ by Schwoaze on Pixabay



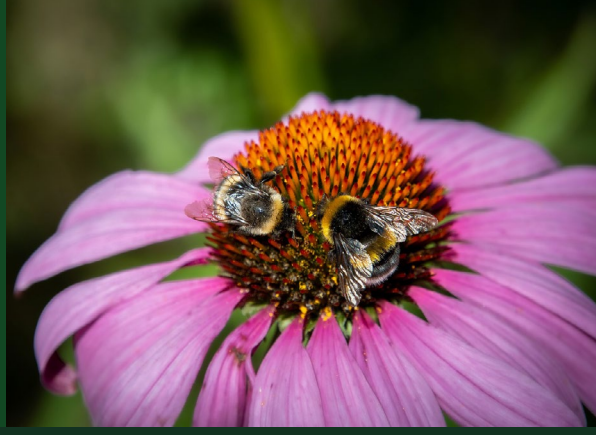
ASTERS *(SYMPHYOTRICHUM SPP.)* ZONES 3 - 8

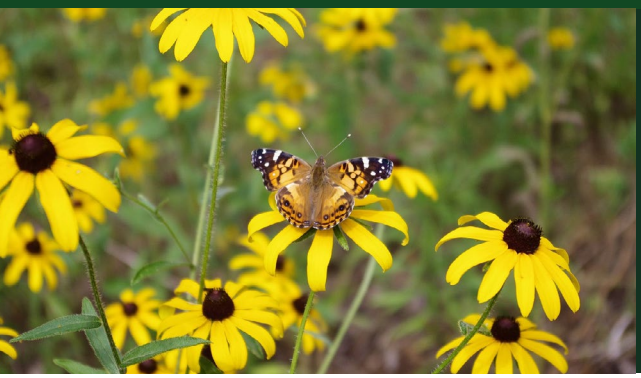
There are many native species of perennial aster in Ontario, including calico aster *(Symphyotrichum lateriflorum)* and New England aster *(S. novae-angliae)* among others, that are a welcome addition to the fall garden. The leaves of the aster are known to be a host plant to approximately 112 butterfly and moth species - by feeding on the caterpillars the energy is then moved up the food chain to birds and other wildlife. Providing host plants ensures birds have enough food to feed their young. Goldfinches, chickadees, blue jays, juncos, cardinals and nuthatches feed on the seed-filled centres during the winter. Asters also provide a food source for migrating monarch butterflies.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/flower-hoverfly-pollination-insect-6576831/ by Marjonhorn on Pixabay

PURPLE CONEFLOWER *(ECHINACEA PURPUREA)* ZONES 4 - 9
Purple coneflower is a herbaceous perennial, native to Eastern North America. It has a profusion of daisy-like purple flowers featuring drooping rays surrounding a spiny, dark brown central cone. They are rich in nectar which attracts butterflies, hummingbirds and insectivorous birds. If the flower heads are not removed in the fall, the blackened cones will be visited by birds such as goldfinches, blue jays and cardinals that feed off the seeds during the winter.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/purple-coneflower-flower-bumblebees-7702826/ by dendoktoor on Pixabay





BLACK-EYED SUSAN *(RUDBECKIA HIRTA)* ZONES 3 - 9
A member of the daisy family, rudbeckia are perennials, native to Ontario. The flowers bloom from summer to frost and attract butterflies, bees and other pollinators, beneficial insects and therefore insectivorous birds. They are also deer-resistant due to their rough leaves and stems. In the fall/winter, the dried seed heads attract goldfinches, chickadees, cardinals and nuthatches.

