

**SEPTEMBER 2020**

## Table of Contents

- 2 **The Dunrobin Tornado and Beyond**  
by Jennifer Mix
- 6 **The Book Nook**
- 7 **The Tornado**  
by Marilyn HS Light
- 13 **Now It's Time**  
by Blaine Marchand
- 16 **Falling for Plants!**
- 17 **American Pokeweed**  
by Tuula Talvila
- 19 **My Favourite Tree: Manitoba Maple**  
by Edythe Falconer
- 21 **Calling All Creative Gardeners!**
- 22 **Shows Corner**  
by Maureen Mark




# THE TORNADO ISSUE

TWO YEARS LATER

ARTICLES BY JENNIFER MIX  
& MARILYN HS LIGHT





# The Dunrobin Tornado and Beyond

JENNIFER MIX

**O**n Friday afternoon, September 21, 2018, around 4:15 Environment Canada changed its weather watch for Renfrew and Lanark counties to a weather warning. Our weather near Dunrobin tends to blow in from the north-west, so I took that warning seriously and told Peter, who was working outdoors.

**S**hortly thereafter, the sky, already blackish, disappeared completely in a white-out of flying rain, wind, dust, leaf particles, and hell was upon us. Peter, who had thought to take shelter on the front porch, realized that he needed more than a roof and came in the front door with a blast of the near-solid air. The two of us struggled to close the front door against the blast and then stood staring through the windows (triple pane and evidently tornado-proof) at nothing. The noise was terrific, sounding louder than a dozen freight trains, and in the ten seconds or so the wind took to move across our land, it left total chaos in its wake.

The centre of the tornado passed between our home and our neighbour's, removing or damaging almost every tree in that space, twisting and felling all the lofty white pines, the oaks and maples with their massive canopies, and most of the smaller trees caught in the whirling melee. Only the ironwoods, though some were twisted like pretzels, seemed able to withstand the assault. An EF3 tornado, as this one was later classified, carries winds of up to 265 km/h within it. *[photo Devastation] [photo Removing fallen spruce]*





01



02



03



04

When we emerged from our home, mere minutes after the monster's passage, it was to a new reality, one that we've been dealing with ever since. After ensuring that our house was sound, if slightly damaged, our next concern was for our neighbours, so we fought our way over, under, and through downed trees in full leaf, massive trunks, and huge upended root systems to reach the road. Calls back and forth confirmed that everyone was ok as far as we could tell, but the road was impassable. The next morning brought a group of neighbours from the nearby suburb of Dunhaven who chainsawed their way for half a kilometer up our gravel road to clear a narrow path for emergency vehicles. From then on, volunteer groups began sending crews of workers to help clear driveways, roads, and generally get things back into some sort of useable shape. We were grateful for their experience in aiding inexperienced helpers on a job site. Very soon, our laneway had been cleared and much of the fallen timber between our house and the road had been dragged out of the way, or cut into firewood lengths, or chipped and blown aside for future mulch. *[Photo laneway damage]*

And then we were on our own.

To make something positive from this heart-breaking disaster, we decided to build a new garden close to the front door where a large maple and several huge Colorado spruce trees had been uprooted. They had all fallen toward the house but had not damaged the roof so we were lucky. During the remainder of that fall we began construction of a retaining wall to create a sun garden where previously there had been no sun at all. *[photo New retaining wall]*

The winter of 2018/19 was a time to get over the shock of the event: I spent a lot of time

Photo 1 - Devastation. Photo 2 - Removing fallen spruce. Photo 3 - Laneway Damage. Photo 4 - New retaining wall.





