

AWARD
WINNING

THE DTBBLER

SPRING 2026

Remembering Two **Great Plantswomen**



Ottawa
Horticultural
Society

OTTAWA HORTICULTURAL
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Ottawahort.org

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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.

Among the 29 titles for this issue are materials relating to:

- ✓ **PERMACULTURE**
- ✓ **ECOLOGICAL GARDENING & FARMING**
- ✓ **GARDENS FROM AROUND THE WORLD**
- ✓ **BOTANICAL PRINTING**
- ✓ **A GARDENING MEMOIR**
- ✓ **THE RESTORATIVE POWER OF GARDENING & GARDENING FOR LIFE**
- ✓ **PLANTS OF QUEBEC, THEIR HARVEST AND CONSERVATION**
- ✓ **GROWING FOOD & PRESERVING THE HARVEST**
- ✓ **COTTAGE GARDENS & TINY GARDENS**
- ✓ **FLOWERS - growing cut flowers, role of flowers, their meanings and lore**
- ✓ **ORCHIDS**

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/v2/list/display/354296247/2989938928>

Marilyn as auctioneer at the 2017
OHS Plant Auction & Sale with Jeff
Blackadar as her assistant
Photo by Laurie Graham



MARILYN LIGHT *Remembered*

BY LORI GANDY *with contributions from various OHS members*

It was with great sadness that OHS members learned of the passing of Marilyn Light in Kingston this past December. Marilyn was a long-time member of the OHS and the Ottawa Valley Rock Garden & Horticultural Society, along with other Ottawa garden clubs, and she loved to share her knowledge of all things horticultural.

A microbiologist with a profound love of nature and insects, Marilyn dedicated her life to conservation and was active in preserving orchids in Ottawa and across the world. She was internationally recognized as an orchid conservationist. She studied the long-term behaviour of wild orchid populations and registered several of her own orchid hybrids. She was a member of the Canadian Orchid Congress, the Ottawa Orchid Society and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

She loved to share her knowledge about horticultural matters. She authored books and articles on orchid culture and lectured across Canada and internationally. She also often filled

in as host for Ed Lawrence on CBC's garden call-in show.

Many OHS members will recall with delight Marilyn's talent as a plant auctioneer, a role she carried out for several years before moving to Kingston about two years ago. She was a master at getting the best prices for each auction lot. She provided valuable horticultural and historical tidbits on specimens and she enjoyed encouraging competition between bidders.

Marilyn received many awards, including the Ontario Horticultural Association's Silver Medal (the highest medal) in 2000, and The North American Rock Garden Society's Edgar T. Wherry Award in 2006 for her work in disseminating botanical and horticultural information about native North American orchids. The Canadian Orchid Congress awarded Marilyn the COC Certificate Award for long-time service to the Canadian orchid community when she retired as their conservation chair. The OHS bestowed upon Marilyn the award of Honorary Life membership in 2024.

Photo of her garden by Marilyn



Memories of **MARILYN FROM OHS MEMBERS**

Many OHS members have offered their memories of Marilyn and they provide a moving and heart-felt tribute to a much-loved person.

MAUREEN MARK

My last memory of Marilyn is of our traipse through Gatineau Park in Spring 2023. This was an annual excursion over several weeks in the spring that started in 2006. As the Ottawa Valley Rock Garden & Horticultural Society was hosting the North American Rock Garden Society convention in 2008, Marilyn was responsible for the tour of Gatineau Park. As I had already been working with Marilyn on plant selection for the OHS auction, I thought volunteering to be her assistant would be an amazing opportunity for me to learn more from such an accomplished plantsperson. We spent two years documenting and mapping the plants of interest on the Lauriault trail. She had so many tidbits of information to share including historical use of some of the herbs, the geology of the trail, as well as birds and insects. What I remember most about our walks was the utter delight that she found in every discovery. She would point her cane at a stand of wild leeks and talk about the ebb and flow of the stand over the years with a few snarky comments about illegal picking. Then she would suddenly tilt her head as a wide smile blossomed while she listened to the Northern Cardinal's spring song. After the convention, we continued our spring walks until her move to Kingston. We had conversations on countless topics, including topics that Marilyn researched at work or for personal interest. I miss her boundless energy and endless joy in the natural world.

