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FALL 2025

## LIFE IN THE GARDEN



Ottawa  
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OTTAWA HORTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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### ON THE COVER

'Blackberry Ripple' dahlia  
Photo by Serge Parisien  
(see his article on page 10)

## The OHS Dibbler won the Judge's Choice Award

in the Publications Competition at the Ontario Horticultural Association's 2024 Convention.



# The Book Nook

TITLES SUGGESTED BY THE OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR OHS MEMBERS



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

This season, the topics covered range from changes in garden styles to how gardens from literary works are made atmospheric!

✓ **A HISTORY OF GARDENING** By Angela Youngman

Between 1800 and 1960, gardening underwent a massive transformation, changing almost beyond recognition. It was a period when the concept of gardening as a leisure activity emerged, along with a vast array of changes in garden styles, plant breeding, the arrival of horticultural societies and shows, brands, and mass market tourism to garden sites.

✓ **LITERARY GARDENS** The Imaginary Gardens of Writers and Poets by Sandra Lawrence

Literary Gardens explores thirty of the most atmospheric and emotionally charged gardens in literature from The Secret Garden and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland to Rebecca and The Great Gatsby.

✓ **THE GOTH GARDEN** The Mystery, Beauty, and Lore of Dark Gardening by Felicia Feaster

From the Mangave Black Widow to the humble mint plant, discover the hidden stories behind plants that bring a moody, gothic vibe to your garden.

Click on the link below to see the complete list of 23 items from the Library. This also allows you to view availability and place a hold from the link.

<https://ottawa.bibliocommons.com/v2/list/display/354296247/2863080617>

# THE OTTAWA FOOD BANK AND ITS COMMUNITY HARVEST FARM:

GROWING FOOD,  
GROWING COMMUNITY,  
GROWING HOPE

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BY LORI GANDY

We all know that the cost of food is going through the roof and continues to rise. For many people, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to afford basic needs like food. Here in Ottawa, 1 in 4 families are food insecure and a growing number of people rely on the Ottawa Food Bank for their groceries and other essentials. It is particularly heartbreaking to learn that 37% of the Ottawa Food Bank's clients are children.

Most of us know about the Ottawa Food Bank and its mission to provide fresh and non-perishable food, as well as supplies such as diapers, toiletries, and cleaning supplies for clients across the city. What is not so well known, though, is what goes on within the system, and the vital role the Ottawa Food Bank's Community Harvest Farm plays in ensuring a steady supply of fresh, healthy produce for their clients.

## **FIVE KEY STEPS IN THE OTTAWA FOOD BANK'S PROCESS:**

**GROWING** - Not only do they work with local farmers who donate fresh produce, they also grow their own produce at their Community Harvest Farm (more on this below).

**COLLECTING** - Food donations from the community are collected throughout the year at food drives, special events, as well as from food industry partners, and through the red bins we see at grocery stores across the city. Food donations to the Ottawa Food Bank totalled \$11 million last year.

*OHS volunteer Leia Fourney washing lettuce.  
Photo by Maria Nicoll*



**PURCHASING** - The Ottawa Food Bank spends roughly 9.3 million dollars a year on food purchases to provide a variety of fresh and nutritious options to the community.

Last fiscal year (Oct 2023-Sept 2024), the Ottawa Food Bank operated with a budget of \$31.5 million, which includes the value of donated food. Financial donations from individuals, organizations, corporations, and grants make up 98% of the Ottawa Food Bank's revenue. About 1.4% of that budget is from the municipal government. They receive no funding from the provincial or federal governments.

**SORTING** - Food donations and purchases are sorted into roughly 30 different categories, which helps ensure they know exactly what's on their shelves and what they may need. The food sorting section of the warehouse is completely volunteer run. Volunteers are trained to look at the condition of the donations as well as the expiry/best before dates to ensure only safe products get into the hands of our neighbours in need.

**DISTRIBUTING** - After the food is sorted, it is distributed by the Ottawa Food Bank's fleet of trucks to a network of agencies across Ottawa.

"The Ottawa Food Bank is not a frontline organization in the traditional sense, a place where people go to access groceries," says Farah Mustafa, who joined the Ottawa Food Bank as Communications Manager about a year ago. "We are a collection and distribution centre for both food and funds for the network."

The Ottawa Food Bank distributes food to 71 member agencies that run 98 food programs. Some of these programs are exclusively food programs, others are multi-service programs that provide employment support and have a small food cupboard for clients to access. Still others, such as the Ottawa Mission, provide cooked meals from the food they receive from the Ottawa Food Bank.

Through partnerships with about 18 schools, the Ottawa Food Bank offers Kick Start After 4 Club programs, which provide healthy snacks for school-aged children during the school year.

During the summer months, they run summer nutrition programs that provide snacks to agencies within the network to distribute to children.

"The Ottawa Food Bank would not be what it is without our network of agencies that run their own independent programs across the city," says Farah.

## **NUTRITION IS A KEY FOCUS FOR THE FOOD BANK**

The Ottawa Food Bank's food purchasing decisions are guided by the expertise of a Registered Dietitian. This professional insight, combined with feedback from clients across the city, helps ensure that the foods selected meet both nutritional standards and community preferences.

Fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, bread and eggs represent 43% of total food distributed by the Ottawa Food Bank. Approximately 1.6 million pounds of fresh produce alone were shared with our community, helping to make nutritious, high-quality food for thousands of our neighbours. The Ottawa Food Bank website even includes downloadable recipe cards and books with recipes for delicious and affordable meals that can be prepared in an hour or less.

## **THE COMMUNITY HARVEST FARM**

A major contributor to the Ottawa Food Bank's food supply is their Community Harvest Farm, a vital component of their ability to provide fresh, healthy produce for the community. And it's possibly Ottawa's best-kept secret.

The concept began in 2010 as a small-scale operation at a regional site near Manotick Station when Jason Gray, community harvest manager, was hired by the Ottawa Food Bank to develop relationships with local farmers to secure food donations.

"The objective wasn't to start a farm for the Ottawa Food Bank," says Jason. But he started growing food to test out the concept and gauge the volunteer support he knew he'd need to make the operation work.