Image: https://pixabay.com/photos/butterfly-on-black-eyed-susan-3566965/ by MikeGoad on Pixabay

Birds and plants are dependent on each other for their mutual survival - plants depend on animals or insects for pollination and seed dispersal and birds depend on plants for their food supply. It's a two-way street. Birds can provide insect control by consuming pests at every stage of life - eggs, larvae and adults. Barn swallows and purple martins love mosquitoes; robins, chickadees and nuthatches love eating bugs and caterpillars from your plants and flowers. Blue jays and cardinals eat grasshoppers, beetles and spiders for their meals. Birds such as hummingbirds can also help with pollination as they fly between plants, transporting pollen from one to another.

Native plants are more than visually attractive - they are a crucial part of the ecosystem of your backyard. Ontario is home to a wide variety of native plants, many well suited to your home garden. Native plants grew here prior to European colonisation and have survived thousands of years and, therefore, are well adapted to the local weather conditions. Native plants are vital to local ecosystems, being the foundations of our natural communities and increasing biodiversity. They do the job of providing food and shelter to our native wild animals and those species that are becoming increasingly rare in the wild. They improve soil, air and water quality by removing toxins and pollution and generally can eliminate the need for chemical input such as pesticides and fertilizers that can cause harm to other life and can contaminate the water. So the next time you plant a tree or shrub in your yard, try a native variety!

RESOURCES

https://www.fernsfeathers.ca/blog-1-1/how-to-attract-backyard-birds-naturally#:~:text=Fruit%2Dbearing%20shrubs%20such%20as,nuts%2C%20berries%20and%20nesting%20habitat.
https://www.audubon.org/news/10-plants-bird-friendly-yard
https://www.readersdigest.ca/home-garden/gardening/bring-birds-butterflies-your-garden/
https://birdgardens.ca/
https://www.chinookobserver.com/sports/nature-notes-how-do-herbicides-affect-wildlife/article_d99e2e31-2e8e-5b2c-a279-a4718cbd90af.html
https://www.birdscanada.org/you-can-help/bird-gardens
https://www.birdsandblooms.com/gardening/growing-trees-shrubs-grasses/black-chokeberry/
https://choosenatives.org/articles/native-plants-nesting-birds-top-12-picks/
https://www.perkypet.com/articles/birdscaping-10-tips-for-how-to-attract-more-birds
https://blog.nwf.org/2022/11/when-we-save-wildlife-we-save-ourselves-2/
https://www.pathwaystoperennials.com/trees-and-shrubs-to-attract-birds
https://www.exploringbirds.com/posts/birds-attracted-to-serviceberry
https://www.thespruce.com/nine-species-serviceberry-trees-and-shrubs-3269674
https://www.inournature.ca/native-berry-producing-shrubs-for-birds#:~:text=Chokecherry%20feeds%20birds%20such%20as,is%20edible%20to%20humans%20too.
https://www.gardenia.net/plant/prunus-virginiana
http://www.northernontarioflora.ca/description.cfm?speciesid=1005371
https://www.fernsfeathers.ca/main-blog/highbush-cranberry-is-a-bird-magnet
https://www.paurbanforestryconsulting.com/the-best-trees-and-shrubs-for-bird-lovers-in-canada
https://onplants.ca/product/viburnum-lentago/
https://www.exploringbirds.com/posts/birds-attracted-to-red-twig-dogwood
https://www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/attracting-birds/plants-and-trees-that-attract-birds/dogwood-trees-attract-birds/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viburnum_lentago
https://www.provenwinners.com/plants/cornus/arctic-fire-red-red-osier-dogwood-cornus-stolonifera
https://www.nwf.org/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2006/Planting-Junipers-for-Wildlife#:~:text=Those%20juniper%20berries%20are%20also,tailed%20grouse%20devour%20the%20fruit.
http://ontariotrees.com/main/species.php?id=2051
https://onplants.ca/product/eastern-red-cedar/
https://onplants.ca/product/aquilegia-canadensis/
https://www.gardenia.net/plant/aquilegia-canadensis-canadian-columbine
https://www.exploringbirds.com/posts/birds-attracted-to-sunflower
https://www.inournature.ca/sunflowers-of-ontario#woodland sunflower
https://www.gardenia.net/plant/echinacea-purpurea
https://www.birdsandblooms.com/gardening/attracting-butterflies/attract-birds-and-butterflies-with-coneflowers/
https://www.exploringbirds.com/posts/promoting-insect-habitats-for-birds
https://www.inournature.ca/best-native-asters-for-your-garden
https://www.exploringbirds.com/posts/birds-attracted-to-black-eyed-susan