05

mourning the loss of our beautiful forest and regretting the sight of our neighbours' houses across our raw, naked landscape. (Our neighbours felt the same way about seeing us.) Our home was now exposed to wintry blasts out of the northwest and we dearly missed our sheltering pines and spruces. It was a long, cold winter that year. *[photo Devastation in winter]*

In the spring of 2019 the new retaining wall was finished. Truckloads of triple mix were brought in to create the new garden, which essentially surrounds a low outcrop of native granite that resembles the back of a whale. I have never had a true sun garden before so I was excited to plan for these new delights – roses, peonies, echinacea, iris, perennial geraniums, grasses, and more. But somehow, the plan was sideswiped by my enthusiasm for everything green – so many more perennials begged to be included and vegetables, my first gardening love, had to be accommodated



06

too. I decided to devote a third of the new area to vegetables, and I wanted gladiolas too. You can see where this is going – by the end of its first season, the new garden had become a wild hodge podge with too many varieties growing on top of each other, a classic novice gardener error! *[photo Floral chaos]*

Meanwhile, in an attempt to fill the void of our vacant land and hide our neighbours' houses from view, Peter has had three small post-and-beam sheds built. The frames of the sheds are thick pine but the walls, ceilings and floors are made from lumber milled from our own trees. The sheds were finished this spring and turned out to be charming and whimsical additions to the property; we look somewhat like a small village now. They are the talk of the neighbourhood – everyone wants one! *[photo milled lumber]* *[photo New shed]*

---

Photo 5 - Devastation in winter. Photo 6 - Floral chaos. Photo 7 - Milling lumber. Photo 8 - New Shed.



07



08





to drought. [photo Vegetables in the new garden] [Photo Vegetable plots1]

Alas for my existing perennial garden, however. My passion has shifted to growing vegetables and the perennials are showing my neglect. Hostas, primula, ferns, and other shade lovers had a tough time adapting to the sudden increase in sunshine last summer. This summer has been even harder on them, as I didn't want to risk running the well dry to water them adequately. The hostas are hanging in, growing smaller and looking sun-burned; the ferns are suffering; and the late-summer flowering plants will not flower abundantly this year. This kind of heat and dryness is probably the way of the future and plants will select themselves eventually for this change in climate. On my part, I will need to mulch both the perennial and the vegetable gardens if I want to keep both types of gardens flourishing in future.

This March we all began to experience a different sort of disaster. Anticipating food security problems and having nothing better to do during the pandemic, I started seeds indoors, which proved alarmingly successful, as I produced far too many little turnip, squash, cabbage, tomato, arugula, and lettuce plants needing to be transplanted. In a panic, I decide to expand the 'new garden,' the area behind the new retaining wall, so we brought in *more* soil to raise the level even further, expanding the bed by 50%. Now between the 'old' garden areas and the new, there are seven separate vegetable plots. [Photo Expanding the new garden]

Because our house draws from a well, we use water from five 45-gallon barrels to water the gardens. They have barely managed the job in these distressingly hot summer months of 2020. Still, the vegetable gardens thrive and as I write this (in late July) we're eating potatoes, green beans, turnips, chard, kale, summer squash, tomatoes, and the usual variety of herbs. New plantings are producing black raspberries and strawberries but the elderberries and haskap berries were too few to harvest, probably due



Photo 9 - Pine seedling. Photo 10 - Perennial garden in spring. Photo 11 - Expanding the new garden. Photo 12 - Vegetable plots. Photo 13 - Vegetables in the new garden.



# The Book Nook

25 FALL TITLES SUGGESTED BY THE OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR OHS MEMBERS



The Collection Development staff at the Ottawa Public Library have put together a list of materials for OHS members. This list includes new titles added to the OPL collection.

Among the materials this quarter are:

- **Growing Great Garlic**
- **Pretty Tough Plants**
- **Water-smart Gardening**
- **Tomorrow's Garden**
- **Jardiner avec Marthe**
- **Jardin facile**
- **Kitchen Garden Revival**
- **Stay Grounded**
- **Adventures in Eden**

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/1692947109\\_ottawa\\_horticultural\\_society\\_fall\\_titles](https://ottawa.bibliocommons.com/list/share/354296247_collection_development/1692947109_ottawa_horticultural_society_fall_titles)