"In the early years, we relied on local farmers to donate or sell us produce to supplement what we could grow," says Jason. "I'd also go regularly to the Lansdowne Farmers' Market to pick up donations from the many generous local farmers. Seeing the farmers face-to-face served as a reminder to them about the Ottawa Food Bank's needs."

Fast forward to 2012. Thanks to a generous allocation of land from a local farming family, the Ottawa Food Bank's Community Harvest Farm was established in its current location in Stittsville. The operation started out with 2 acres and grew over the years to its current size of 10 acres, with 7 acres devoted to edible crops and 3 acres devoted to cover crops at any given time.

Jason begins the season with a forecast based on the previous year's yields. It's not an exact science though, as yields can change year over year of course. He then coordinates with the Ottawa Food Bank's operations manager to determine what and how much to harvest each week.

"We know how many cases are part of our quota system for the agencies that receive produce," says Jason, "so we know the maximum number of cases per week. Agencies make orders to us the week before and then we harvest accordingly and the orders get prepared."

If they can't make the forecast, their operations manager will call a wholesaler and purchase what is needed to ensure orders are filled.

The array of crops grown at the Farm is staggering - everything from peppers, tomatoes, zucchinis, squash, beets, carrots, potatoes, leeks, onions, and lettuce (to name a few) to crops such as garlic, sweet potatoes, and eggplant which were introduced to respond to a diversity of food preferences and cuisines.

*Photo by Maria Nicoll*



*Growing onions. Photo by Maria Nicoll*



*Harvested garlic. Photo by Lori Gandy*

"Garlic is used ubiquitously in cuisines around the world but it is rarely available at the food bank," says Jason. "We grow sweet potatoes and purchase them year-round because of our clients' needs. We've grown okra too in previous years but we dropped it this year as we are tweaking our rotations. We may add it back in the future. And the expanded greenhouse space has allowed us to grow eggplants successfully."

Plant rotations keep the soil productive and the irrigation system allows Jason and his colleagues to regulate the amount of water each crop receives. With the heat and sun we've had this

season, regular watering has been critical for production.

The Community Harvest Farm team keeps a running tally of the produce harvested throughout the season. In late summer, Jason predicted (with fingers crossed) that they would record their best season yet: "It's possible we could hit around 160,000 pounds of produce this year," he said back then. And he was right, and then some! At the close of the 2025 season (harvesting continues until early October), the total harvest is an astounding 174,515 pounds of fresh produce for the community.

Juliana Adema shows off one of the harvested carrots.  
Photo by Lori Gandy

## VOLUNTEERS MAKE IT ALL POSSIBLE

With a small staff of five, including Jason and Juliana Adema (an Ottawa Horticultural Society Board member), the Community Harvest Farm relies on the support of volunteers who work on the Farm throughout the growing season, many of whom return week after week, year after year. Each season, over 1,100 volunteers work on the Farm, collectively providing over 5,000 hours of service to support the Farm's goals.



"During the growing season, we're always on the lookout for dedicated volunteers to help out," says Jason. "We also welcome monetary and equipment donations to help make our program more efficient, and to expedite program expansion."

Volunteering is a great way to learn about farming and get an appreciation for where food comes from and how much work is involved in food production.

"To say that volunteers are vital to our operation is an understatement," says Juliana. "Annually volunteers give 20,146 hours of work to the Ottawa Food Bank; 30% of that is devoted to the Community Harvest Farm."

Beyond helping to produce and harvest the food, the experience of volunteering on the Farm broadens peoples' view of what's involved in farming, especially for a large operation.

### MEET BARBARA NEUWELT

Barbara has been volunteering at the Farm for 4 years. She says she had no experience gardening before starting her volunteer gig. When she retired, she looked for a way to contribute to the community that would allow her to be outdoors. An internet search came up with the Ottawa Food Bank and she found the Community Harvest Farm.

"Doing something that would allow me to be outdoors was important," says Barbara. "I'm out of town a fair bit but when I'm in town, I'm here twice a week for a half day. I really look forward to coming to the Farm."

Barbara is one of the ambassadors on the Farm, a title given to frequent and experienced volunteers who help new volunteers with tasks and getting oriented. Ambassadors also talk about how much they love being at the Farm and encourage the new folks to come back.

"There's a group who come every Wednesday," says Barbara. "They've gotten to know each other and now they all come regularly. It's a social event as much as a work shift."



Barbara standing in front of the truck with carrots - Photo by Lori Gandy

## CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS

### LISA BALL AND HER TEAM FROM ROGERS

Many corporate groups come regularly to volunteer at the Farm. Lisa Ball has been volunteering with a team from Rogers for about 5 years.

"Rogers encourages us to volunteer and gives us time off during work hours," says Lisa. "In the post-Covid world, with people working at home for some of the week, getting groups together collaboratively has been great for building relationships."

Lisa grew up in the country. Her family had a big garden and everyone contributed to it. She likes that she can come to the Farm and "do good, get dirty and have time outside."

"This is just such an amazing organization and we are lucky to have the Farm here in Ottawa. For groups, it's a tremendous opportunity to build community by developing relationships with others in your company or organization. I love that I get to talk to people that I wouldn't otherwise have a chance to see at the office."

Lisa's group signed up for three shifts this year. They booked in May to be sure they got the shifts that worked for them. After the Farm winds down, Lisa's group will volunteer in the warehouse over the winter.

"The staff here are amazing," says Lisa. "They make it such a good experience to come here. We're very excited today because we are picking carrots. There have been shifts when we've picked potato bugs. We joke about it, but whatever has to be done, has to be done. I've gained a whole new appreciation for farming and for where my food comes from."



Lisa (right) and her colleague Niki Tep with their freshly pulled carrots. - Photo by Lori Gandy

## OHS VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AT THE COMMUNITY HARVEST FARM

A group of OHS members and family spent a hot morning in June weeding a few 470-foot-long rows of sweet peppers and washing hundreds of heads of lettuce in preparation for distribution. Everyone agreed it was an invigorating and satisfying experience and a great way to build a community spirit. As the pictures attest, in spite of the heat and the bugs, we were all smiles at the end.

### CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Any OHS members interested in volunteering for next season on the Farm, or for a shift or two in the warehouse over the winter months, are encouraged to sign up on the Ottawa Food Bank's website at <https://ofb.volunteerhub.com/vv2/#>

OHS members and family working - Photo by Maria Nicoll

# FOOD INSECURITY EMERGENCY IN OTTAWA

The Ottawa Food Bank, the network of agencies they support, and the Community Harvest Farm are all vital to helping those in need in the Ottawa community. And while their efforts are extraordinary, there is much more that needs to be done to eliminate food insecurity in our community.

The Ottawa Food Bank is a member of Feed Ontario, the provincial entity that oversees food banks throughout Ontario. Some of the agencies supported by the Ottawa Food Bank are also members. Feed Ontario provides food, financial aid and logistical support to its network of over 1,200 food banks and hunger relief organizations across Ontario.

"Feed Ontario highlights the issue of food insecurity and encourages folks to take action - through donating, volunteering, education or advocacy," says Farah.

November/December is when Feed Ontario releases their annual Hunger Report, which will provide the most up-to-date data on food insecurity in Ontario. The Ottawa Food Bank also releases an annual Hunger Report in November. It paints a picture of food insecurity in Ottawa.

The Ottawa Food Bank has been working since last November to petition the City of Ottawa to declare a food insecurity emergency in Ottawa. This past September, they renewed the call for a declaration. More information is available at: <https://www.ottawafoodbank.ca/renewing-our-call-to-declare-a-food-insecurity-emergency-in-ottawa/>

According to the Ottawa Food Bank's website: "The City of Ottawa has the power to declare a food insecurity emergency that would affirm their commitment to working with the Ottawa Food Bank and 71 member agencies; signal to the province that we demand meaningful solutions; and create accountability that the City of Ottawa will continue prioritizing food security."

Says Farah: "There is a great need to address the root causes of food insecurity - improved social assistance, access to jobs and affordable housing being key. About 40% of people who access food programs are on social assistance programs that are not keeping up with the cost of living."

The City is listening. On 24 September, 2025, they passed a motion directing the development of a

comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of food insecurity. While this is not a declaration of emergency, it achieves what the Ottawa Food Bank and the network of agencies they support have been asking for - a commitment to develop a city-led strategy, and to coordinate action with the provincial and federal governments.

## UPCOMING OHS PANEL ON FOOD INSECURITY

**In March 2026, the OHS will host a panel discussion entitled: Food for Life: How Some Organizations In Ottawa Are Addressing The Food Insecurity Gap.**

This panel will bring together community leaders, experts and speakers from the Ottawa area who are actively working to address food insecurity in our community. Attendees will learn how innovative gardening initiatives, urban agriculture and special community partnerships are vital to creating a more equitable and sustainable food system to help bridge the food gap. **For more information on this panel, as well as the line-up of speakers for 2026, see - <https://ottawahort.org/speaker-series-2026/>.**

"The Ottawa Food Bank is a compassionate place," says Farah. "The folks are great. And it's heartening to see the incredible support in our community. We recently received a donation from a brother and sister who set up a lemonade stand in their neighbourhood. That just goes to show you that no contribution is too small and every dollar makes a difference."

But the goal, of course, is to make food banks a thing of the past. Until that happens, we all need to step up and contribute - whether it's with donations of food or money, time volunteering at the Farm or the warehouse, or advocacy to effect changes. We can all make a difference in someone's life by helping to support the tremendous efforts of the Ottawa Food Bank and their Community Harvest Farm.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### SIGNUP FOR SHIFTS AT THE FARM OR WAREHOUSE:

<https://ofb.volunteerhub.com/vv2/#>

### MAKE A DONATION:

<https://www.ottawafoodbank.ca/donate/>

### LEARN MORE AT:

**Ottawa Food Bank website:**

<https://www.ottawafoodbank.ca/>

**Community Harvest Farm website:**

<https://www.ottawafoodbank.ca/community-harvest/>

**Ottawa Horticultural Society website:**

<https://ottawahort.org/>

## REFERENCES:

Ottawa Food Bank Website, Ottawa Horticultural Society Website



# THE COLOURFUL WORLD OF DAHLIAS

BY SERGE PARISIEN

Few flowers come in more varied shapes, sizes and colours than dahlias. Some are even multi-coloured! While many gardeners shy away from these beautiful flowers because of the effort required to uproot and winter their tuberous root system, these flowers will reward the patient gardener with gorgeous blooms throughout the summer (tubers are groupings of “potato-like” structures attached to one or more crowns). Because dahlias have hollow stems, some of the taller varieties require staking, contributing to the high maintenance reputation of this flower.

Putting the negatives aside, for those of you who would like to experience the beauty of dahlias with less effort, tubers can be purchased in early spring and planted indoors to get an early start so that they will be well established when planted outdoors (mid-May). These plants can also be purchased at local flower nurseries in late spring or early summer to enhance your gardens. When purchasing, note that not all dahlias are perennials. The annual varieties tend to be smaller plants with small flowers. Nonetheless, they will add a new dimension to your gardens and provide



beautiful blooms all summer and into the fall season. Some of the bi-coloured varieties (see 'Blackberry Ripple') will often surprise you with solid colours as well as bi-coloured flowers on the same plant. Dahlias are sun-loving plants requiring rich soil, regular watering and the occasional fertilizing but will wilt in afternoon sun so it is best to avoid locations where the late afternoon sun is intense.

These amazing flowers can also be planted in pots to enhance your patio. The key requirement

here is to plant them in a large pot (minimum 15 inches in diameter) having adequate drainage to avoid root rot. I usually put a layer of rocks at the bottom of the pot (you can also use loose crushed stones). Keep in mind that with potted plants, they will require more frequent watering as the sun dries up the soil more quickly in a pot.