BLAINE MARCHAND

Jamie [Robertson] and I had a great fondness for Marilyn. She was very kind and generous with us. In fact, we have a number of her peonies, either raised by seed or through hybridization, in Osceola. As so often happens in life, for the past two years we had intended to go down to Kingston and take her out to lunch or dinner. But one thing or another seemed always to get in the way. And, of course, now it is too late.

REBECCA LAST

Very sad news indeed. Marilyn was a pioneer in what we call Ecological Gardening today. She was also a world-renowned orchid expert. Her scholarly papers on ResearchGate have over 200 citations. In addition to the plant auction, I recall several years when she ran a mini auction of heritage garlic. She inspired me to start growing garlic. She was always very generous with her time and knowledge, and reviewed and provided helpful comments on several of my presentations. She will be missed.

JEFF BLACKADAR

I have a peony I love that Marilyn bred and donated to the OHS. Some information below about Marilyn's work; she contributed many articles to the OHS since about 1983:

- [Choosing Your First Orchid \(1997\)](#)
- [Growing Fruit in a Small Garden \(1990\)](#)
- [How Does Your Garden Grow? Strategies To Make It Grow Better \(1988\)](#)
- [Perennial Plant Propagation \(2005\)](#)
- [Putting Your Garden to Bed \(2001\)](#)
- [What's the situation with Orchids in our area? A Conversation with Marilyn Light \(2000\)](#)
- [When April Showers Don't Come Your Way or Drought-Proofing Your Garden \(1989\)](#)
- [Zinnias | Ottawa Horticultural Society \(1983\)](#)
- [I never saw this coming but so happy to have been prepared! \(2020\)](#)
- [Garlic: What to know and how to grow \(2021\)](#)
- [Creating pollinator-friendly neighbourhoods \(2023\)](#)



Remembering **OHS MEMBER GILLIAN BOYD**

BY LEIA FOURNEY & REBECCA LAST | PHOTOS OF GILLIAN'S GARDEN BY JOSIE PAZDZIOR

The OHS was saddened to hear that Gillian Boyd passed away in January. Gillian was a valued member of the OHS since 1998. Among other contributions, for many years, Gillian was a key member of the judging team for the annual Mary Bryant Award, which recognized gardens that made harmonious use of native and introduced plant species.

Gillian's involvement with the Mary Bryant Award was in keeping with her many contributions to what we now call ecological gardening, and in sync with her well-earned reputation in the broader Ottawa gardening community. A member of the Master Gardeners since 1990, she contributed many articles to their publication, "Trowel Talk." Gillian was also an enthusiastic practitioner of organic gardening. She was the

coordinator of the Canadian Organic Growers' Demonstration Garden at the Experimental Farm in Ottawa for over 15 years. The COG newsletter described Gillian as "instrumental in developing a core of dedicated volunteers, in planning a major remodeling of the garden space and in making the 'Demo Garden' a popular and attractive learning experience for the public."

Friends who recall being pressed into service to weed or otherwise tend this garden never resented it because working with Gillian was such a wonderful learning experience. Fellow volunteers who worked with her on a wildflower project south of Manotick for the Baxter Conservation Authority, or at Fletcher Wildlife Gardens, where she worked on the butterfly meadow and backyard garden, had the same experience. Gillian was as



generous with her immense knowledge as she was passionate about making the world a better place for humans and non-humans alike.

Gillian's garden, which featured wildlife-friendly features and native plants that served pollinators, was the site of many of her informal mentoring activities. She shared a love of bird-watching with her late husband Hugh, and the two of them created a bird paradise. In her own words, her informal garden reflected her "interests in soils, plant behaviour, xeriscaping, and gardening to attract birds, butterflies, and other beneficial wildlife." OHS member Rebecca Last recalls a tip from Gillian that she incorporated into her own garden. "Birds need places to perch," Gillian had said. So, her garden (and now Rebecca's) featured stakes and bamboo poles sticking out at odd angles to provide perches for her feathered visitors.

