OTTAWA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2022

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SUMMER COMPANIONS

GROWING SUNFLOWERS THIS SUMMER

by Julianne Labreche

Standing tall against the bright blue sky, big yellow sunflowers are the showy giants of the flower world. They're bold and beautiful, reminiscent of old-fashioned country charm. There are so many reasons for Ottawa gardeners to love sunflowers, especially this growing season.

That's why the Ottawa Horticultural Society wants to encourage everyone to grow sunflowers this year. To inspire you, here are ten good reasons to grow sunflowers somewhere in your garden, or on a sunny patio or deck this summer.

1. NATIONAL PLANT OF UKRAINE

The sunflower (or 'soniashnyk' in Ukrainian) is the national flower of Ukraine. It has been grown on the country's central and eastern steppes since the middle of the eighteenth century. The national flag of Ukraine is yellow and blue, just like sunflowers reaching to the sky. These days, the Ukrainian people, as well as others around the world, see this flower as a symbol of peace and hope while the war there drags on.

2. FASCINATING FLOWERS

Sunflowers are fascinating flowers. Each sunflower, it turns out, is actually thousands of tiny flowers amassed together in order to better attract pollinators. Young sunflower buds and blossoms turn to follow the sun. At sunrise, they face east and gradually, by sunset, will turn west. At night, they revert back to the east again, ready for the sun's rays the next day. This ability of the plant to track the sun is called 'heliotropism.' No wonder the French word for sunflower is *tournesol*, which translated means "turns with the sun."

3. EASY TO GROW

Apart from the challenge that squirrels love sunflower seeds too, sunflowers are easy to germinate and grow quickly. Annual sunflowers *(Helianthus annuus)* can be planted once the danger of spring frost has passed, after the soil has warmed. Direct sowing is preferable to transplanting because their long taproots do not like to be disturbed. Sunflowers are heavy feeders, so soil needs to be nutrient-

rich. Additions of compost over the growing season will help. Sunflowers need about six to eight hours of direct sun. Most mature in 80-95 days.

4. FOOD FOR PEOPLE AND BIRDS

We grow sunflowers not only as ornamentals but also because they are a source of food. Their seeds contain many healthy fats, fibre and vitamins. In many countries, especially Ukraine, sunflower oil is an important commercial crop. We enjoy sunflower seeds as a nutritious snack. They are used in cooking and are made into spreads, including as an alternative to peanut butter.

Many bird species love sunflower seeds too, sold both shelled and unshelled to attract birds to our gardens. If you grow them, leave some for the birds.

5. NATIVE TO NORTH AMERICA

The common sunflower, *Helianthus annuus*, is native to North America. Indigenous people grew sunflowers long before corn and beans were introduced. The plant offered food, medicines and dyes. Sunflower oils were extracted for the hair and to treat coughs and sunstroke and as a snakebite treatment. Flower petals and pollen were used to make dyes used in clothing, baskets and face paint.

6. DIFFERENT COLOURS AND SHAPES

Check any seed catalogue and discover a vast array of sunflower shapes, sizes and colours. Shorter sunflower varieties work well in planters and containers while mammoth varieties are better suited to large spaces in the garden. Typically, we think of sunflowers as being yellow. However, sunflowers these days are available in red, orange, pink, burgundy and other shades.

7. INSPIRING ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

Many artists over the years have been inspired to paint sunflowers, including the famous Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh. These days, artists in many parts of Canada are painting sunflowers as a sign of solidarity and support for Ukraine, donating their art.

Within the OHS, members are encouraged to photograph sunflowers this summer, including any plants that you grow yourself, and enter them for judging in the 2022 OHS photography competition.

8. BEAUTY IN BOUQUETS
There is always joy in receiving a simple bouquet of fresh-cut, local flowers. This summer and early fall, yellow sunflowers tied with a blue ribbon could be a lovely gift to take to a Ukrainian friend or relative or as a welcoming gift to an immigrant newly arrived from Ukraine. While monetary donations, food, medical supplies and clothing are shipped overseas, closer to home, a simple bouquet of sunflowers may bring some small comfort.

9. ROOTS RECLAIM CONTAMINATED SOIL
Sunflowers have an amazing capacity to remove harmful toxins from the soil. This process is called 'phytoremediation.' Some plants, including sunflowers, are able to remove, stabilize or destroy contaminants in soil, air and water. One of the most notable examples was in Ukraine when sunflowers were grown in the contaminated soil following the Chernobyl disaster.

10. SUNFLOWERS MAKE YOU SMILE
Sunflowers bring out the crowds and our cell phones to post selfies on social media. These big, beautiful flowers make people smile. What better reason to grow sunflowers this summer than to cheer up family, friends and garden visitors.

In a world that may feel – some days, at least – as though hope is lost, sunflowers seem to radiate hope. Surely, that is worth the small price of a package of seeds.

All the photos are of annual sunflowers, *Helianthus annuus.*
Cover photo and page 4: Julianne Labreche. Remaining photos by Mary Ann Van Berlo.

BUILDING A SOLARIUM

by John Waddington

Have you ever considered adding a solarium to your house? These days it will cost a bundle and, whether done right or wrong, you will have to live with the result. To date, I have built three: two in Saskatchewan and one in Kelowna, and I have some opinions, biases, and suggestions (warnings?) for you.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Will the solarium be an extension of a room in your home? Or an extra room in the home? Or more like a greenhouse attached to your home? How big should it be – a solarium with a house attached? OK, let's be realistic: as big as you can afford while fitting in with the aesthetics of the house design. After completion it will look bare with only a few small plants in a corner, but it is surprising how fast plants grow, and how many new ones you accumulate, and how soon your solarium is not big enough.

***A warning:** Have you any idea how messy plants are? The occasional dropped leaf or faded flower of the few plants you have around the house now is absolutely no introduction to the mass of litter a couple of hundred plants can dump on your floor, along with dirt from plants fallen or knocked over, and water seeping out of pots or spilled while watering them. **Another warning:** The more closely your solarium is integrated into the rest of your home, the fewer options you will have to control the usual assortment of pests.*

THE FLOOR

Consider the floor. Water weighs 62.5 lbs per cubic foot (1 kg/ litre). Wet soil can weigh up to 100 lbs per cubic foot (1.6 kg/L). If you are building with a full basement under the solarium, put the joists (10 x 2's) on one foot

Photos this page and next are of our solarium in Kelowna, BC.