I have been perpetuating my dahlias over the past 10 years by pulling out the plant tubers in the fall and storing them over winter. Should you wish to experiment with this process, below are the steps that I follow:

- After the first good frost, cut the stems 3-4 inches above the ground then use a pitch fork to uproot the dahlia tubers, staying several inches away from the stems to avoid damaging the tubers. It is very important not to cut the stems too low as you do not want to damage the crown of the tubers. This can usually be done in late October in the Ottawa area.
- Once the tubers have been uprooted, remove most of the soil using a garden hose. Let the tubers dry prior to storing for winter. One to two days in a garage or shed should be sufficient. Although not mandatory, you can cut most of the small dried roots from the end of actual tubers.
- For storing, I use a dry mixture of peat moss or rich organic soil with wood shavings (Note: the wood shavings are optional but will help absorb moisture from the soil mixture). The important point here is that the mixture must be as dry as possible. The tuber grouping is then placed in a paper bag completely buried in the mixture (only the short stems can be visible). The paper bag is then stored in a location where the temperature ranges from 5 to 10 degrees Celsius, ideally a cold storage or a mildly heated garage where the temperature does not go below freezing in the winter. I have vented shelves in my cold storage and that provides plenty of air around the bag.

**I hope you have enjoyed this brief article and that you are excited to take on a dahlia project of your own. The start-up of dahlia tubers in the spring is for another article. In the spring article, I will cover the process of "waking up" dahlia tubers as well as how you can separate them so you can enjoy more of these beautiful flowers! So, stay tuned and have a good winter!**



# THE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

BY SUNDAURA ALFORD-PURVIS

## LESSONS LEARNED

Around ten years ago, after thirty years as an avid gardener and about fifteen working in the horticultural industry, I started actively seeking out and planting native species; I've learned a few things from those plants since then.

I've learned that, rather than just sun, shade and growing zone, I need to seriously consider the ecosystem that a species originates from and what that tells me about their needs, behaviours and the plant community that usually surrounds them. I've also learned that they can behave in unexpected ways when we separate them from those communities.

When it comes to animals, we have learned over time that incorporating as many aspects of their home habitat as possible when bringing a wild species to a new place helps to ensure that they thrive and helps to reduce the chances of them developing unusual or unhealthy behaviours. In our urgency to add native flowers to our home landscapes to help support dwindling pollinator populations, the reality that these plants are not domesticated species is easy to overlook.

## HARDWORKING BUT OFTEN FORGOTTEN

The majority of pollinator gardens are filled with plants that evolved in grassland settings but, when we bring them into our gardens, we often neglect to bring their companion grasses along and those grasses have a lot of important roles.

Grasses help to slow the spread of enthusiastic rhizomes with their fibrous root masses. They densely



cover the soil to limit the number of volunteer seedlings. They provide root competition that limits overly enthusiastic growth that often results in plants that flop over under the weight of their own blooms. They also directly support pollinators, acting as host plants for skippers and other insects and providing seeds for migrating and over-wintering birds.

The dense mass of foliage that they create is also part of the physical habitat of many of the creatures that tend the health of the soil or that need a place to hide away from drying winds or hot sun during the day or temperature fluctuations over the winter. Grasses are the living mulch that protects the soil from the drying sun, the eroding wind and even compaction from falling rain. In naturalistic landscape design, which often mimics grassland ecosystems but doesn't always fully consider the origin of the species included, grasses are frequently described as the matrix that the showier species are placed within. This gives a fair idea of how dense grass plantings need to be to fulfil their role. Rather than a clump here and there, they are at their best when they are extensively planted and densely fill the spaces between the other perennials, becoming the framework that holds the showier species through the changing seasons.

## GETTING STARTED WITH NATIVE GRASSES

If you are planning out a new pollinator garden, starting with the right grass(es) for the growing conditions can help narrow down the rest of your plant selections by helping to define which ecosystem to use as your guide.

Consider the soil fertility, sunlight and available water. Moisture-loving species will tend to be taller, whereas drought-tolerant species tend to be shorter, but there are exceptions.

Picking a species around 2/3 of the height that you want the overall planting to mature to will help to ensure that the showier species remain visible to humans and insects alike. Plan for a grass or flower seedling every foot or so and for the grasses to fill between 30% and 70% of the available spaces.

On the shorter end of the range, in hot, dry, low-nutrient settings, Poverty Oat Grass, June Grass and Purple Love Grass are really good options. In richer or partially shaded areas, Tufted Hair Grass would be a better bet. Prairie Dropseed is popular for very tidy gardens but I find them to be incredibly slow to establish. For tuft-forming species in dappled shade, Nodding Fescue and Purple Oat Grass are two good options although I'd also recommend exploring the wonderful world of Sedges if you are working with a forest or wetland ecosystem. Little Bluestem is a familiar landscaping species but they are really prone to flopping when exposed to the least bit of shade or enriched soil, so keep that in mind when considering them for your space.

*The Dibbler typically does not capitalize common names of plants, except where there is a proper noun included. For this article, however, we have left the common names capitalized, as they were written, to respect Sundaura's viewpoint:*

*"I actively choose to do this because I think that framing plants (and all other non-human lives) as things and humans as beings is one of the really foundational problems in our culture and I like to push back at that framing in my writing, both in refraining from referring to plants as 'it' and by treating their names the same way that I treat human names."*

For the middle of the height range, Virginia and Canada Wild Rye and the closely related, shade-tolerant Bottlebrush Grass are all clump-forming, easy to grow from seed and do well in a range of conditions (I've even had one growing outdoors in a large pot for three years without any winter protection). But please be mindful that they have barbed awns that can work their way into delicate skin. Not a difficult thing to manage for humans but they can cause issues for pets if they work between toes or into ears or mouths.

On the taller end, Switch Grass is big, showy, and clumping, tolerant of enriched garden soils and excellent at moderating the spread of rambunctious perennials (yes, Goldenrod and New England Aster, I'm thinking of you). The same is true for Yellow False Sorghum and Big Bluestem, but keep in mind that these last two mature to between 5' and 10' tall, reaching the taller end of that range with plenty of moisture and nutrients and staying shorter in leaner, dryer settings.