In addition to informal mentoring, Gillian was also a skilled teacher. As a volunteer with Canadian Organic Growers, she ran their organic gardening courses in the early days of the Ottawa chapter. In 2013, her efforts earned her an award for being an exemplary volunteer. Other awards followed, culminating in notification from the Governor General's office that her name was added to the list of Canadian volunteers slated to receive the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers. With the support of Master Gardeners, who happily submitted the required paperwork to support her nomination, Gillian was awarded the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers (SMV) in 2021. As described on the [Governor General's website](#):

"She has inspired many people—young and old— to garden more sustainably and shared her knowledge and provided guidance and sage advice on growing in a sustainable, organic and responsible manner."

Over the decade that she volunteered at the Britannia Community Garden, she contributed to planting and maintaining a large rockery. As a volunteer at Bethany Baptist Church, she was invited to create low-maintenance, drought-resistant gardens. Her ecological gardening touch reached throughout the Ottawa area.

People who knew her described her as a humble, down-to-earth person who cared for all creatures,



big and small. Her gardens were known homes to wildlife, with friends saying their fondest memories with her were sitting out in her gardens listening to the ambiance of the outdoors. Her love of gardening spanned not only time, but also location. Friends of Gillian's were encouraged to share pictures of their gardens with her; she often found joy in sharing the art of gardening with others.

She was always giving to others, without the expectation of reciprocity. She didn't like to garner attention and didn't like to cause a fuss.

When receiving the award from the governor general, she reportedly turned down a ceremony and simply wanted the award delivered without fanfare.

The OHS is saddened by her loss, and it will be felt by members of the wider gardening community. We appreciate Gillian's significant contributions over the many years. She was a member, a mentor, a friend, and a recognized advocate for the community, someone who was truly invested in making the world a better place for all of its inhabitants.

GROWING SEEDS

BY TUULA TALVILA
PHOTOS BY TUULA TALVILA
EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

Spring is here and with it comes the joy of seeing your seeds germinate! You may have already started some plants from seed indoors, or are busy planning what seeds you'll be sowing outside in the warmer months ahead. Maybe you're going to try growing something new or are looking forward to your favourite reliable varieties. If you plan to save seeds at the end of the growing season, now is the time to plan your garden accordingly.

WHY SAVE SEEDS?

Saving your own seeds is fun and can make gardening more economical. It gives you a sense of self-sufficiency and of being part of nature's cycle. Maybe you have a special variety of tomato that has been grown in your family for generations and you want to continue that, or just grow something that's hard to find. Seeds can be stored, seeds can be shared, and seeds can even be eaten (think pulses).

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU PLANT?

First of all, if you're planning to save seeds, you need to choose open-pollinated varieties. These



ABOVE PHOTO: A selection of seeds saved from last season: peas, basil, and pole beans | **TOP PHOTO:** The hardest thing about saving seeds from peas is resisting eating all of them when they're ripe! Leave some pods on the vines until they are fully mature and have dried, usually by mid- to late July.



Beautiful scarlet runner bean seeds

will “come true,” i.e. plants will have the same characteristics as their parents. In contrast, F1 hybrid seeds will produce sterile plants or, if they do produce seeds, the next generation plants won’t have the same traits as their parents.

If your plants get cross-pollinated by other varieties of the same species and you collect

the resulting seeds this year, they won’t come true to your original variety. If you want to maintain a variety’s purity and keep getting its desirable traits year after year – the size, colour, and flavour that are specific to that variety – then you have to know a few things about your plants before you plant them this spring.

HOW DO YOUR PLANTS REPRODUCE?

Plants such as spinach, sorrel, Swiss chard, beets and corn are wind-pollinated. Most people don’t grow leafy greens like spinach and sorrel with their fruits in mind but, if you’d like to get some seeds from them, it’s best to plant them not in rows but in a block; that way you increase the likelihood of wind-borne pollen encountering the same kind of plant. The same is true for corn. Note that spinach has male and female flowers on separate plants, so you’ll have to let more than one plant bloom if you want to produce seeds. Beets and Swiss chard are biennials, so to get flowers you’d have to overwinter them.