(30 cm) centres with tongue-and-groove 3/4 inch plywood as sub-floor, glued and screwed down. On ours, we put ½ inch (1 cm) thick unglazed quarry tile. Our second solarium had matte finish tiles on a concrete floor laid on 2 inch (5 cm) styrofoam. All tiles mark up with plant pot rings, scuffs, general dirt, etc. but with cleaning and general wear, the marks fade over time. Watering for both was the kitchen sink and a watering can. In Kelowna, we laid concrete bricks on a sand base, and watered with a hose. However, ants nested beneath the floor. You can defeat them with borax eventually. Termites in Ontario? We had them in BC.

WALLS AND WINDOWS

When you plan the superstructure think HUMIDITY. A good, tight vapour barrier is essential. If you are adding to your present house, how good is your present vapour barrier? And when your humidity is 40-60% and the temperature outside is -20, you will get condensation and ice on double-glazed windows, guaranteed. The water will collect on the sills and rot wood frames. Worse, it can break the seal on the glass units. To stop this, run a bead of silicone around the inside of your windows. Clean off mold with bleach from time to time. Triple glazing will help for humidity control, but on really cold nights I would expect some condensation.

Interior paint does not stand up well to water splashes: bathroom paint is better. I haven't tried exterior paint. I have used cedar wood in all my solariums because of its rot-resisting properties. I finished it with either varathane or spar varnish. Both have worked well.

THE ROOF

Glass absorbs about 5% of light hitting it perpendicularly, per layer, so double-pane windows let about 90% of light in. More is lost if the light hits the glass at an angle, which it is bound to do most of the time. It is reasonable to assume that clear plastics have much the same transmission properties. On a roof, glass must be tempered. In Saskatchewan, I used patio door units (3 x 6 ft, 91 x 183 cm), on 2 x 6 cedar frames. On a sloping roof, you need wedges at the bottom and sticky tape on the frame with a fibre or plastic string in it to support the glass without squeezing all the

seal out. Use lots of roofing cement around the flashing and lots of black silicone around the glass edges.

In Kelowna we used triple-layer polycarbonate for our roof windows. Polycarbonate is light, strong and resistant to ultraviolet but has a high coefficient of expansion. It is recommended not to use pieces wider than 2 ft (60 cm). In our solarium, the roof units were about 4 m long, so the flashing had to allow for an inch (3 cm) of change between winter and summer. When it rains, polycarbonate is a lot noisier than glass. These days, very good commercial units are available in all sizes.

HEATING AND COOLING

Think about heating in winter. Will your current furnace have the extra capacity to warm your solarium? Do you wish to control the temperature differently there? Add insulation where possible.

Think about cooling in summer. You need shading on the roof windows, brisk air movement through the room, and water evaporation. In Saskatchewan, thin 50% metallised cloth inside the roof windows was only moderately useful. In Kelowna, we had 50% shade cloth on the outside, rolled up and down by a motor. The various awning companies in town can give you a price. It worked well. The sash cord that pulled the cloth down needs replacing about every five years. Brisk air flow through the solarium will lower temperature towards ambient outside. Automatic roof vents are highly desirable. Fans are noisy. If you can, mount them outside to pull air out so that most of the noise will be outside. A couple of quiet fans inside are tolerable. I doubt if evaporative cooling will work well in Ontario, and air conditioning will be horrendously expensive.

BUILD YOUR DREAM!

Do build your dream solarium, and with some forethought and planning it will be a delight. Plants are a pleasure to have around us, green and flowering, during those cold winter days when we cannot garden outside.

For a longer version of this article, send an email: johnnchar@bell.net. And - Good Gardening.

The Book Nook

30 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 materials for OHS members. This list includes new titles added to the OPL collection.

Among the titles for this issue are books, in English and French, relating to:

- Regenerative and sustainable gardening
- Creating a garden for birds, bees and butterflies
- Plant and garden science
- Seasonal and cut flowers
- History of fruit
- Acidic soil gardening
- Care and propagation of houseplants
- Vegetable gardening in small or urban spaces
- Container gardening
- Canada's Local Gardener magazine
- Healing gardens
- Greenhouses

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/2097021939_ottawa_horticultural_society_summer_titles

A GOOD READ

by Nancy McDonald

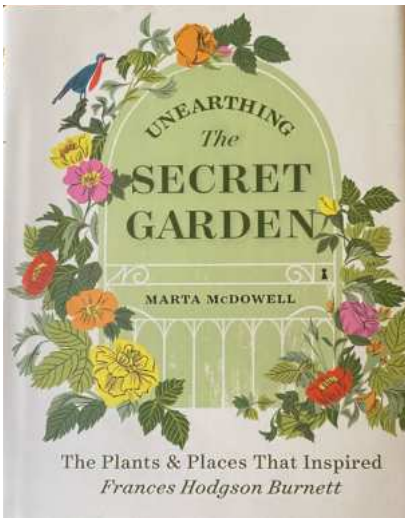
BOOK REVIEW: UNEARTHING THE SECRET GARDEN

by Marta McDowell

If you enjoyed reading *The Secret Garden* as a child, may I suggest Marta McDowell's new book *Unearthing the Secret Garden*. I heard Marta's interview with garden writer Margaret Roach, and her description of the book as "the plants and places that inspired Frances Hodgson Burnett." My interest was piqued!

Before opening Marta's book, I decided to first read *The Secret Garden* as sixty plus years had passed since my first reading. To say this rereading was a delight is an understatement. I was reintroduced to the children in the book, Mary, Colin, Dickon, and Martha. Mr. Weatherstaff, the gardener with his Yorkshire dialect, captivated me with the word "daffydowndillys." And his description to Mary of the smell of the spring earth she was noticing: "That's the good rich earth. It's in good humour making to grow things." No wonder I loved the book in my childhood - it was speaking to the gardener to be.