While there are plenty more native grass species in Ontario, these are all species that are available from local nurseries and have been tested in urban and suburban settings to ensure that they are at least somewhat adapted to the novel ecosystems so often found around our homes.

*Sundaura Alford-Purvis is the owner and grower at A Cultivated Art Inc., a local native plant nursery. You can find more details about these grasses and many other aspects of native plant gardening on her website [acultivatedart.com](http://acultivatedart.com).*

*Garden Museum exterior including edge of glass walled cafe.  
(Photos by Blaine Marchand)*

# GARDEN GEMS

BY BLAINE MARCHAND

**London is a city with many famous public gardens. But two of its lesser-known gardens are also well worth visiting.**

## **THE GARDEN MUSEUM**

The Garden Museum is housed in the former church of St. Mary at Lambeth. It is close to the River Thames, a short distance from Lambeth Palace, official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and upstream of the Houses of Westminster.

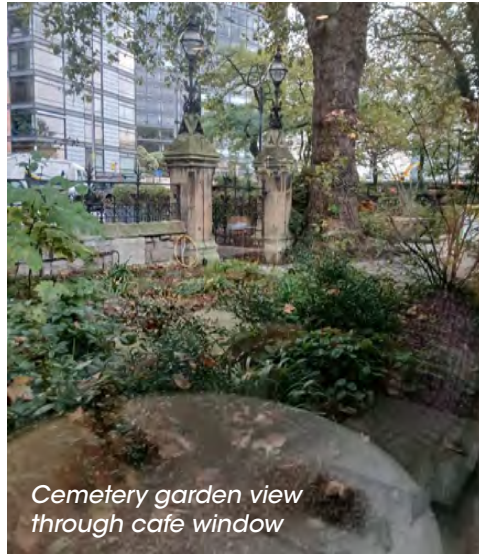
Deconsecrated in 1972, the church was slated for demolition. However, the graveyard adjacent to the building held the remains of two royal gardeners and plant hunters, John Tradescant the Elder (c1570 - 1638) and his son John Tradescant the Younger (1608 - 1662). Father and son had opened their garden to the public. In fact, the current museum is located at the edge of what was the Tradescant estate.

As the church is the oldest structure in the London Borough of Lambeth, its burials and monuments record lives and deaths over a period of 950 years. Built in 1062 by Goda, the sister of Edward the Confessor, it was originally a wooden structure, but was later replaced by a stone building. In the Victorian era, it was substantially altered.

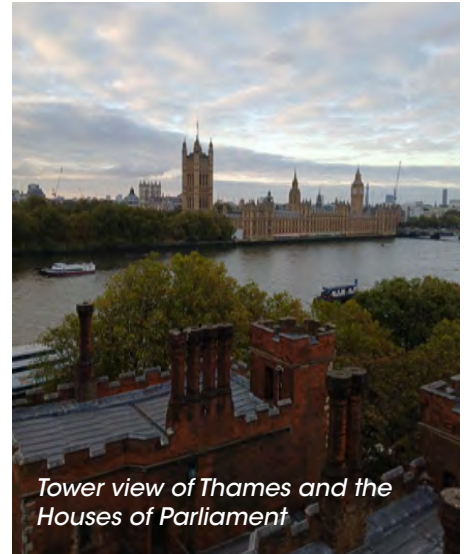
The connection between the church and the Tradescant father and son inspired Rosemary and John Nicholson to fight to save it and create a museum to highlight gardening. Establishing the Tradescant Trust, the Nicholsons secured a 99-year lease from the Lambeth Diocese, which continues to own the land. The rescue and repair of the structure became a celebrated architectural conservation story, opening in 1977 as The Museum of Garden History.



*Sarcophagus in Interior Garden*



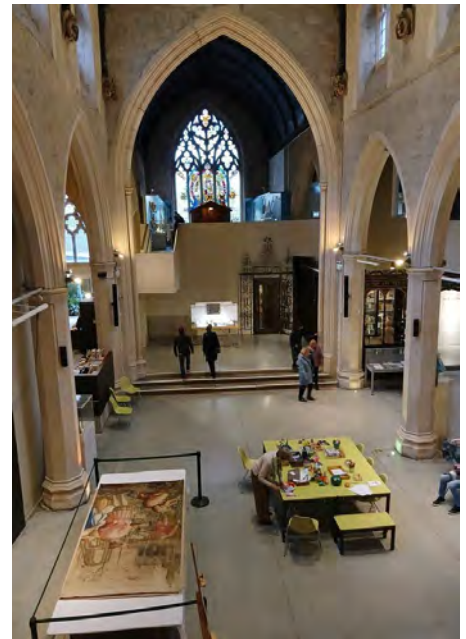
*Cemetery garden view through cafe window*



*Tower view of Thames and the Houses of Parliament*

As an independent registered charity, it relies on donations from Friends, Patrons, and charitable trusts, as well as income from admissions and events. In 2002, the museum launched a multi-year fundraising effort with a goal of £600,000. Subsequently, a design competition was held and the interior was refurbished to allow exhibitions and events. In November 2008, it took on a new name - The Garden Museum.

In 2014, the Museum secured a grant of £3,510,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which allowed further redevelopment and restoration of the former church. This undertaking doubled the interior display space and created rooms which enhanced the museum's ability to incorporate programming for schools and community outreach. The renovation also permitted an archive of garden and landscape design to be opened. Included in the redesign was a viewing platform on top of the church's medieval tower. By climbing the 200-plus well-worn steps of the spiral staircase, visitors have a commanding view down the Thames. A visitors' centre and a Garden Café were added. In 2020, an interior garden was created to hold, in addition to plants, a replica of Tradescant's Ark, a Cabinet of Curiosities containing rare and unusual objects. The original Ark was a showpiece in the Tradescant estate.