In January 2020 I ordered bare root pine and spruce seedlings from the tree nursery in Kemptville to replace our missing forest, and in early April we received and planted them. (The deciduous trees – the oaks, maples, ironwood – were already self-seeding so we didn't worry about their survival.) Alas again, this summer was a terrible time to plant young evergreens. Despite daily watering, we lost a great many to the intense heat and drought, but beyond that, starting a little tree in the poor and thin soil of the Carp Ridge is problematic at the best of times. It's really a small miracle that white pines do decide to grow here: a young self-seeded pine will die in what looks like a perfectly viable spot, yet another will root and grow in a crevice in a rock face. *[Photo Pine seedling]* They seem to be able to decide where they will grow and where not. So we cheer on the survivors, water them as often as possible, and hope that this coming winter will be kind to them. In so many ways, winter is now a kinder, gentler season than summer.

It will take several generations for the forest to re-establish itself. The trees we have planted to assist this process express our hope and our faith in the ability of the natural world to heal. We love the sunshine (in moderation) that the tornado gifted to us and we're trying to diversify the small environment in which we live. We see many more birds now and more bee species working among the proliferating wild flowers that we're encouraging in the new landscape. It still looks a bit chaotic but the bald rocky scars are slowly being covered by a green carpet as regrowth begins. For that we are grateful.



# The TORNADO

Marilyn HS Light

I never saw this coming but am so happy to have been prepared!

## PRE-TORNADO

### Strategies that come in handy!

Just when you believe you have seen it all over the past 50 years — fire, flood, hurricane, ice storm, severe drought, and summer hail — there comes a tornado! To recall how many of my cultivated orchids had survived those previous challenges, and that most garden plants had managed also wherever they happened to be growing, gave me confidence in the resilience of living things to challenging natural events. Which stressor, when, and where it happens may determine the outcome, but why some plants are better able to manage and adapt so well to a new situation is intriguing. We can learn from each and every situation, becoming a more skilled gardener over time. Thankfully, *my gardening strategy has always favoured diversity, selecting plants for heat/cold/drought resistance, and planting seeds of a wide range of annual and perennial species, permitting self-sowing, so that the garden could be prepared to deal with change.* Depending on the event – in this

case a tornado – some plants might not survive thereafter while others might manage well if not beyond expectations in a storm-modified habitat. A garden seedbank may deliver new plants. This is my garden's story.

## TORNADO HAPPENS

On 21 September, 2018, I started the day watering and repotting my orchids, placing them in trays on shelves in the wood frame shade house. Covered with spun woven polypropylene fabric, this setup had provided summer shade and ventilation for some 20 years. That afternoon, I was periodically checking radar showing the weather systems headed for the Ottawa/Gatineau area. When I saw a line of thunder cells approaching at 4:30 pm, with a trajectory likely to cross over us, I turned off the computer and accessories, checked all upstairs windows, leaving a couple open a crack at the top to accommodate possible pressure changes during a severe storm. I then went downstairs to start dinner





early just in case we lost power. Then the lights went out! There was a sound like that of a large dog – growling – six times, each about one second long and apart. At the same time, my husband had seen some shingles flying by, that's all. Then we noticed scattered fragments of pink insulation in the upstairs corridor, and the attic entry ajar. There was no roof! We were safe but securing vulnerable items became a priority. Research data, notebooks, computers and peripherals, reference texts were taken to safety followed by removal of anything else that could be damaged by rain that would soon follow. The basement was the most secure place so all was taken there quickly and covered with plastic—just in case!

## GARDEN ASSESSMENT

**September 21, ca. 6:30 pm, after the tornado passed.**

Five neighbourhood spruce trees were lying on their sides while ours was still rooted, minus its top 7m (*Before: Photos 1, 2, 3; After: Photo 4*). The sturdy 5-foot stem of the Conca D'Or lily had disappeared yet the morning glory vines were

intact, still with blooms. Sections of our roof now lay scattered about the backyard. One piece had slammed into the side of the shade house, shoving it sideways into the shed, while another had slammed into the neighbour's cedar hedge/chain link fence, bending three posts. Various coloured shingles and pieces of other roofs lay scattered about. Pink, white, and blue insulation decorated trees and hedges. I began planning what could be done immediately and what could wait until tomorrow.