The author, Marta McDowell, was new to me but may be familiar to Ottawa residents as her books are available at the Ottawa Public Library. She teaches landscape history and horticulture at the New York Botanical Garden and does consulting work for private clients and public gardens. Her previous books of authors and their gardens are *Emily Dickinson's Gardening Life, The World of Laura Ingalls Wilder* and *Beatrix Potter's Gardening Life.* Marta looks for the connection between the trowel and the pen. She is a popular lecturer whose talks can be found on YouTube videos.



One of the pictures in Marta's book, and readily found on the internet, is Frances Hodgson Burnett in a designer Worth gown; I wondered if she really was a lady who gardened. I found Frances's life story remarkable. She was born in 1849 in Manchester, England, to comfortable family circumstances. Her father died when Frances was four years old, however, and their economic conditions changed dramatically. Eventually these conditions forced them to move to Tennessee in 1865 where an uncle promised help. Unfortunately, his fortunes had changed, and the family fended for themselves with brothers finding work and both Frances and her mother teaching. They were almost destitute. Tragedy struck again when Frances was 19 and her mother died.

Frances always had a great imagination and could see herself as a writer. Writing was to be her way out of poverty. She and her sisters

picked grapes to sell for postage money to mail her first story, which was published in 1868 by *Godey's Lady's Book*. Frances did not come from a wealthy family or marry into wealth. Marta's book allows us to see an independent and self-made woman who, once she started at age 19, wrote every day to support herself and her family. Frances suffered personal losses in her life and, unheard for her time, divorced twice which caused scandal. Initially her writing was for adults. The success of her first children's publication, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885), opened the way for *A Little Princess* (1905) and her greatest triumph, *The Secret Garden*, in 1911.

Marta tells us in detail of the three gardens Frances created. The first began in 1898 when Frances sublet her London home to lease one in the country. Thus, she came to Maytham Hall in Kent and her gardening life began at 50 years of age. Once she started, she went full tilt, reading books, talking to gardeners and finding the local vicar knowledgeable on roses. She engaged a gardener, learned the importance of manure, deadheading, dividing and pruning. It is wonderful to read Marta's account of Frances in her Maytham garden with her big hats and garden attire. Frances wrote in her rose garden, entertained largely, and it became her refuge from the notoriety of her second divorce. Maytham has often been described as the most famous garden in literature. It had a brick-walled kitchen garden, and one quickly realizes that much of *The Secret Garden* comes from inspiration at Maytham. Her roses were both celebrated at Maytham and in *The Secret Garden*.

Frances encountered many English robins at Maytham. English robins are smaller than ours in North America. According to Bird Spot, a UK organization, English robins are often associated with gardeners, even learning their schedules and following them as they dig. All the better to score a tasty treat! It is not surprising then that one featured prominently in *The Secret Garden*.

In 1907, the owner decided to sell Maytham Hall, and Frances moved back to America where her son Vivian lived. With her son's help, she built a new home at Plandome Park, New York and started her second garden on this 3-acre property. Garden writers at the time described it as "a comfortable rambling house surrounded by gardens." This garden was created using varied colour and texture. Delphiniums were prominent in *The Secret Garden* and at Plandome. I will entice you to read Marta's book to discover why delphiniums were both her greatest success and greatest failure. As gardeners we can relate with Frances that everything else stops when the seed catalogues arrive and planning for the garden season starts. Marta tells us Frances was not a plant snob and we can see that for ourselves with the list of flowers, fruits and trees Marta has compiled through research and generously added to the book. *The Secret Garden* was written at Plandome. Marta quotes one reviewer saying, "it is so quietly entertaining that you'll hate to hear your mother call you to supper."

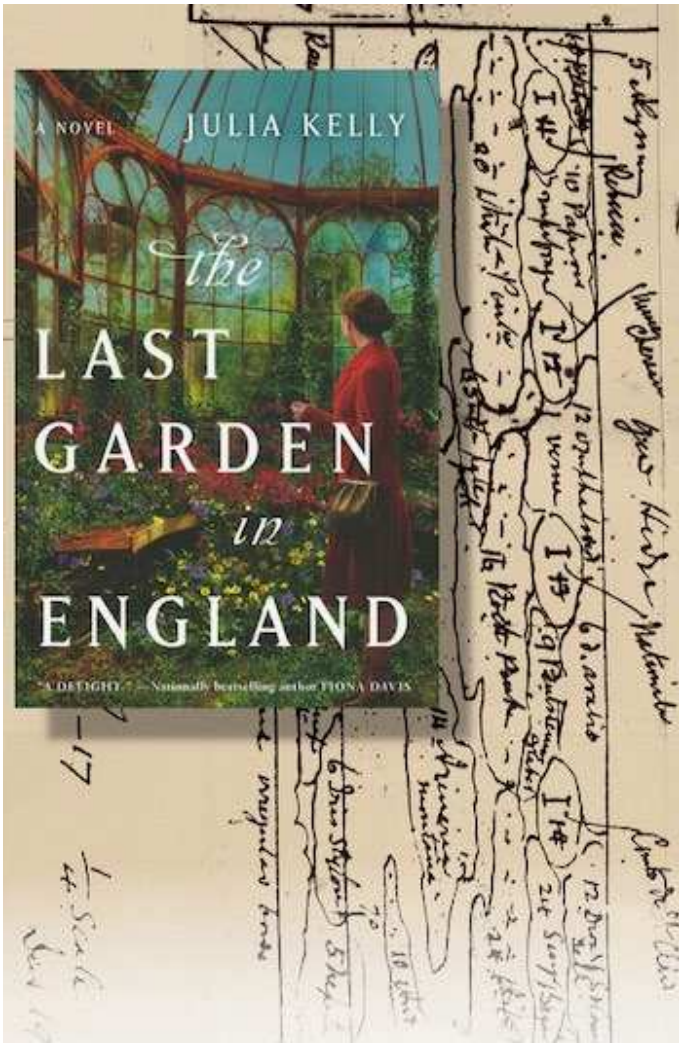
Frances's third garden was at Clifton Heights in Bermuda where she travelled during the winters from 1912-1920 to escape the cold. Frances described the soil as "wretched" and began adding manure as she had first learned in England. She grew to love the brilliant colours of hibiscus, crotons and red amaryllis. Additions of very familiar plants - coreopsis, candytuft, heliotrope, petunias, ageratum and poppies - added to these colourful gardens.