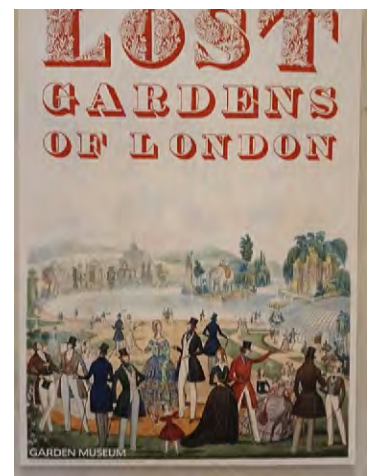


*Garden Museum interior*

In November last year, there was an exhibit, *The Lost Gardens of London*, which showcased drawings, watercolours, design plans, as well as tools, to tell the story of vanished city gardens both splendid and humble. It was a fascinating exhibit. My only quibble is that, it being an overcast November day, the low lighting threw shadows and the information cards were too low to read. But the cafe is a great place to relax over a cup of tea and scones. In conjunction with the exhibit, a book on the subject was on sale - *Lost Gardens of London* by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, Modern Art Press, distributed by Yale University Press.

Also on display was the magnificent Mortlake Tapestry, dating from the 1630s. It illustrates gardening at the time of the Tradescants. It is the earliest known depiction of a woman gardening. Spread horizontally over a loom, this unique piece of history is being conserved by the Museum. Donations are also being sought to finance the work.

Entrance to the Garden Museum is £11 (roughly \$16) per adult. For more information visit [The Garden Museum's website](http://The Garden Museum's website).



*Poster for Lost Gardens of London exhibit (also used for a book cover)*

## THE CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

The second London gem is the Chelsea Physic Garden, a four-acre green space nestled in the very heart of London. Established in 1673 by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, it was created to be an outdoor classroom to train apprentices in the trade.

In many cultures around the world, health was seen as the balance between the body and the mind. Plants were a valuable resource to maintain or restore that balance. Trained in the taxonomy and uses of different plants, apothecaries played an important role, offering general medical advice and treatments made from natural concoctions of herbs.

In the 1680s, Sir Hans Sloane, who had trained at the Chelsea Physic Garden, went on to a lengthy career as a physician and scientist. He became the personal physician to the Duke of Albemarle in Jamaica. When Sloane came back, he bought 166 acres of land in the Chelsea area, which included the Chelsea Physic Garden site. In 1722, he formally agreed to rent the four acres to the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries for £5 per year in perpetuity, ensuring continuity for a space dedicated to teaching people about plants and their medicinal benefits. For over 350 years it remained a teaching garden, lasting in that role until the 1970s.

Within the largely walled garden, there are over 4,500 species of edible, useful and medicinal plants. Each garden has been planted with a specific focus - edible, medicinal, poisonous plants, etc.

Glasshouses are also a prominent but subtle feature in this garden. The first one, installed in 1723, allowed plants from tropical climates, such as pineapples, to be grown. Heated by a stove, these glasshouses recreated growing conditions from around the world. The Victorian Era saw the construction of new glasshouses so the Garden's global collection of plants continued to thrive. Recently, the glasshouses were fully restored, further improving the growing conditions for more sensitive plants.

Throughout its history, the Garden has been a leader in discoveries. Phillip Miller, Head Gardener (1722 - 1770), was an expert in mimicking



growing conditions of plants in their original locations. Miller classified many plants in the west for the first time. His *Gardeners Dictionary*, published in 1731, offered practical advice on the latest plant cultivation methods and the science of botany. Eight editions of his guide reached readers in Britain, and beyond.

Robert Fortune, the most famous British plant hunter, was Curator of the Garden from 1846 to 1848. He left, after being recruited by the East India Company, to search for specimens in China and Japan. His exploration introduced to Britain around 250 new ornamental plants, including *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant. The production of tea in China was a closely guarded trade secret. In modern sensibility, such acts are now viewed as horticultural espionage.

Thomas Moore, Head Gardener (1848 - 1887), an avid collector of medicinal plants, made the Garden the showcase in Britain. He also oversaw the building of the garden's Cool Fernery.

One accidental discovery was the forcing of rhubarb. Oral tradition relates how a gardener found rhubarb growing underneath a bucket and noticed it grew straighter and taller. This method quickly became a standard horticultural technique.

Like all organizations, the Chelsea Physic Garden has moved with the times. In 1990, Fiona Crumley became the first female Head Gardener. Reflecting an increased understanding of the importance of local and Indigenous knowledge, the Garden was now committed to respecting, crediting, and protecting this knowledge for the future of humankind. The Garden endorsed the Nagoya Protocol, a supplementary agreement to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. This Protocol's objective is the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. It is a way of contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The Garden supports the Nagoya Protocol by raising awareness and verifying the sources of its plant collections. It ensures permission is obtained before using plant knowledge and guarantees profit-sharing.

The Physic Garden became a charity, opening to the public, in 1983. More than 80,000 visitors and learners visit the Garden annually. For those wishing to visit this beautiful and calming space it is best to consult their website, [chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk](http://chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk) for more information. Tickets are £11 (roughly \$16) per adult. There is also a gift/bookstore and a cafe.



Tours on Offer



Map of Garden Layout



Psychic Garden Greenhouse



Psychic Garden Greenhouse

# THE GIFTS OF A FALLEN OAK TREE: How a 115-Year-Old Red Oak is Helping My Garden and Home

BY JOANNE LACROIX

## AN UNEXPECTED FALL

In the quiet darkness of an early summer morning, just after 4 a.m., the forest on my home property echoed with a deep, resonant crash. A mighty red oak—standing tall for an estimated 115 years, based on its diameter and circumference—had snapped in half and had fallen to the forest floor. Its presence in the forest had long been a source of shade, shelter, and silent grandeur. But its fall was not the end of its story. In fact, it marked the beginning of a new chapter filled with abundance and gifts—one that would deeply benefit my garden, my home, and the creatures who share this woodland.

When I approached the tree later that morning, the scene was both humbling and inspiring. This giant had landed hard, its great trunk split open, revealing something unexpected and beautiful inside: a channel of beautiful, dark, rich soil. Years of undetected internal decay had transformed the heartwood into a thick, earthy compost—a slow and natural process that had turned its once-solid core into something entirely new and life-giving.