OHS DIRECTORS COLUMN

The first in a regular series of columns on gardens and gardening by members of the OHS Board of Directors. This is an opportunity to get to know more about the people on the Board who direct the affairs of the Ottawa Horticultural Society.

MY NATURE-FRIENDLY GARDEN

BY JULIANNE LABRECHE

One of the best parts of retirement is having more time to spend with friends in nature. Most Wednesday mornings, if the weather cooperates, my friend Pat and I head out to explore local nature trails.

TOP: Julianne and her friend Pat picking sunflowers
BOTTOM: Bumblebee collecting nectar from native beebalm *(Monarda fistulosa)*
Photo credit: Julianne Labreche

In the driver's seat of her little green Volkswagen adorned with pink daisies and ladybug decals, Pat steers us down the back country roads in search of hiking trails around Ottawa. Once we find them, we always enjoy our walks, pausing sometimes to learn more about local native plants.

On those really hot summer days, we take a different direction, and head to local garden centres to browse and buy plants. As well as hikers, we both are avid gardeners.

In recent years, it has been gratifying to find a few more native plant species, like those on our hikes, available for sale at these places. I find them too at plant sales and through small specialty growers. It seems to me that gardening trends are changing. Nature is making a comeback in our gardens, inspired by recent trends such as wildscaping and naturalistic garden design.

Native plants play a special role in nature, with some acting as host plants for native insects. The classic example, of course, is the monarch butterfly and its dependence on milkweed. Introducing native plants back into gardens provides a boost for biodiversity, which could certainly use a little help these days, especially with many insect and bird species dwindling across North America.

On my own property, I used to garden for beauty. For many years, I delighted in new species of daylilies, peonies and iris. These days, I still garden for beauty but for biodiversity too. My garden is a mixture of non-natives and natives. Gradually, over time, new native species are being introduced into my garden beds. Some non-natives are being replaced. Invasive non-native plants are being removed. A few years ago, I took out the entire front lawn and made a big pollinator garden. The backyard is slowly becoming a refuge for birds, with more native trees and shrubs added each year.

For me, being nature-friendly bumps gardening up a notch, from enjoyable to essential in the

big scheme of nature. My interests are also expanding, wanting to learn more about native bee and butterfly species, pollinators and birds that visit my garden. There is something profoundly moving about watching a monarch butterfly land on a spotted joe-pyeweed *(Eutrochium maculatum)* on a hot summer's day, or seeing bumblebees collect nectar on black-eyed Susan *(Rudbeckia hirta)* and blanket flower *(Gaillardia)* or being transfixed by fireflies aglow in the dark. These are creatures that I saw often when I was a child during holidays at summer cottages, or camping. Today, I am seeing them less frequently. Scientists report these same observations at conferences and in scientific journals.

These days, I have decided to open up my garden to wildlife, providing habitat and water. Even though I live in suburbia, somehow it is comforting to think that I can make a small difference. Our natural world is increasingly threatened for many reasons, including climate change and habitat loss. Like many of us living in this fast-paced, technology-driven society, I figure nature can do with more friends too.