I encourage you to read Marta's book, especially if you grew up reading *The Secret Garden*. Keep in mind, if you missed reading *The Secret Garden* in your youth, it is readable and will enchant at any age. My young neighbour and her grandmother read *The Secret Garden* to each other virtually during our first lockdown. What a wonderful book to share with a grandchild. Marta's book is richly filled with photos and illustrations. Thank you, Marta, for *Unearthing the Secret Garden*, and the vivid details of a beloved author's life and her gardens. I will leave you with this quote from Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*: **"If you look the right way, you can see the whole world is a garden."** This quote reminds us to care and give attention to our garden and our world as Mary did.

THE LAST GARDEN IN ENGLAND

BY JULIA KELLY

Gallery Books, 2021.
Reviewed by Tuula Talvila



This Christmas present came with a sticky note from my sister saying "Chick lit with a twist. A garden twist!" It was a fun read during the early, wintery months of this year when garden activities were on pause. I was pleasantly surprised to read a novel with so much detail about plants, garden design, and the work of the garden – the author must be a garden lover too.

The novel takes place in three different time periods, all focused around the gardens at the fictional Highbury House in an English village. In modern day, Emma Lovell is a garden designer specializing in restoring historical gardens as accurately as possible. She's working with Highbury's owners – the wife's grandfather used to own the house – to uncover the original garden plans, recreate the gardens, and perhaps discover what lies behind the brick walls and permanently locked iron gate of the unruly and overgrown winter garden that "was so…sinister? Solemn? Secretive."

Interleaved with Emma's story are the two other time periods. Venetia Smith, an up-and-coming garden designer, created the original gardens at Highbury in 1907 for the nouveau riche owners who are looking for a garden that will impress their guests from the city.

"I pulled free a detail of the long border next, showing him how tall columns of clematis would tower over roses, Echinops, campanulas, allium, and delphiniums in soft pinks, whites, silvers, and purples. I showed them how walls of hedge and brick would create garden rooms of varying themes just to the west of the shade border."

Venetia's developing relationships with the owners and their family – there is a brother who's an amateur horticulturist and skilled rose breeder – are complicated by class conventions and constraints, and her life takes several unexpected turns that in the end have a huge impact on her work at Highbury.

The middle time period, 1944, reveals the house and gardens during wartime and is the only one with chapters from three different characters' points of view. Beth, one of the land girls sent to the countryside near Highbury House to aid the war effort by working on a neighbouring farm, befriends Stella, a cook in the Highbury House kitchen. The house itself has been requisitioned as a military hospital and there are tensions between the widowed owner, Diana Symonds, who still lives there with

her young son, and the hospital administrators. Vestiges of class distinctions are clung to but also chafed against, as normal life is disrupted by the tumult of war.

This time period had the least focus on the garden – although it does still play a role – but was very interesting for me because of the depictions of English country life during wartime. The gardens are not left unscathed, either.

"Typed out in orderly lines was the agricultural requisition for all unused land at Highbury House. Her garden. One of the few things that was still her own – which she'd done her very best to maintain throughout this bloody war – and they were going to take it away from her."

I found the modern day sections the least interesting but they help to gradually uncover the ideas and mysteries of the original garden. There are parallel themes connecting the characters from all three time periods: the beginnings of a romance, a whirlwind wartime marriage, and a prohibited romance and scandal; independent women working hard in traditionally male fields, each taking risks to take charge of her own life's path; and of course a love of the garden and gardening throughout.

"[Venetia Smith had] never understood 'gardeners' who refuse to garden because it is unseemly for a lady or gentleman to dirty their hands. Perhaps they don't know the thrill of plunging a trowel into spring-softened soil to toss up the sweet, earthy scent of leaves and twigs and all manner of matter. By refusing to stain their aprons, they miss the sensation of damp, fresh dirt crumbling between their fingers or breathing the fresh air deeply. They don't know the satisfaction of knocking the dust off one's clothes when retreating into the house for a well-earned cup of tea."

Images:
Book cover photo by Tuula Talvila
Background image "A copy of part of Gertrude Jekyll's hand-drawn plans for the world-famous garden at the Manor House in Upton Grey, Hampshire" by Anguskirk
https://www.flickr.com/photos/anguskirk/5974659063

SUMMER GARDEN

READING SUGGESTIONS

Summertime, and the living is easy. Unless you are a gardener – in which case, there is usually a never-ending list of tasks to do: weeding, dead-heading, watering, etc. Still, on those hot, lazy days of summer, or those long summer evenings, it is sometimes nice to take some time for yourself, pour a cool drink, and relax with a good book. These may not be "beach reads," but they should help pass a few enjoyable hours while sitting in a garden.

https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2015-5-september-october/green-life/5-plant-manuals-and-meditations-help-you-garden

We have compiled a list of fiction titles – in no particular order – that have gardens or gardening as one of their themes. Suggestions were solicited from various OHS members.

The Garden of Evening Mists, by Tan Twan Eng (2012)
recommended by Tuula Talvila

This was one of those books that I didn't want to end and I missed being in that world once I had finished reading it. It was so interesting for many reasons: the historical period and location (1951 Malaya), the Japanese art and gardens, the intriguing and complex characters. Teoh Yun Ling survived a Japanese war camp and is now a prosecutor of Japanese war criminals. She wishes to make a memorial garden for her sister who died in the camp, and apprentices with a mysterious Japanese gardener living in exile at a tea estate in Malaya. There was lots of stuff going on in the book but at the same time it created a calming, thoughtful, contemplative space – just like the Japanese garden in it.

The Long Way Home, by Louise Penny (2014)
recommended by Kristin Kendall

This novel is the 10th in the wonderful series by Louise Penny, featuring Armand Gamache of the Sûreté du Québec, and Three Pines, a small village in the Eastern Townships. Now retired, Gamache is living in Three Pines. This book focuses on two artists: one has disappeared and Clara, the other, is searching for him. A turning point in the plot involves a strange encounter in a Garden of Cosmic Speculation. At first I thought the garden must be from Penny's imagination. But no – it's real, at Portrack House, near Dumfries in South West Scotland. It's a product of the imagination and obsession of its creator, a man named Charles Jenks. The garden and its connection with the search for the missing artist still intrigue me.