Peas, bush and pole beans, and lettuce are self-pollinating, or self-fertile – pollen moves within each flower and doesn’t need to come from another flower or plant. A few years ago I was surprised to learn that tomatoes are not dependent on insects for pollination. What about all those bumblebees on my tomato flowers? Pollen in tomato flowers is tightly held within the

stamens and the bees’ buzzing loosens it – “buzz pollination.” Tomato flowers, however, are entirely capable of pollinating themselves as long as the pollen is released by some sort of movement. Because bumblebees visit many flowers, however, they can transfer pollen between tomato plants (cross-pollination). This is useful if the pollen’s coming from tomatoes of the same variety and will improve fruit production. If the pollen’s coming from a different variety, however, you want to avoid this if you’ll be saving seeds.



Tomato flowers in a blossom bag. (Photo copyright Seed Savers Exchange, used with permission.)

Peppers, chives, and many herbs, brassicas and ornamental flowers have

open flowers that are insect-pollinated. Members of the squash family – squashes, zucchini, cucumbers, melons – have separate male and female flowers on the same plant. Pollen from a male flower has to be transferred to a female flower for pollination and fruiting to occur. Here, bees and other insects are essential (or a gardener with a paintbrush). Cross-pollination is common within species in this family; for example, zucchini and acorn squash are both varieties of the species *Cucurbita pepo* and will readily cross-pollinate.

Knowing what species your plants are and how they get pollinated will help make sure you’re going to get fruit, and therefore seeds, and will help you determine how to eliminate unwanted cross-pollination from related varieties nearby.

HOW TO PREVENT UNWANTED CROSS-POLLINATION?

You can prevent cross-pollination from other varieties of the same fruit or vegetable species by using timing, separation, or containment of the flowers you want to collect seeds from:

- ▶ Grow only one variety of each vegetable you plant in a given year.
- ▶ Grow varieties that flower at different times and save seeds only from flowers that were pollinated when the other variety was not blooming.
- ▶ Keep different varieties at a suitable distance from each other so that pollen is unlikely to travel between plants of different varieties. There are some excellent resources (see list at the end) that outline the necessary isolation distance for various food plants. Distances can be as short as 3 to 5 metres for self-pollinated plants such as peas, lettuce, and green beans; 3-15 metres for tomatoes. For wind- or insect-pollinated plants, however, isolation distances can be large, such as 25 metres for eggplants, 45 metres for peppers, or 400 metres for squash, which isn't feasible for most home gardeners (unless you have a second property where you also garden, such as a cottage or an allotment garden).
- ▶ Create a physical barrier to cross-pollination, such as a blossom bag used to cover a cluster of tomato flowers, or a piece of insect netting over an entire pepper plant. You may then need to assist with pollination: with tomatoes inside a blossom bag, you can give the flowers a strong shake to get the pollen moving; you can use a paintbrush to manually transfer squash-family pollen from male flowers to female flowers. Just remember to mark those flowers and save their seeds.

Keep in mind that you may not know what your neighbours are growing and could end up with cross-pollination from plants in surrounding gardens. Similarly, you may not know if someone nearby is growing a genetically modified variety; as of January 2026, a GM tomato called The Purple Tomato™ is allowed to be sold to home gardeners, without mandatory labelling identifying it as genetically modified. As the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario points out, "this poses a contamination risk for organic growers and for those stewarding heirloom or regionally adapted varieties."

HOW MANY PLANTS SHOULD YOU GROW?

If you're interested in maintaining a good level of genetic diversity in the seeds you save and carry on to the next generation, you'll need to take population size into consideration. This might be less of a concern for the home gardener, compared to a commercial seed producer, but it's still worth keeping in mind. Many of the resources listed below, that include information about isolation distance, also include the number of plants required to maintain good genetic diversity. While you will likely get viable seeds from a single plant, to maintain genetic diversity over many future generations you should save seeds from 5-10 plants for many common food plants.

I have been referring here to vegetable gardening, but these principles apply equally to saving seeds from your flower garden. Good luck with your seed growing this season!