Very heavy roof segments had caused structural damage to the shade house but shelves were only displaced laterally; the spun woven polypropylene fabric was intact and was holding the frame together. Another piece had struck the shed and was blocking entry. One large piece of light-weight roof had collided with the runner beans on bamboo stakes while another heavy piece of our roof had landed on the soon-to-be planted



FIG 1 – 2013, Plants grow around blue spruce dripline. FIG 2 – 2013, Foxglove species have propagated on the sunny side of the spruce. FIG 3 – 2017, Yellow Bedstraw prefers the sunny place around the tree. FIG 4 – 2018, the spruce top is torn off by the tornado.



garlic bed, bending and partially dislodging iron posts behind it. These posts supported wire mesh with espaliered jostaberry and gooseberry: the shrubs seemed alright. The fruit had already been harvested so that area was OK for now. I could deal with this the next day.

It was now getting dark so I turned my attention to the 7m tree top that was laying partly in our front driveway, across a perennial border, and into the next driveway. A chap came by with a chainsaw, offering to cut the butt traversing our driveway. For a top-up of gasoline (he refused payment), he quickly removed the trunk and lopped off major branches which allowed me to spread boughs across the flower bed to cushion the lavender that could be trampled. I hauled trunk pieces

and severed boughs to the roadside. A neighbour came by with a sat phone so we could call the insurance.

The rain lasted 20 minutes but that was long enough to enter near the upstairs windows. A smoke detector was wailing as water poured through... but the ceiling seemed intact for now. It was only the following day that we learned, thanks to the same neighbour taking photos with a drone, that the roof frame and most of the plastic film covering the insulation and ceiling was intact. Water had only entered where there were openings through the plastic. I made us coffee using a fondue setup, cheese and meat paste sandwiches, with cookies for dessert. We could survive. We slept downstairs. Tomorrow would be a busy day!

## POST TORNADO - SEPTEMBER 22

### Preliminary Plan

- 1 Cut through the fabric covering the shade house to remove trays of orchids.
- 2 Check all pots/plants for damage, remove to a table in shade.
- 3 Identify orchid and gardening friends who could eventually shelter larger orchids and other plants. We could keep smaller plants indoors until we had alternative accommodation.
- 4 Remove the lightweight debris from the bean vines, harvest undamaged pods, extricate and store the bamboo poles alongside the foundation.
- 5 Attempt removal of heavy roof segments; otherwise seek assistance.

### What was possible?

I successfully removed the orchids, and reaped green beans. Using flagging tape and stakes, I protected an Itoh peony and a lily bed from trampling. There would be a lot of house exterior renovation in future so the garden would be protected.

### What was delayed?

The only task I could not do without help was removal of large heavy pieces of roof. This meant that the shed could not be opened and that the garlic could not be planted. Removal only happened in late October, snow threatened on Oct. 9, so garlic was planted on October 10 and limited to only two cloves per variety because of the size of an alternate bed. At least this would ensure the survival of my collection of 28 varieties.



## APARTMENT-LIVING

Oct. 1, 2018 to July 1, 2019

Alternative accommodation was very limited. After several weeks, we were shown an apartment that had just become available. Places for plants would be limited to windowsills and the back passage near the furnace room where the sun shone in and the temperature was a steady 20°C. During April, the boughs were cleared from flower beds and a planting area chosen for pole beans, tomatoes, and herbs. In May, I started tomatoes from seeds removed from supermarket Bella tomatoes, raising these partly within the sunny passage, and later outdoors on a table by day. I took the plants by bus to our home garden in late May. These grew into impressive and very productive specimens.

## RETURN HOME

We returned to a repaired home on July 1, 2019. The good news was that the Conca D'Or lily, thought lost to the tornado, had survived and presented us with a beautiful set of fragrant blooms in July 2019 and again this year in July (*Photo 5*). This Oriental-Trumpet hybrid is hardy and resistant to lily beetles.