The Lost Garden, by Helen Humphreys (2002)
recommended by Lori Gandy

In 1941 in the Devon countryside, a young horticulturist takes charge of a group of girls growing crops for the home front. A secret garden overgrown with "mysterious markers that speak of long buried emotions" inspires her to face her past and her present. Beautifully written. (Quote from book jacket.)

https://www.homestratosphere.com/gardening-books/

https://scallywaif.me/2015/02/17/lies/

The Forgotten Garden, by Kate Morton (2008) recommended by Jamie Robertson

A family, an old book of dark fairy tales, a secret garden, an aristocratic family, a love denied, and a mystery. *The Forgotten Garden* is a captivating, atmospheric, and compulsively readable story of the past, secrets, family and memory. (From GoodReads)

Earthly Joys, and ***Virgin Earth***, by Phillipa Gregory (*Tradescant* series, 1998 & 1999) recommended by Jamie Robertson

John Tradescant the Elder (d. 1638) and his son John Tradescant the Younger (d. 1662) were early English naturalists, botanists, gardeners, collectors and travellers, who discovered and introduced many plants. Phillipa Gregory, a historical novelist, wrote two novels about this gardening family, set during the English Civil War.

The Paradise Project, by Merilyn Simonds (2012) recommended by Blaine Marchand

"What is a garden? A yearning to bring nature close? Or a bid for total control?" *The Paradise Project* is a collection of short stories exploring humans' interactions with the planted world, "erotic, exotic, suffused with startling colour and heady scent, grounded in dark shadows and decomposing duff....ensures you will never look at gardens the same way again." (Quotes are from the author's website.)

Canadian writer Merilyn Simonds' "The Paradise Project" is described on her website as flash fiction: it was a very beautiful, handmade, limited edition book printed on a hand-operated printing press. While copies are available for $150 from the author, it is also available as an eBook (http://merilynsimonds.com/books.html#paradise).

The Door in the Wall, by H.G. Wells (1911) recommended by Tuula Talvila

After wandering away from home, a child encounters a mysterious green door in a white wall that he is drawn to. Inside he discovers a wondrous place: a beautiful garden with animals, kind people and other children to play with. For the rest of his life, he is haunted by that garden and yearns to revisit it but either cannot find it again when he tries or else spots the door when he is at a busy point in his life and cannot take the time to go through the door again. Until one day...does he find it and go in again at last?

You may be able to find this story in a collection of Wells' short stories and it is also freely available in its entirety online at Project Gutenberg (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/456/456-h/456-h.htm).

The Experimental Gardener's Diary:

A COMPLETE NOVICE'S TALE

by Valerie Xavier

It's not been easy figuring out how to tell the story of an experimental gardener's experience over the years. I'm out of my element – I know I am talking to those who know a thing or two - but here goes.

Before I start – a disclaimer: I am a complete novice when it comes to gardening. I'm a lover of plants, both indoors and out, but nonetheless an experimental gardener.

Last year I moved from a home I owned for more than 20 years. That downtown home had a postage stamp-sized, chain link-fenced, semi-detached dirt patch, with a dying Chinese cherry tree almost dead centre of the yard (no pun intended), along with another dead bush just in front of that. Oh yes, and some old ferns that I did manage to uproot and grow against a garage.

The home was as untouched and as derelict as the yard (it was all I could afford) – but since this is about gardening, I will focus solely on the yard.

There is a theme here – you don't have to spend tons of money on landscapers or super-expensive showy plants to have a beautiful garden.

When I started, I had no idea what I was doing (I still don't), but I knew I first needed grass. My lovely neighbour John (his real name), who lived with his wife and kids on the other side of the chain link fence, realized that my method of accomplishing the work was getting me nowhere fast, so he decided to lend a hand. Together that day, we poured, raked, and rolled the dirt in preparation for laying the sod. He supplied both the wheelbarrow and a water-filled roller thingy – don't ask what I had been using before that.

I have a rescue dog — Chipper. He loves to tear up the yard — especially loves to eat hens and chicks. I'd like to include him as part of my experimental garden. He's a hoot and hopefully will add some colour to my escapades — how to establish a garden with a dog that likes to dig it up.

The next day I decided I would lay the sod. How hard could it be, right?

Apparently, it's important to stagger the lengths the same as you would when laying a hardwood floor, so it grows in well. John, who also came out for Day Two, taught me that.

So now I was off.

During my first summer, I created three gardens: one on the side of the garage; another against the chain link fence between my neighbour and me; and the other against another chain link fence that opened to the debris from the Queensway.

Nothing grew next to the Queensway. That's when I conducted my first gardening experiment and hack (of many).

In the first year, and later years as well, I gathered garden waste from bush trimmings, hosta leaves and anything with substance, and piled it up against that fence, from the backside that faced the Queensway. I thought all the dirt and debris, along with that annoying garden-killing Virginia creeper from the Queensway barriers, would become trapped and choked out by the cut branches and long trimmings I'd piled there. And since it was 100% biodegradable, I was feeding the soil at the same time (note: don't use grass trimmings).

After one season and in the following year, I could grow anything against that fence… enter the Jackmanii clematis, sedum, peonies, two spireas and much more. The answer to my prayers!!

Over the years, I shaped the yard with mini vignettes and a tiny secret garden that was only visible when you walked around the yard. I made paths from an old brick fireplace I had taken down to retrofit a gas one (another hack) and other stone paths that allowed access between rows of flowering plants for easy pruning, shaping, and watering.

TOP PHOTO: The Tangled Garden by J.E.H. MacDonald, 1916. (image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Tangled_Garden.jpg , J. E. H. MacDonald, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

By experimenting with different plants, year after year, I had created a garden that included only perennials, which flowered in cycles all summer long, and colourful shrubs and bushes (some already mentioned) that provided a colourful backdrop as the perennials moved from one flowering type to another. Who says you need annuals to make a yard pretty and colourful?

My experimental yard moved from all dirt to boxwoods, purple peonies, irises, plants that grow among rocky paths like hens and chicks and stonecrop sedum, and lambs' ears. There was a Japanese maple (almost killed that trying to keep it out of my neighbour's yard), a little secret garden, flowering sedums, and bachelor's button that grew under a *Berberis* (which caused bodily injury to me more than once).