## RICH GIFTS

I collected the soil found along the tree's core, filling several large containers with the deep brown humus. It was crumbly, fragrant, and clearly alive with biological activity—the kind of material gardeners dream of.

When I worked it into my garden beds, the results were very encouraging. Plants responded with vibrant growth, lush foliage, and an overall boost in health and vigour. The abundant rain that fell shortly thereafter provided the right moisture for this thriving new layer. The tree, once towering overhead, had become nourishment at ground level.

But the fallen oak's contributions didn't stop there. Its wood, strong and dense, will warm our home through the fall and winter months once it has sufficiently dried out. The large logs, once seasoned, will feed our fireplace and help us keep the chill at bay. There's a certain comfort in knowing that the tree will continue to give warmth long after its fall.

As for the branches, they were gathered and sorted into piles throughout the property. These seemingly chaotic heaps now serve a quiet purpose—becoming shelters for small forest mammals, birds, and insects. In this way, the oak's legacy lives on in the lives of others, creating micro habitats that support biodiversity in our corner of the world.

A rich source of nutrients for the gardens



Gathering the new-found rich humus



A source of heat for the fall and winter seasons

## A TREE THAT WILL KEEP GIVING

The fall of the red oak was dramatic, even startling. But what followed has been a powerful reminder that in nature, nothing is wasted. From soil to shelter to firewood, this tree continues to serve with quiet generosity.

It's comforting to know that the cycle continues. One life ends and, in doing so, nourishes many others. This once-majestic oak may no longer stretch to the sky, but its roots—metaphorically speaking—now run through the soil of my garden, the warmth of my home, and the life of the forest floor.

A channel of deep brown humus at the tree's core

*Photos by Joanne Lacroix*

*Helloborus spp.* (hellebore, Lenten rose)

## OHS DIRECTORS COLUMN

A 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 Garden Darlings

BY CINDY LYON

It is August – it has been a very hot, very dry mid-to-late summer. After returning home from a stay at a friend’s cottage, I walk through the garden and witness many of the inhabitants of my urban corner lot in Ottawa’s McKellar Park neighbourhood begging for water and attention. Some have gone so far as to give up life entirely and call it quits for this summer of 2025.

But there are those that remain nonchalant, still glowing, blooming, green and managing through this drought like champions. Those are my “Garden Darlings.” I know, it is rather improper – like naming your favourite children. But we all have those members of the family, and the garden family, that require less care, less attention, and continue to perform year-in and year-out – not just gracefully but with special aplomb, continuing to beautify even through the current drought and my neglect. The list includes many you probably have in your garden: bridal wreath spirea, peonies, day lilies, weigela, hydrangeas and brown-eyed Susans – but here I will just bring attention to a few special ones, perhaps even a bit unusual, including a few natives as I diversify my horde.

I have two hellebores that are my late-winter/early-spring delights in the garden – the first beautiful blooms poking out of the soil in April while all around them are grumpily pulling the covers over their heads. The blooms are resplendent well into July, partnered with the beautiful dark



*Helloborus spp.* (hellebore, Lenten rose)



*Helloborus spp.* (hellebore, Lenten rose)

green, evergreen leaves that continue to perform throughout the summer and fall.

My real garden champion is a yellow false indigo cultivar, 'Lemon Meringue,' purchased many years ago at Richmond Nurseries, that surpasses all expectations. It is a charming bully, having outgrown its current location, but it would be such a task to move or divide, I think I will just have to work around it. This year, its diameter has reached 9 feet across and 4.5 to 5 feet tall. At full bloom in the spring, it is a mass of yellow leguminous panicles, but it is the steady, uncompromising performance throughout the season that makes it a standout. I recently planted a fully native *B. australis* and it is showing all signs of being as vigorous as the yellow cultivar. Always green, healthy and happy.

In search of a vine to cover a privacy trellis in deep, dry shade, a chance suggestion at Green Thumb Nursery sent me home with a small hops vine. From this one plant, the vine has provided complete privacy over 12 feet of a 6-foot-high trellis and has been divided to also cover my son's fledgling garden fence. The lime green leaves provide a pleasing brightness in the dark shade and, once winter sets in, I have used the extensive vine to make my Christmas wreath! I just learned that technically hops vines are called "bines," meaning they use the sharp hairs on their twisted stems to grab support, rather than sending out tendrils.



Photos by  
Cindy Lyon

Looking to expand my native plant selections and to cover another 8-foot length of trellis in semi-shade, I purchased a tiny shoot of virgin's bower (nicknamed "native clematis") from Beaux Arbres. This winner has provided full coverage, a beautiful display of small white flowers in mid-summer and many offshoots to send to the OHS plant sales.

My wish to fill a big, empty space and to provide ground cover against the southwest side of the house led me to try two varieties of fragrant sumac - one upright and one low-growing ('Low Gro') - both purchased from Ritchies. Mission accomplished with these hard-working native endurance champions, surviving drought and minimal attention while providing full summer green and bright red fall foliage.

The newest member of my garden favourites is the wonderful corydalis I purchased as my first choice for volunteering at an OHS potting-up event before a sale (shout out - volunteering for potting-up gives you "front of the line" plant selection). The photo shows how it looked from spring to August - constant yellow blooms in a lovely mound of feathery green leaves.

I picked up this little blue star at Artistic Landscape Design, having viewed it in bloom in their display garden. It is a stalwart, showing off its sparkling star flowers in the late spring/early summer, and later with its yellow fall foliage.

I am not a completely neglectful gardener - I do provide my flock with compost and aged horse manure in the fall and practise the work-saving technique of "leave the leaves." But, come summer, my attention goes to activities - biking, camping, hiking and canoeing - so my garden must just manage the best it can. My "Garden Darlings" continue to thrive while I am out adventuring - we seem to have come to a workable understanding.