The garlic was harvested in late July but only one bulb of each two could be consumed: the other was saved for propagation. Without a gardener present in early summer, apple mint had spread, attracting a flight of migrating Monarchs and Painted Ladies in September. A full complement of fall-planted garlic was possible which made me smile as I could fill my winter supply for 2020-21. Of course, there was the topped tree, alive, sheltering plants beneath, but somewhat of an eyesore. Neighbours were 'concerned' while I defended



our leaving the tree in place over the 2018-19 winter/summer to protect what grew beneath. On December 5, 2019, a specialist removed the trunk, cutting it into slices that could serve as garden pavers (*Photo 6*). A bounty of fresh boughs was used to protect exposed areas over winter.



FIG 5 – 2019, Lily Conca d'Or was snapped off during the tornado but the bulb survived. FIG 6 – Tree gone, more sun, now the plants take over!



## SPRING/SUMMER 2020

This year's bounty began with squirrel-planted crocus, and resilient *Helleborus foetidus* promising abundant blooms in April (Photo 7). As spring entered summer, we had variable weather, frosts and heat, then frosts again, then drought and a lot of heat. What would happen in that exposed habitat that was once sheltered by the tree? There were surprises with few disappointments.

## WINNERS

Trample-tolerant *Dianthus deltoides* seems to have shrugged off the foot traffic of window and siding installers (Photo 8). Bumblebee-pollinated *Helleborus foetidus* (Photo 7) thrives in full sun, deals with frost, heat, and drought. I discovered seedlings springing up everywhere. Seeds are spread by ants! Shade-loving Solomon's Seals (*Polygonatum multiflorum* and *P. odoratum variegatum*) have now formed an umbrella that shades some *Trillium* and *Arisaema* beneath. Full sun has provided these plants with pollinator access so seeds are possible. The lavender survived beneath a temporary carpet of boughs and is growing well (Photo 9). Fragrant yellow bedstraw (*Galium verum*) has become more compact (Photo 10). A seed-raised *Yucca filamentosa* graced our garden with its first blooms this year. With a backdrop of yellow bedstraw, the look was impressive (Photos 11 & 12). What is truly amazing is how so many annuals and perennials have sprouted from a seedbank, forming handsome clumps in needle-rich compost that was exposed after the tree was removed (Photo 13). *Anemone virginiana* really likes the sunnier place. Foxglove species (*Digitalis*), Columbines (*Aquilegia*), Mallows (*Malva alcea* (Photo 14) and

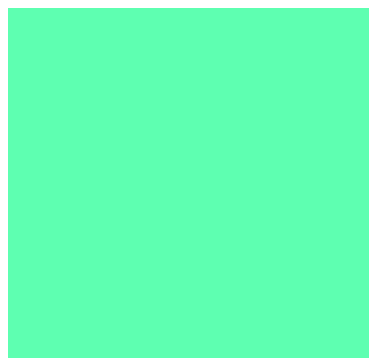


FIG 7 – Now in full sun, *Helleborus foetidus* prospers. FIG 8 – *Dianthus deltoides* survives outdoor renovation to bloom even better than before. FIG 9 – Lavender, sheltered by boughs in winter, now enjoys the heat and summer sun. FIG 10 – Yellow bedstraw thrives with sun, heat, and drought. FIG 11 – Summer heat spurred flowering of *Yucca filamentosa*, June 2020. FIG 12 – *Yucca* blooms opened over a week, drawing the attention of passersby. FIG 13 – Something for everyone, and no planting was needed this year. All plants are self-sown.



*Malva moschata f. alba*), *Polanisia dodecandra* (Photo 15), bright orange butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) (Photo 16), poppies, a magnificent volunteer dill (Photo 13), and electric blue *Echinops ritro* (Photo 17) have collectively almost covered the exposed land. Rust-resistant hollyhock seedlings (*Alcea ficifolia*, *A. rugosa*) abound. Full sun exposure has worked wonders but the deep, spongy, moisture-retentive compost formed over years of needle, grass and hedge clipping deposits is likely most important.