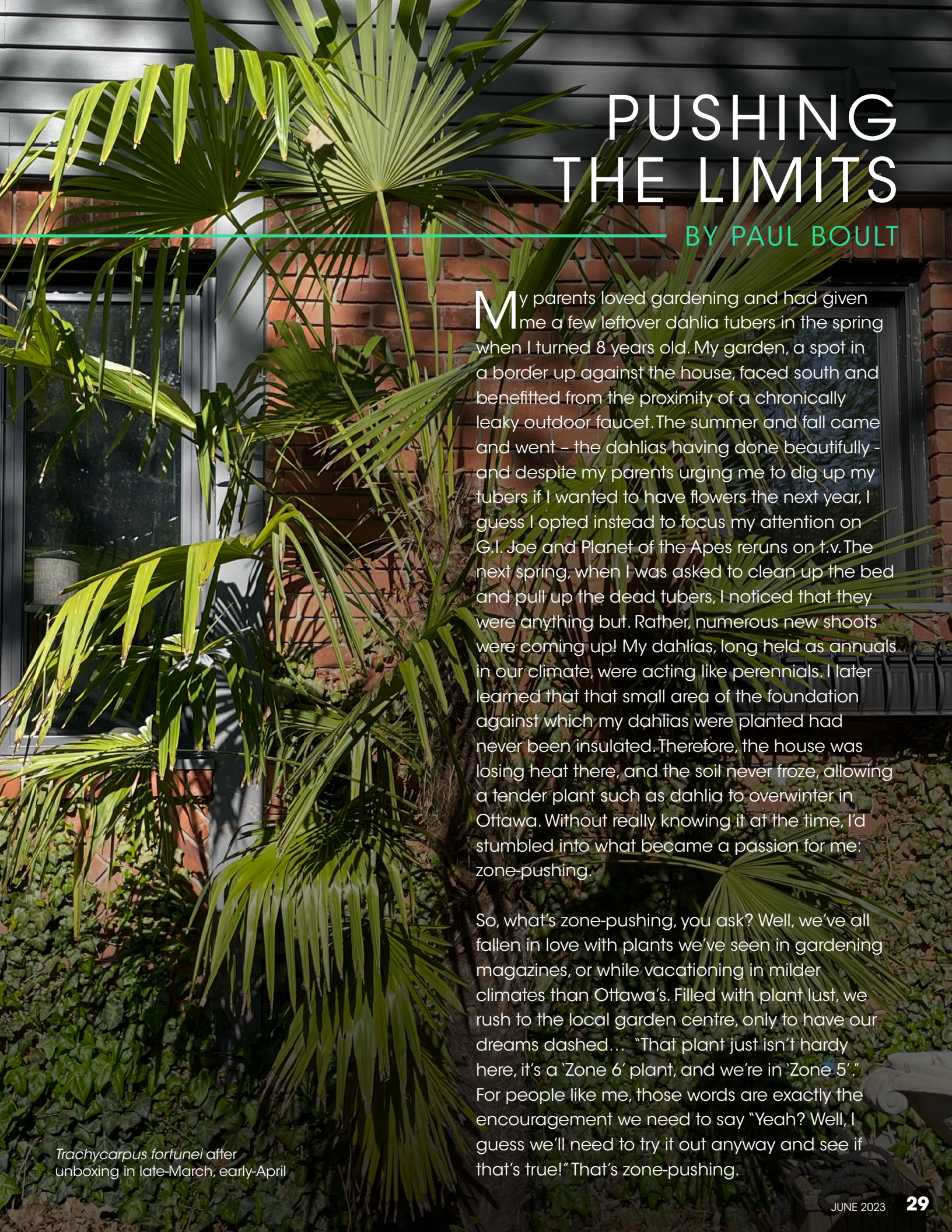
The look of my garden is changing. Now it includes part of a dead tree, called a snag, to welcome chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers. There are logs and bush piles for overwintering mason bees, and other native bee species. The garden looks a bit messy in spring, not like the old days when I did a thorough fall cleaning. Now, I wait until the ground thaws and the pollinators emerge to tidy up. Instead of deadheading and throwing everything in leaf and yard bags, fallen leaves and dead plant stems remain. The garden is evolving, and so is this gardener.