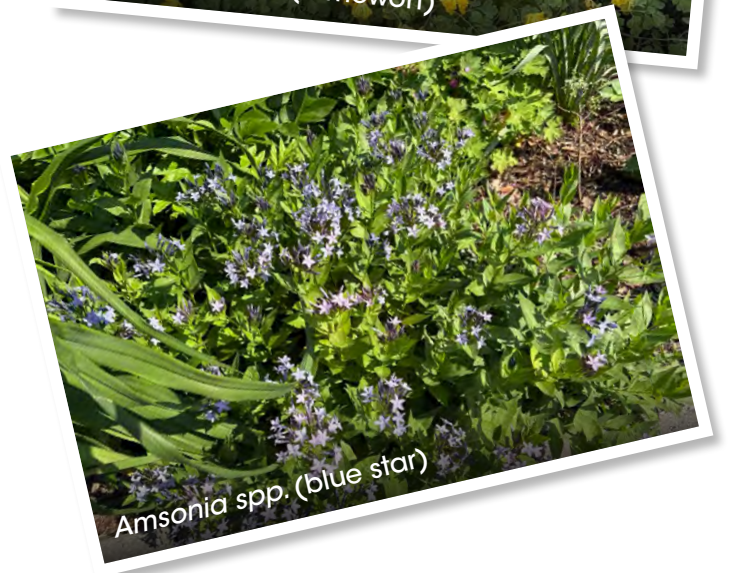
*Clematis virginiana* (virgin's bower, native clematis)



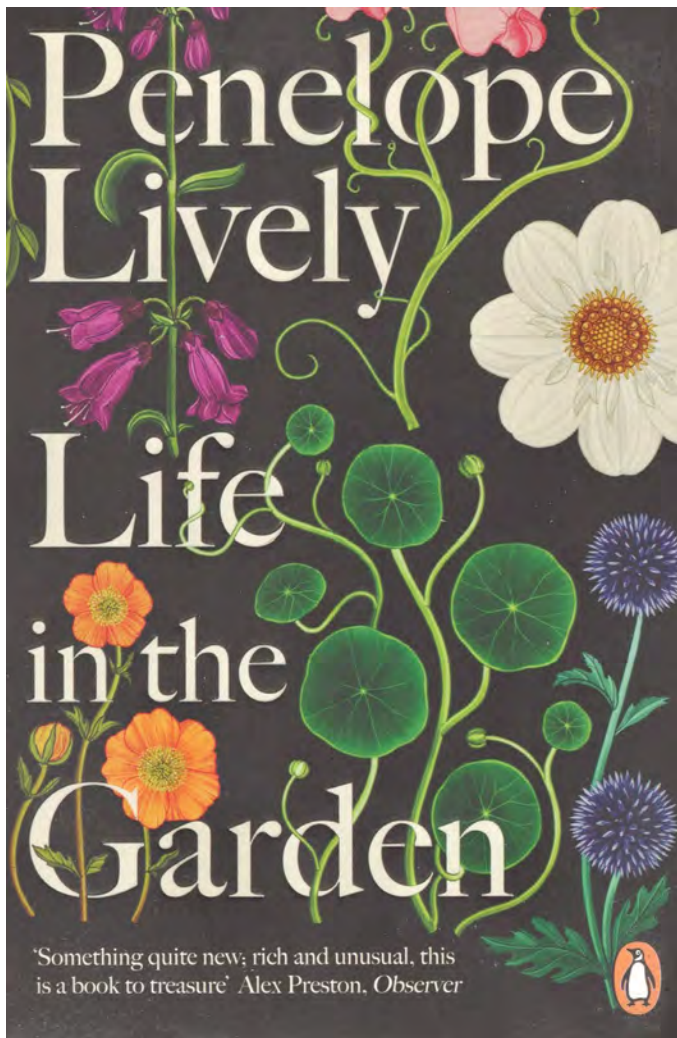
*Rhus aromatica* (fragrant sumac)



*Corydalis lutea* (fumewort)



*Amsonia* spp. (blue star)



## CONNECTING THROUGH GARDENS: DON'T FORGET YOU CAN WRITE!

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BY CATHERINE YOUNGER-LEWIS

She could have sent me an email and a link to the garden book she recommended.

But she didn't, and that made all the difference.

The book appeared unannounced in my community mailbox on a quiet street in Ottawa. A package, postmarked from Great Britain. Mailed from Golsoncott, Somerset, England. Mailed by my English friend. A friendship, spanning 50 years, that has endured through handwritten letters and cards, and occasional live person visits. Letters and cards that were kept, and often re-read, even

years later. The paper and the handwriting, literally keeping us in touch.

I had retired, and my big treat to myself, planned for April 2020, was to take a [Beginner Gardening Course](#) at the ancient London Physic Garden, in London, England [see Garden Gems on page 14 - Ed.], followed by a week in Golsoncott - a wonderful hamlet of old, rose-covered cottages, ensconced for hundreds of years in rural Somerset. It would be gardening bliss.

These plans vaporized, of course, with the onset of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

A few emails were exchanged, and we all hunkered down. Weeks turned into months...and months...and months...with no end in sight. There were no end of suggestions of online ways to "keep in touch."

And then, in my REAL mailbox, The Package. "Life in the Garden" by Penelope Lively. A small hardcover book with an embossed cover of flowers, and the wonderful prose of a Booker Prize winner. Lively muses on the important place her gardens have held in her life throughout her 80-plus years. It was gardening bliss.

I am immediately transported to Golsoncott. I see the sixteenth-century farmhouse. I see my friend's garden, an English country garden. And I see the little red van, proudly displaying "Royal Mail," bouncing down a narrow lane between towering hedgerows, with my book on board, leaving Somerset, and embarking on an amazing journey all the way to my community mailbox in Canada.

A handwritten inscription on the title page reads:

*"Forget about Covid 19 and 'Lockdown.' Read about gardening instead.*

*- love from Somerset xxx"*

My friend could have sent me an email and a link to the book online.

But she didn't. And that made all the difference.

# THE DIBBLER

## 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. Unless otherwise stated, authors are members of the OHS.

## PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSIONS TO:

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The newsletter welcomes articles about all aspects of gardening. **Our Style & Submission Guide is available, along with past issues of The Dibbler, on the OHS website at: <https://ottawahort.org/resources/>**

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