Daylilies (dwarf and garden-variety), tea roses, hostas (miniature variegated and garden-variety) and much more – all grew in my tiny backyard.

Sure, I killed stuff…lots! Couldn't get foxgloves or delphiniums (that I love) to last more than a season, no matter how hard I tried, but it was the process that thrilled me. Nothing more so.

My yard certainly was not Butchart Gardens (if you haven't been, you should go), but it was *my* garden, full of mistakes and happy little experiments that happened to turn out, with a little help from nature.

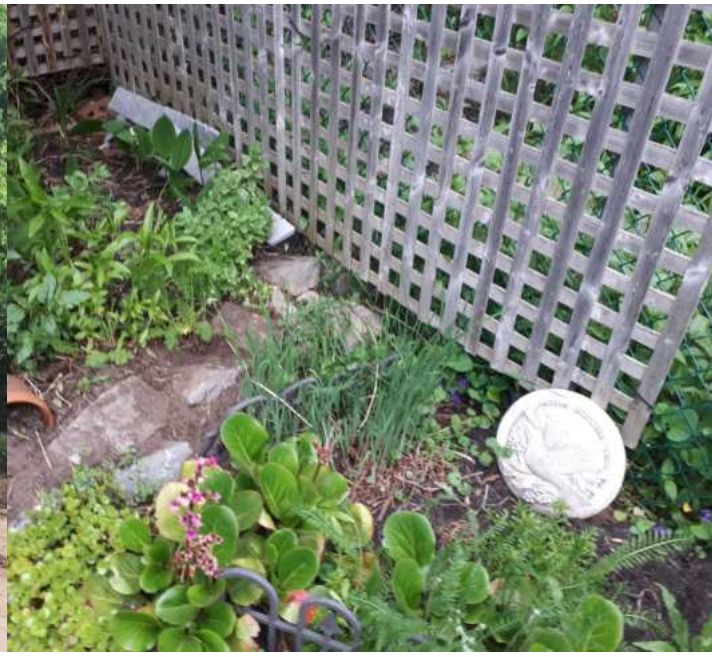
If you have ever seen J.E.H. MacDonald's painting 'A Tangled Garden,' then you will get a sense of my former yard and the kind of gardens I like most.

This pastime provided hours and hours of joy year after year - the kind that only comes from taking on something beyond your scope and from the heart. It delights you – even if it isn't perfect.

Last May, I moved again. My current yard is landscaped, and nicely laid out – something my old yard was not. Nothing left to chance, everything in its spot.

But you know, history repeats itself…you guessed it…there's dirt – but not as much. Every time I cut the lawn at the beginning of the summer, I needed a shower after. So, once I caught my breath (post move), I set out to fill in the huge patches of dirt with lawn. I started from seed; the City of Ottawa and Hydro thank me. I was 90 per cent successful. Does anyone know how to keep alive grass that butts against cedar hedges? Please let me know; I'll work on that this year.

Hopefully, there will be time for more diary entries as I figure out what I want this yard to be. I'd like to take you along with me. What will my garden be? At this moment, I am unsure, but it will be an experiment.



A STRIKING FLOW OF COLOUR

By Blaine Marchand

Boring, I thought. But then I was young and foolish, in my salad days and not very knowledgeable in gardening ways. Now, after 50 years, I see things through a much different lens in more ways than one. Coleuses are actually quite beautiful and provide a striking flow of colour to the garden landscape or set ablaze a seating area with strategically placed pots.

In my childhood — I would call those my sprout days - my memories of coleus were as indoor plants. They had a reputation for being "such serviceable" plants, as Miss Jean Brodie would say. Sure, they made the winter days less dreary. And in a way, it is no wonder, given their history.

Coleus was discovered in the mountains of tropical Java in 1853 by the botanist and plant explorer, Karl Blume — with a name like that what else could he have been destined to have become. It created a sensation in Victorian Britain and the United States, especially in the gardens of the well-heeled who used them to create ribbons of colour in formal beds.

The plant bore his name — *Coleus blumei* — but only until 2006 when, with a nod and a wink to all the hybrid variations that had been created in previous years, its moniker became *Coleus x hybridus*. And then in 2012, botanists labelled it *Plectranthus scutellarioides*, a tongue-twister for sure. But for me, a simple kind of gardener, it will always be just coleus.

It is actually in the mint or Lamiaceae family, the proof of which can be seen in their square stems and opposite leaves. As with most plants, gardeners assign colloquial nicknames and the coleus, with a reference to its colouring, was assigned the epithet painted nettle or flame nettle.

Photo by Tuula Talvila

Today, the coleus has moved well beyond the colours most often found in the 1950s — red and green. Recent varieties carry names that vividly suggest what you see in the nurseries — 'Chocolate Covered Cherry,' 'Mint Mocha,' 'Dipt in Wine,' and 'Watermelon.' They evoke landscapes — 'Alabama Sunset' and 'Florida Sunshine.' They come in solid colours — dark purple/black leaves ('Othello,' 'Black Lace'); pale yellow leaves ('Big Blonde,' 'Wasabi'). Solid colours that contrast with a coloured or scalloped margin - orange with a green edge ('Molten Orange'), garnet with yellow ('Garnet Robe'), purple with green trim ('Solar Flair').

Even their designation as shade-loving plants is so yesterday. Some of today's coleuses actually luxuriate in bright light and their colours intensify. In fact, today's breeders strive to create coleus that are even more sun-tolerant, have delayed flowering, multiple branching and are compact or trailing. What is there not to love?

And equally easy to love is how simple it is to propagate coleus from leaf cuttings. In August or early September, pinch off branches (10-15 cm in length), take off the leaves along the lower portion of the stems and pop them into a glass, leaving them to stand for a week or two. Or, for those who want to go the more traditional method, plant the cuttings in a mix of equal parts vermiculite and perlite. Some experts recommend that the cuttings be kept moist and this can be done by covering them with a plastic bag. Place them under florescent lights and watch them grow. If they get too leggy, the tried-and-true remedy of pinching them back works perfectly. The soil should be moist but never soggy.

Just be aware that coleus have a preference for bright morning's softer sunlight but indirect light during the afternoon. Keep an eye on the plant — if leaves fade and lose color, it is an indication it is getting too much sunlight; if leaves start to fall, it is an indication it requires more light. This is why growing them under artificial light gives you more control. When overwintering, the temperatures should be 16-24C.