I saw my very first ruby-throated hummingbird a few summers ago, attracted by the native cardinal flower *(Lobelia cardinalis)* that I planted. In spring, I watch for bumblebee queens, larger than worker bees. There is always something to see, hear, feel or smell in my wildlife garden. I've become a little more relaxed as a gardener – dare say, a lazy gardener. Instead of mowing grass, more time is spent just observing and taking photographs. In fact, there isn't much grass left, just a small patch in the backyard where my dog used to sleep contentedly under the old crabapple tree. The electric mower was sold. Now it takes the push mower about ten minutes to trim the backyard turf.

One of the pleasures of joining any horticultural society, including the Ottawa Horticultural Society (OHS), are opportunities to meet gardeners with different interests. Because of the OHS, I am learning more about vegetable gardening, rock gardening, flower arranging, fruit growing, gardening on balconies and in small spaces and more. But these days, it is the flying, chirping, crawling and creeping parts of the garden that seem to most interest me, learning more about critical relationships between flora and fauna in nature. Like good friends, these are plant relationships on a deeper level that hopefully will endure for future generations of gardeners, and hikers, to come.

(Julianne Labreche is current President of the Ottawa Horticultural Society. She is certified as a Master Gardener, Master Naturalist and Certified Pollinator Steward. She is also the 2023 recipient of Ecology Ottawa's first-ever Nature Champion Award.)

ABOVE: Monarch butterfly on joe-pyeweed *(Eutrochium maculatum) Photo credit: Julianne Labreche*



PUSHING THE LIMITS

BY PAUL BOULT

My parents loved gardening and had given me a few leftover dahlia tubers in the spring when I turned 8 years old. My garden, a spot in a border up against the house, faced south and benefitted from the proximity of a chronically leaky outdoor faucet. The summer and fall came and went – the dahlias having done beautifully - and despite my parents urging me to dig up my tubers if I wanted to have flowers the next year, I guess I opted instead to focus my attention on G.I. Joe and Planet of the Apes reruns on t.v. The next spring, when I was asked to clean up the bed and pull up the dead tubers, I noticed that they were anything but. Rather, numerous new shoots were coming up! My dahlias, long held as annuals in our climate, were acting like perennials. I later learned that that small area of the foundation against which my dahlias were planted had never been insulated. Therefore, the house was losing heat there, and the soil never froze, allowing a tender plant such as dahlia to overwinter in Ottawa. Without really knowing it at the time, I'd stumbled into what became a passion for me: zone-pushing.

So, what's zone-pushing, you ask? Well, we've all fallen in love with plants we've seen in gardening magazines, or while vacationing in milder climates than Ottawa's. Filled with plant lust, we rush to the local garden centre, only to have our dreams dashed… "That plant just isn't hardy here, it's a 'Zone 6' plant, and we're in 'Zone 5'." For people like me, those words are exactly the encouragement we need to say "Yeah? Well, I guess we'll need to try it out anyway and see if that's true!" That's zone-pushing.

Trachycarpus fortunei after unboxing in late-March, early-April

But pushing the traditionally held hardiness of a plant requires a bit of mental preparation. To begin with, like most things in life, zone-pushing is an exercise in managing expectations. It's about figuring out why you're doing it in the first place, and how ready you are to accept the results. In my case, I'm doing it purely for experimentation purposes and to see what happens. Despite appreciating a plant for all its qualities, it still means I'm ready for any outcome and won't be (too) disappointed if a plant doesn't thrive (and yes, I've lost way more plants than I'll even admit to myself!). But if my goal was to try replicating what I saw in another climate ("I loved the rhododendrons in Victoria and want to grow some here") or grow a plant for purely sentimental reasons, that would probably mean disappointment with a non-thriving plant. It also means being willing to go the extra mile.

Although there are many measurements for successful zone-pushing, here in Ottawa, it almost always boils down to getting things through our winters. And yes, outside in the ground.