SOME GOOD SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

The Seed Garden: The Art and Practice of Seed Saving (2015). Seed Savers Exchange. (Available at the Ottawa Public Library)

The Seed Savers Exchange website:
<https://seedsavers.org/learn/growing-guides/>

Seeds of Diversity seed-saving resources:
<https://seeds.ca/seed-gardening-resources/seed-saving/>

How to Save Your Own Seeds: A Handbook for Small-Scale Seed Production (2013). Seeds of Diversity Canada.

Seeds, Transparency, and Choice: GM Tomatoes Threaten to Enter the Garden Market (2026). Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario.
<https://efao.ca/genetically-modified-garden-seeds/>

Squash Hand-Pollination. Seed Savers Exchange.
<https://seedsavers.org/squash-hand-pollination/>

Bagging Tomato Blossoms. Seeds of Diversity.
<https://seeds.ca/seed-gardening-resources/gardening-resources/bagging-tomato-blossoms/>



Waking up YOUR DAHLIA TUBERS

BY SERGE PARISIEN

This article is a follow-up from the fall edition of The Dibbler (The Colourful World of Dahlias).

With Spring just around the corner, this article will provide step-by-step instructions to get your stored dahlia tubers started.

WHEN TO START YOUR DAHLIA TUBERS

My recommendation is to start your dahlia tubers in the mid-April timeframe as you want the plant to be in full growth when transferring outdoors. In my experience, when planting sooner, the plant's root growth becomes limited by the growing pot, resulting in a plant becoming leggy.

PREPARING YOUR TUBERS



While the survival rate is generally very good, it is possible that not all tubers will survive winter storage. I have noticed that I typically lose 5-10% of my dahlia tubers. With the extreme cold temperatures we have seen this winter, the temperature in my cold storage where I store my dahlia tubers has

been colder than usual. As a result, I may experience more losses this year. If your tuber grouping looks shrivelled (see picture), it

may be necessary to soak them in water for a few hours (4-6 hours) to help rejuvenate the tubers. This should provide the hydration needed prior to potting your dahlia tubers.

POTTING YOUR TUBERS

When planting your tuber grouping, use an indoor/outdoor potting mix. This will provide the growing tuber the necessary nutrients to give the boost required for initial growth. For best results, plant your tubers in indoor conditions exceeding 15 degrees. The warmer, the better!

When initially planting your tuber grouping, it is not necessary to completely bury the tubers in the mix. As illustrated in the picture, half-fill your planting pot and simply push the tuber grouping into the potting mix until all tuber tips are embedded in the mix. This is more than sufficient to get the initial growth going. At this point, you should water the tuber very sparingly to avoid root rot. A few drops of water around the planted tuber every 3-4 days is more than sufficient. Also, do not worry about providing the tuber with light until you notice sufficient growth.

SEPARATING YOUR TUBER GROUPINGS

It is not recommended to attempt to separate your tuber grouping until you notice the early growth stems coming out of the crown of your tubers. When ready to separate, use a sharp knife or cleaver to separate your tuber grouping, keeping sufficient tuber support with each separated grouping. The tuber is not the root but the food supply for the plant; therefore, the new stems require at least one tuber to survive.

INITIAL GROWTH MAINTENANCE

As the initial growth stems lengthen (3-5 centimeters), you can add potting soil to cover your tubers. At this point providing a few hours of light daily will also help the plant

in its growth.

This will also be the opportunity to cut back the previous year's old stems.