If you want to grow them from seed, simply sow the seeds in cell packs using sterilized soil-less mix. Carefully press the seeds into soil but do not cover them, as they need light to germinate. The

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Solenostemon_scutellarioides_cultivars_(7774261596).jpg Photo by darius_saulenas, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

best temperature range is 21-23C. You should start to see the first seedlings in 10-14 days.

Once the weather outside turns delightful and all threat of nasty late spring frosts has evaporated, transplant them into pots, containers and, in that old-fashioned way, directly into the garden. Seedlings of the dwarf coleus should be spaced 22-30 cm apart while larger varieties should be 30-45 cm. Once established, coleus can withstand drought, particularly with a regular sprinkling of water. Your reward will be their great colour and the oohs and ahhs of your visitors throughout the gardening season. Just don't forget to pinch off the blooms.

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PATENTLY OBVIOUS?

MAYBE NOT.

BY TUULA TALVILA

How carefully do you read "the fine print" on plant tags? Have you noticed text saying that unlicensed asexual propagation is prohibited, accompanied by abbreviations such as CPBR or USPP with a number? These relate to intellectual property, plant patents, and rules prohibiting propagation. What does this mean for the home gardener dividing their plants or for horticultural societies selling donated plant divisions – if anything?

WHAT CAN BE PATENTED?

After investing a lot of time, money, work, and expertise into developing new, improved plant varieties, breeders wish to protect their work and benefit from the commercial value of their new products by applying for some form of intellectual property protection. In the United States, an entire plant and/or the process to develop it can be patented – think Monsanto and their genetically modified glyphosate-resistant soybeans and corn. In Canada, higher life forms including plants cannot be patented. (The process to develop that plant, typically genetic modification, can be patented; patents are valid for 20 years.) Instead, plant breeders who develop a new variety (either through genetic engineering or traditional breeding techniques) can protect it as their intellectual property by applying for a Plant Breeders' Rights certificate under the *Plant Breeders' Rights Act* (PBRA).

The plant variety must meet certain conditions: it must be **new** and **distinct** i.e. clearly distinguishable from other varieties; its essential characteristics must remain **stable** from generation to generation; its characteristics must be **uniform** across the population and

if there is variation, that variation must be describable, predictable, and commercially acceptable.

Once a Plant Breeders' Rights certificate is granted, the holder receives royalties from sales of the plant variety, has legal protection and can seek compensation if the variety is used without authorization. The holder's rights include "the sale, production, reproduction, import, export, stocking and conditioning of their variety's propagating material (e.g. seeds or cuttings). If the holder is unable to exercise these rights on the propagating material, they may exercise the rights on harvested material (e.g. grain or fruit)." Under the PBRA, the certificate holder's rights extend for 25 years for tree and vine varieties, and for 20 years for all other plants. Typically, the certificate or patent holder will licence the propagation of the plant variety to someone else; this licensee pays a royalty to the holder. It is up to the certificate or patent holder to pursue violations of the protections.

WHAT'S ON THE LABEL?

Here are the abbreviations you may encounter on your plant tags that relate to intellectual property protection:

CPBR# – *Canadian Plant Breeders' Rights, with certificate number*

CBRAF – *Canadian Breeders' Rights applied for*

USPP# – *United States Plant Patent, with patent number*

USPPAF – *United States Plant Patent applied for*

COPF – *Canadian Ornamental Plant Foundation (organized the collection and distribution of royalties prior to Canadian Plant Breeders' Rights regulations)*

'Maestro' sedum in lower right

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GARDENERS?

In my backyard I have a large, beautifully purple sedum, or stonecrop, that is about 10 years old now. It is a patented variety called `Maestro' protected under United States Plant Patent USPP#20,094. The plant has become very large and by the end of the summer its stems have all flopped outwards, forming a large, unsightly circle sprawling on the ground. It really needs to be divided, but technically asexual propagation is not permitted. The plant doesn't know this and has on occasion decided to propagate itself by making baby plants nearby, which I have transplanted elsewhere in my garden. I doubt the holder of the patent, a Mr. Gary M. Trucks from Michigan, will swing by anytime soon to collect royalties.

But seriously, is it legal to divide a protected plant variety if the propagules are going to stay on your own property? If it's not legal, what are we supposed to do with them – destroy them, and go buy more if we want more of the same variety? Personal, non-commercial propagation, like keeping divisions, has a negligible impact on royalties for the certificate or patent holder and I doubt the rules are intended to keep home gardeners from dividing plants. It is, however, technically an infringement of the breeder's rights.

Similarly, an organization selling donated plants is depriving a plant breeder of their dues if divisions of CPBR or USPP designated plants are being sold. Many groups holding plant sales are not-for-profit organizations, and do not significantly compete with the commercial sale of these varieties. However, they could choose to prohibit donation and sale of *divisions* while still accepting plants that have never been divided.

Another thing to consider is cost. Plant growers who have paid licensing fees to a breeder will be passing along that cost to the nurseries who buy their plants; that cost will in turn be passed on to you, the plant buyer. Is it worth paying this higher cost for protected varieties?

The subject of intellectual property with respect to plant breeding has lots of thorny details and raises several questions. As gardeners, we can take these into consideration when we purchase plants, divide them, and when we donate plants to sales.

All photos by Tuula Talvila

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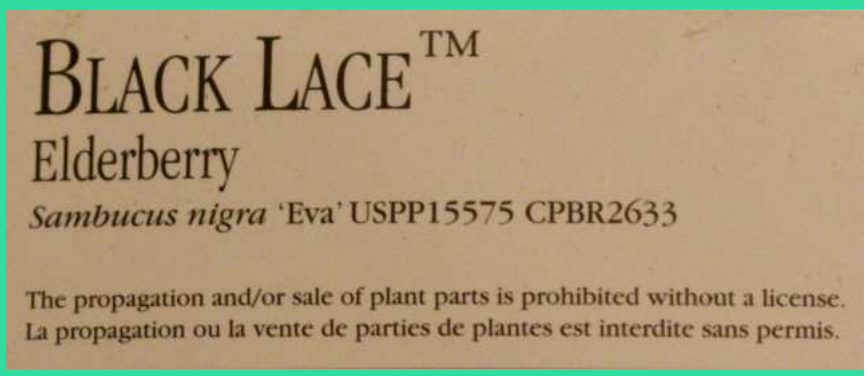

You may also see plant names with a trademark (™) or registered trademark symbol (®). (Registering a trademarked name provides certain legal protections.) A trademark on a plant protects only the plant variety's *name*, not the variety itself. This is used to help create an association between a company and the names they coin, creating brand recognition, because the holder alone can use the trademarked name for 10 years.