But if, for whatever the motivation, you're interested in zone-pushing that unusual plant, here are a few of the methods I've used in my Canadian Zone 5b garden:

PEGGING TO THE GROUND AND MULCHING

I use this method on plants that have flexible woody top growth. By carefully bending the branches to the ground and finding a way to keep them there (either by using a tent peg, a log, a stone, etc.) and mulching (leaves, pine needles, evergreen boughs), I make sure the plant stays protected from the worst of our temperatures, thus increasing its chances of survival. With our dependable snow cover every winter, I've been able to verify that under optimal conditions, temperatures at ground level can be -3°C while the air above is -25°C. This method works great for preserving last-year tissue on *Hydrangea macrophylla*, which blooms on old wood. I also use it for figs (Z7), aucuba (Z7), some more tender wisteria varieties (Z6), a *Sequoiadendron giganteum* 'Pendula' (Z7), dwarf pomegranate (Z7), bamboos (Z6) and some of the medium-sized cryptomeria (Z6b).

TOP: *Hydrangea macrophylla*
BOTTOM: *Sequoiadendron giganteum* 'Pendula'

BOXING

This method works great for larger and stiffer plants that wouldn't bend to the ground without breaking. It involves adding some artificial heat (in this case stringing the inside of a Styrofoam-insulated box with a plumbing heating cable). The insulation, combined with the minimal heat source allows the inside to remain between -10°C and 0°C, thus avoiding the worst of the cold. My 12 year-old Chusan palm *(Trachycarpus fortunei)* (Z8), which is hardy to -18°C, has done very well with this method. It is now over 4 metres tall and growing by leaps and bounds. My main challenge is having to increase the size of the box every year – and of my stepladder for fall and spring installation! I've also strung one of the heating cables inside a large rose cone to protect a crape myrtle (Z7).

SITING

As I learned with the dahlias of my youth, some plants just do well because of siting. My Japanese fibre bananas *(Musa basjoo)* (Z6) receive no more than a heavy layer of mulch where they are growing – against a south-facing wall. Each year, they reach heights of at least 3 metres. The same applies to a *Passiflora incarnata* (Z6) that re-sprouts from the roots every year to produce many flowers and fruit.

SNOW

The 'white stuff' we gardeners love to hate (because we can't garden when it's still on the ground!) is actually pure gold when it comes to zone-pushing. And how fortunate are we to live where it can be relied upon almost every winter, through the coldest months. Snow is one of nature's more efficient insulators, and we have it in droves! After a snow storm, I like to go out and shovel more of it onto tender plants. Plants near pathways has enabled me to combine snow-clearing with plant protection. My *Prunus laurocerasus* (Z6-7), aucuba (Z7), evergreen azaleas (Z6-7), and *Tetrapanax* (Z7) have all succeeded well beyond their documented zones just with a healthy layer of snow. One caveat is that snow does pick up some extra weight once it starts melting and has the potential of damaging some plants.

Obviously, this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to zone-pushing, and many other cultural adjustments (including soil amendment and sun exposure to name but a few) will help a plant survive our winters. But one thing is for sure: there's nothing more exciting than that spring day when you're finally able to check in on your plants and to discover you were able to push a plant into a colder and harsher zone.

TOP: Bamboo *(Fargesia nitida)*
MIDDLE: *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Compacta'
BOTTOM: *Tetrapanax papyrifer*

CARDOON CHRONICLE

BY TUULA TALVILA

THE GOAL - FLOWER OF *CYNARA CARDUNCULUS*, THE CARDOON

I'm on a plant mission. My goal? Get a cardoon to bloom! I don't remember where or when I first saw cardoons, but they're my kind of plant: a bit uncommon, with big, dramatic, spiky leaves and oversized thistle-like purple flowers. A few years ago, I bought some seeds and had a beautiful potted plant on my deck all summer. I knew it wouldn't bloom that year because they are biennials so I figured I'd just keep it indoors for the winter and the following summer – ta da! – I would have a two-year-old plant that would bring forth gorgeous cardoon flowers. It hasn't quite worked like that...