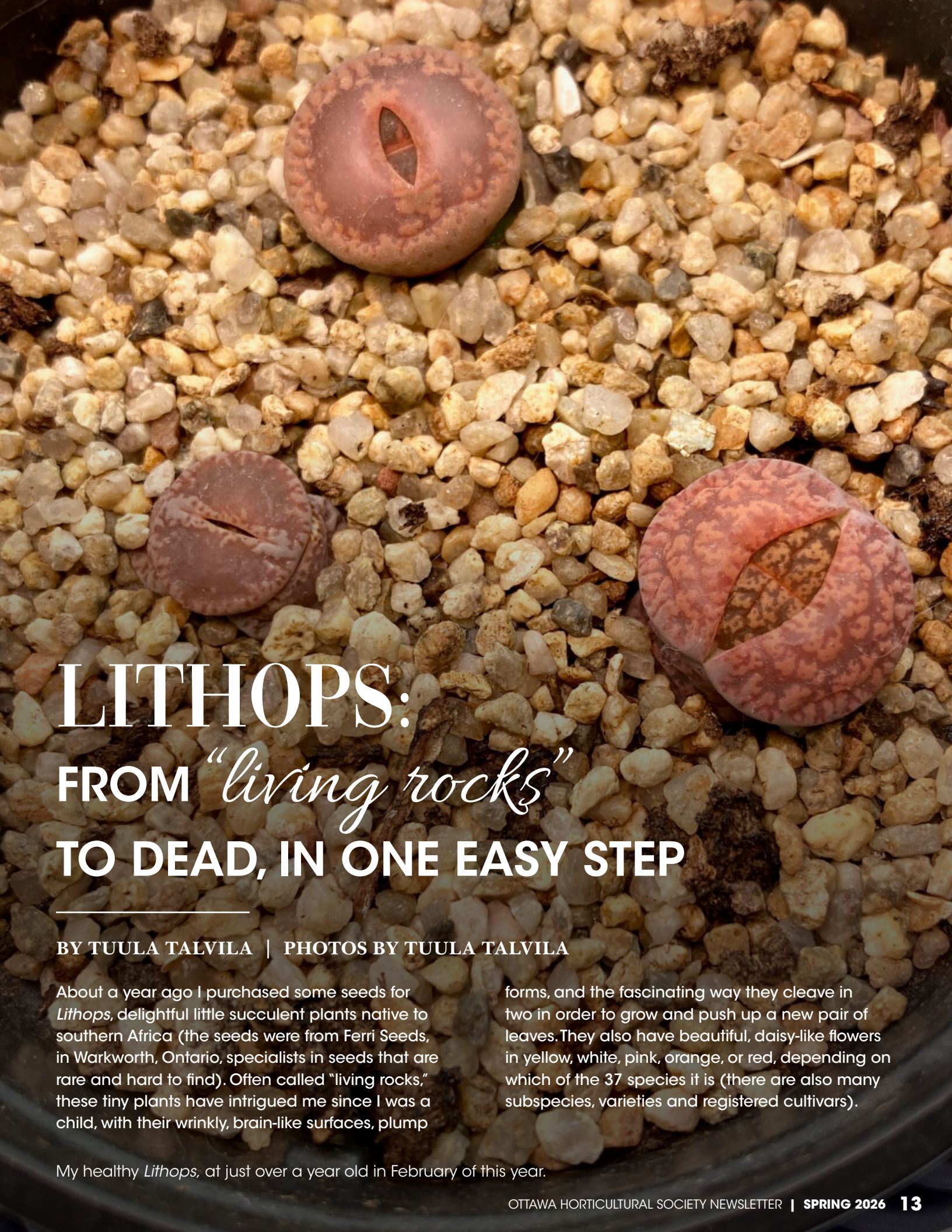
A practice that is highly recommended is to "pinch" your growing dahlia stems. This technique, not unique to dahlias, consists of removing or cutting the top growing tip (including small leaves and the terminal bud) of a young stem to encourage branching out, leading to a bushier, stronger, and more vigorous plant.

Failure to do so will result in a taller, leggy plant with fewer blooms. When transferring outdoors from your indoor pots, you can continue to pinch the dahlia plants until the stems reach 30-40 centimetres high.

As with most annuals, dahlias should not be planted outdoors until the risk of ground frost is extremely low (usually the May long weekend).

I hope these instructions will be helpful and will provide you with the basic steps to get started!



A close-up photograph of three Lithops plants, also known as living rocks, resting on a bed of small, light-colored gravel. The plants are reddish-brown with a mottled pattern and a central slit for a mouth. One plant is at the top, one at the bottom left, and one at the bottom right.