For plants, the trademark name is often the name under which the plant is sold, which may differ from the cultivar name. For example, with my black elderberry (shown on page 20), the botanical name of the plant is *Sambucus nigra* and the variety is called 'Eva' but Proven Winners has trademarked the name "Black Lace" under which to sell this variety.

Gardening & Parenting

by Cecilia Lee

I have a very close friend with a beautiful garden. It's a treat to spend a few hours with her in her back yard, allowing our minds to wander through the sensory pathways that are the colours, sounds and smells, gifted to us by nature.

We are both mothers, and both understand how gardening teaches us not only how to grow a squash from a seed, but how to meet life. As a working mom, I used to feel I didn't have time for gardening. Sometimes, I have felt that I didn't have enough time for all the demands of motherhood and a career either. I am learning, however, that making the time, and learning how to be present in the moment, is very rewarding… not always in growing the perfect rose, but in allowing yourself to be taken into a process and be guided by it.

And with a friend's gentle encouragement, I am sharing my observations on how gardening has influenced my parenting — really, life in general.

1 HAVE A VISION FOR THE FUTURE BUT STAY FLEXIBLE IN THE PRESENT

I have attempted gardening several times, admired my neighbours' yards, and have learned the value of a well-researched plan — paying attention to a desired colour palette, creating interest with plants of different heights and textures, understanding the light, soil and moisture conditions of a property, learning which plants need more space and which prefer to be closer together. A garden is a reflection of the gardener, their hopes, and their personality.

That being said, life happens. Snow in the middle of summer happens. Droughts and deluge happen. Vacations with inattentive or inexperienced garden sitters happen. Conditions will never be perfect but, to me, perfection is not in the result, but in the journey, the mental process that guides our response to the conditions. That process asks us not to waste time and energy being angry but to be grateful that we have a chance to respond or recover. We will learn from this. We listen to our plants, we observe, we make controlled experiments, all to guide their growth and help them become what they are destined to be.

In so many ways, we parent our plants as we parent our children. Even when they are not on or in our turf, we still tend to them (as I have learned to tend my canna lily tubers over winter and prepare them for spring planting). In the end, almost everything is recoverable. It just takes time and attention. Second chances are there if we watch for them.

2 HAVING COOL TOOLS IS HELPFUL, BUT NOT ESSENTIAL

We purchased our home from an elderly couple who were avid gardeners. They left a great shed of tools, most of which I did not know how to use, so I had to do a lot of research. Prior to our first

child, friends and neighbours showered us with the latest and greatest in baby-care supplies, including a warmer for baby wipes.

Over time we realized that we could rationalize the gardening tools and the baby supplies quite a bit. We were happy to gift much of the gear over time. But I still rely heavily on my trusty weeder (it looks like a long screwdriver, and is way more effective than those step weeders – trendy but they still leave most of the tap root in the ground). It has to be over 50 years old. It reminds me of the previous owners, and the pride they had in their property. Every time I use it, I think of them and how the care I take in this home is a way of honouring them.

3 MANAGING VISITORS

Not all visitors are wanted; rabbits chew up our lettuce, raccoons tear through our corn, rip off the ears, taking one or two bites, and leave a sad mess behind. We don't always like our visitors. That being said, there's something to learn from them, even if it's just that we need to get better at discouraging the pests from our gardens. In the same way, we need to discourage all those not-so-useful influences that suck up our children's attention and eat away at their self-esteem and growth potential. That brings me to my next observation.

4 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A WEED AND A NON-WEED IS LOCATION

Every year, new varieties of flowers capture the attention of horticulturists, becoming instant hits – this is not always a good thing. Remember the Canada 150 Tulip? Ubiquitous a few years ago, but overbred and mostly not matching their hype. And every year, gardeners struggle with the challenges of weeding. It makes me think of children, and their potential.

When I was young, I would overhear teachers discussing 'bad' kids and 'good' kids. Labelling children, labelling anyone, is so destructive. It feeds a narrative that there is only one way to live a life or contribute to the world. If there is ever a truth, it's that diversity is strength. People with different ideas innovate and create opportunities. The challenge really is how to recognize these unique gifts and how to nurture that potential, not to force it to grow a certain way, to become something other than itself. This holds true for gardens and families.

Going back to my high school reunion, it was remarkable how 'successful' the 'bad' kids had become. The spirit that got them in trouble with teachers was later channelled into entrepreneurialism. They had their own drive and energy and were completely out of place in a square classroom with a meal break and two recesses a day. Once they found their fertile ground, nothing could stop them. It brings me joy even now to think of them.

5 LISTEN, WATCH AND LEARN. YOUR PLANTS AND YOUR CHILDREN WILL GUIDE YOU

A little humility goes a long way. With my first child I always tried to have the answers; I read everything, and struggled a lot. Now that I have two children and they are screaming into adulthood, I am learning that my children are teaching me how to parent. They are different people with different needs. The more I listen to them and meet them where they are in their minds, the happier we are together. Disagreements are opportunities for discussion, but we have to be willing to hear and respect each other. We also have to start with an understanding that we truly love and care for each other, and share a desire to preserve the relationship no matter what the outcome. I have changed and modified my position on issues because my children brought a perspective I either didn't quite understand or didn't appreciate what it meant to them.

And as a gardener, I am learning to watch for the language of plants. What are they telling me about what they need? When I do not have the skills to meet their needs, I seek help – neighbours, Facebook (and actual books), other members of the Ottawa Horticultural Society. As parents, we are kind of a CEO, keeping a household in order, managing resources, procuring outside expertise. Doing it right means being humble and knowing when you're not the best person for a job, listening to others and letting them help you. As a parent, our children and their children are our mirrors. And aren't gardens the same?

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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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