YEAR 1: 2020

My first plant grown from seed made a great foliage plant in a large pot on our deck. I wasn't sure yet how I was going to overwinter it, but I was looking forward to flowers the following summer. (To keep track of different plants, I've retroactively named them according to their year of birth; this first plant is C-20.)

C-20 in its first summer

YEAR 2: 2021

For the winter, I kept plant C-20 indoors but in a cool, somewhat dark corner. By March it was pretty spindly looking but once it started to get some spring sunlight, it started growing more. Just as spring was getting underway and I was thinking I could put it outside soon, it succumbed to an infestation of fungus gnats. That was a learning experience: I had no idea they could kill a plant.

Plant C-20, somewhat spindly looking after a cool, dark winter, shortly before it died.

In spring, I started seeds for the 2021 generation. Lesson learned from year 1: use a smaller pot so it's easier to bring inside for the winter. Plant C-21 was much smaller at the end of the summer though, probably because it was in a much smaller pot than C-20. I kept it as a non-dormant houseplant all winter.

C-21 in October 2021 before I brought it in for the winter.

Nice bluish, furry foliage with ladybug nymph.

YEAR 3: 2022

I transplanted C-21 into a big pot for the summer and it grew to a good size. As the months went by, I kept looking for a flower stalk to pop up but was sadly disappointed. No flower despite being two years old. At some point during the summer, black aphids moved in. I sprayed the leaves with soapy water. That, plus ladybug nymphs, seemed to cure the problem, but it was ugly for a while.

C-21 making a statement on the deck in August 2022.

Yearling C-22 (left) and second year plant C-21 (right) in November 2022.

YEAR 4: 2023 – WILL THIS BE THE BIG ONE?
Plant C-21 spent winter 2022-23 in the shed but not protected from freezing temperatures and, as expected, didn't survive (I was too busy in the fall to do proper garden clean-up so there were some casualties). One-year old C-22 hid in the cold, dark jam cupboard in the basement for the winter with very occasional, minimal watering. I put it outside in the shed for some cold but not freezing days in April. By May of 2023 it had new growth coming – looks like about four 'stems'!

C-22's new growth, with multiple growing points

Will C-22 bloom in 2023, its second year? Did it get enough of a cold spell for it to think it had a winter?

New seeds, new seedlings, with a new trick up my sleeve: Following some advice from online, I tried to trick this year's seedlings into thinking they had had a winter so that they might bloom this year. I put half of the seedlings in the fridge for some days and the shed for some more, but the temperature was fluctuating so much in April that I'm not sure I hit the right range while they were in the shed. Supposedly the ideal temperature for this is 2-10°C. Very exciting, but will it work?

Summer's coming and I look forward to nurturing these two generations of cardoons throughout the months, with an ever-hopeful eye checking for flower stalks. Stay tuned: in the fall, I'll let you know what happened. Fingers crossed!

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.

PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSIONS TO:
James Robertson at jamesrossrobertson@gmail.com

The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the individual authors. They do not purport to reflect the position of the OHS or its members.

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/**

EDITOR:
James R. Robertson

DESIGN & LAYOUT:
Kat B. Design Studio
www.katbdesign.com

EDITING / PROOFREADING:
Lori Gandy
Tuula Talvila

CONTRIBUTORS:
Paul Boult
Rob Brandon
Nina Foster-MacLaren
Lori Gandy
Kathy Kearns
Julianne Labreche
Rebecca Last
Nancy McDonald
Ottawa Public Library
Tuula Talvila

OHS COMMUNITY

Follow us on our Facebook page
GET IN TOUCH OR CHECK OUT ALL OUR EVENTS AND NEWS.

Visit Ottawahort.org
STAY UP TO DATE ON CURRENT EVENTS IN THE OHS OR VISIT THE ARCHIVES.