LITHOPS: FROM “*living rocks*” TO DEAD, IN ONE EASY STEP

BY TUULA TALVILA | PHOTOS BY TUULA TALVILA

About a year ago I purchased some seeds for *Lithops*, delightful little succulent plants native to southern Africa (the seeds were from Ferri Seeds, in Warkworth, Ontario, specialists in seeds that are rare and hard to find). Often called “living rocks,” these tiny plants have intrigued me since I was a child, with their wrinkly, brain-like surfaces, plump

forms, and the fascinating way they cleave in two in order to grow and push up a new pair of leaves. They also have beautiful, daisy-like flowers in yellow, white, pink, orange, or red, depending on which of the 37 species it is (there are also many subspecies, varieties and registered cultivars).

My healthy *Lithops*, at just over a year old in February of this year.



The gang of mutants. One of these days they might make a break for it.

Things started out well. Germination was a big success: from a packet labelled ten seeds, I got fourteen tiny seedlings. I had them in a 9-cell seed pack. Some cells had multiple seedlings, others had none. After a few months, they were recognizable as very tiny living rocks. Some were purplish, others were bright green (the seed packet was a mix of species or cultivars). I kept them under a clamp lamp with a plant grow-light on a timer.

And then came the fungus problem and things started to go downhill. The surface of the growing medium, a mix of coarse grit and indoor potting soil, was steadily getting more fuzzy as a white mould took hold and spread. I had read that sprinkling cinnamon on the soil surface would inhibit mould growth. For some reason – and the logic of the moment escapes me now – I decided to try cinnamon leaf essential oil. Maybe we didn't have any ground cinnamon in the spice cupboard. (But why would I have cinnamon leaf essential oil on hand? And if I didn't have it on hand, why did I buy it instead of ground cinnamon? Some mysteries will never be solved, buried under mouldy fuzz in my memory.)

Thank goodness some part of my brain was still being rational, and I decided to try the cinnamon oil on only some of the cells in the tray. I removed the white fuzz as best I could and sprinkled the extremely aromatic oil on the surface. Very rapidly, my collection of little *Lithops* seedlings went from

fourteen down to seven, as they shrivelled up and died. I had three untreated seedlings that were fine. And there was one cell that had several seedlings that had been treated but were still alive. I flushed the growing medium in hopes of washing out the remaining oil, and they survived!

After that unfortunate episode, every time I watered the tray, the living room smelled strongly of cinnamon for hours, as a sharp reminder of my bad decision. The unaffected seedlings continued to grow and eventually were transplanted into a bigger pot together. They have continued to grow well and slowly get bigger. The group that had barely escaped an early demise, however, were left distorted and stunted in their development. To this day, they are mutants compared to the rest of their surviving cohort. They have scarred tissue and, when they put out new leaves, they sometimes grow right through the side of the old leaves instead of coming up through the gap in the middle. They are tall and skinny, instead of the desired short and squat shape of healthy *Lithops*. I've been waiting for them to reach the recommended size for transplanting to a proper pot, but they have been taking their time getting there.

I treasure the survivors, the true "living rocks," emphasis on the *living*. I'll always regret my decision to use cinnamon oil and will forever be haunted by its pungent odour, reminding me of the poor little "dead rocks."



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.

DIRECTORS CORNER: **Garden to your heart's content**

(Gardening as an act of empowerment)

BY CECILIA LEE
PHOTOS BY MARGARET LAVICTOIRE

PEOPLE, GET READY, THERE'S A GARDEN A-COMIN'

As I write this, it is mid-February and I sense sugaring time is upon us. The angle of the sun creates longer shadows. The light bouncing off the snow is bright. The snow is changing from soft and fluffy to clear and crystalline.

I reminisce about trekking into the woods with family friends in northern New Brunswick to join their spring ritual of tapping trees and creating liquid gold. When that happened, you knew that fiddleheads would come next, then brown fern; edible groundcover and berries will soon proliferate. Lucky for you, if you can get there before the wildlife! A new growing season waits.

Our imaginations sparkle at the thought of new plants, and the visitors that will soon fill the earth and skies.

WHY DO WE GARDEN?

I believe it is human nature. We have a drive to nurture, connect with the earth, grow something beautiful and useful. We are curious – about plants, soil, climate, helpers (like insects and birds), what works well in our area (and not so well). Maybe we seek to make amends for the neglect of the previous season. I am not always the best at wrapping my shrubs, but spring brings a chance at redemption.

Many people don't have access to a yard, but we are still driven to grow: on windowsills, in knotted hangers, floor planters, on shelves. It's not always easy being green, but it brings so much joy.

Gardening is good exercise. At different stages of life, our gardening styles, plant choices, favourite tools, evolve with our differing capabilities and interests. We adapt over time, and are always learning about ourselves as much as about plants and the environment.

Gardening leads to friendships. As a new director of the Ottawa Horticultural Society (2025 was my first year), I have been amazed at the wealth of learning and community activities available through the OHS, and by the enthusiasm and generosity of its members.

Last year, Juliana Adema and I led the Community Impact program for the OHS. Every initiative is rooted in a response to community needs, such as combatting food insecurity, developing sanctuary spaces, and restoring the environment. The activities offer chances for people to come together, work toward a common cause and develop friendships. One of the community gardens sponsored is planning to expand in 2026 to increase production, as well as to provide more opportunities for their volunteers to connect socially.

For me, the chance to volunteer at the Community Harvest Farm and at Carty House were purposeful as well as heartwarming social activities. We look forward to volunteering again, and visiting project sites to see how everything and everyone is making out. An essential element of gardening is that, while there are quiet moments, it is not something we can be truly successful at

completely on our own. It connects us to each other.

GARDENING AS AN ACT OF EMPOWERMENT

Even though I can feel overwhelmed and powerless by trouble in the news, gardening makes me feel we can do something useful. We can grow food for ourselves and others, we can help others learn and enable each other. We can also grow food that is unusual, expensive or unavailable in grocery stores. Food consumed closer to the source is more nutritious than food that travels long distances.

My family planted perilla seeds a few years ago. They spread like crazy, but they provided a taste of home to our transplanted Korean family. As new Canadians, we learned over several decades how to adapt to life in a rural, rugged part of the country. This required tenacity and ingenuity. It also required us to be humble and willing to learn from others.

All of us are new to something, be it a large change, like leaving your country, or a smaller one, like choosing your annuals for the season. Now, as in northern New Brunswick, our garden helps my family enhance the variety in our diet, and feel connected to our histories and the families we can only rarely visit.

EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES ON THE HORIZON

As directors of the OHS, we are excited about the opportunities ahead. Last year, we decided to upgrade our web services, and launched a new website. While we are gradually building the content, the new website will make it easier to support our members, and manage our online resources.

As leads for community impact initiatives, Juliana and I look forward to being able to more easily offer guidance and information to anyone who wishes to be involved in a community planting initiative – whether as a volunteer, a sponsor, or to start a project of your own. On an annual basis, the OHS can assist with expertise, funds, as well as volunteers. You will find information on last year's projects in the [Yearbook](#).

If you have an idea for a community project, please reach out to Juliana and me at community@ottawahort.org. We would love to learn about your ideas, and discuss how we can help.

One activity we will follow closely is the [community gardening and greening initiative of the City of Ottawa](#). The City has launched a new way of assessing applications from residents for community gardens. While it is not a funding program, the approach is aimed at helping proponents implement a gardening initiative on City property.

THE OHS IS LIKE A GARDENING FRIEND

In your own endeavours, I encourage you to look to your friends and resources in the OHS. Last year, my school-aged son and his buddy joined the Friends of the Farm plant sale. They thoroughly enjoyed directing people to OHS experts, soaking in some expertise along with the sun, and helping people carry armloads of plants to their cars. The day was buzzing with anticipation and we fed off of each other's energy. We are eager to participate again.

INSPIRATION IN THE NATURAL WORLD

In closing, I offer photos taken by a friend who likes to bicycle from her home in the Glebe to downtown Ottawa.

A petunia seed landed between paving stones in the middle of a bike rack. How did this little thing take root, avoid getting squashed, and be able to bloom?

It is doing what it is designed to do, thriving in the tiny spaces amidst the stones, to inspire passersby.

To me, the OHS is like this little petunia... small and unassuming, but packed with potential, looking to spark your inspiration.

As we embark on a new growing season, I invite you to take advantage of the learning and connection opportunities with your OHS family.

Bring your ideas, questions and energy. We look forward to seeing you!



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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