There is a new tree already replacing the old one. A volunteer Balsam Fir took root about six years ago. At the dripline of the cut blue spruce, it was well positioned to become part of the front garden when the large one was taken and is wasting no time in showing off! Less than happy is the *Epimedium x rubrum* but I suspect that this spring's frost and extreme heat were not its best friends. The plant performed well in 2019 (Photo 18), is still alive, just hunkered down from summer heat until next spring. We shall see.

I do not want to make light of a severe weather event that struck the Ottawa-Gatineau area in 2018, causing distress to so many people. We were very fortunate. Gardening friends (Blaine Marchand and Jamie Robertson), and orchid society member Margaret Haydon helped secure the life of those larger plants I could not manage in an apartment. Neighbours passing by these past weeks marvel at how the 'bare' land beneath the spruce has developed into such a diverse patch of varied colours and scents. There is always something new to see and learn!

What I have learned is that my gardening strategy of allowing plants to self-sow, to observe how they grow, and to let life happen, does yield positive results. This front garden, rising from the destructive path of a tornado and removal of a large tree, demonstrates how a gardener can take care of a place, even into the future, presenting every opportunity to prepare for the unexpected. My garden plants have performed better than I could ever hope! Hats off to them!

---

FIG 14 – Pink mallow seedlings are plentiful, promising a great show next year. FIG 15 – Annual *Polanisia dodecandra* is very showy but stems need cutting before seed release. FIG 16 – Three butterfly weed plants produced seeds that now are appearing as blooming plants all over the new space. FIG 17 – *Echinops ritro* is a showy bee/butterfly-magnet that will self-sow but with discretion. FIG 18 – In 2019, shade-loving *Epimedium x rubra* managed full sun but too much heat in 2020 has limited its development.



# Now It's Time

Blaine Marchand

In his ode To Autumn, John Keats writes:

**"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun..."**

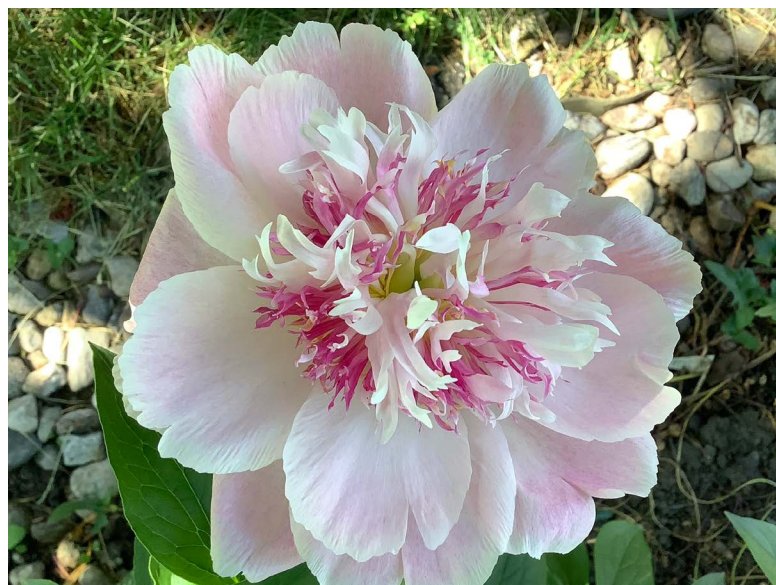
Well, misty and still-warm September is the ideal time to plant bare-root peonies, whether bought from a nursery in a pot or as a division of a mature plant. If you like a particular peony, the only way you can ensure to have the same plant sprout in spring is to take a division of that peony.

Late August through September is the time when peonies start to go dormant. The foliage begins to lose the greenness in its leaves. Before digging to divide a peony, cut back the foliage, leaving about 5.2 cm (two-inch) stalks. Using a sharp spade, you either slice down through the established peony to get a division or, for the whole plant, dig about 20-25 cm (8-10 inches) out from the plant, circling its circumference.

Lift the division or the plant gently from the hole to avoid breaking good roots as these will be the life source to see the peony through the upcoming months and into spring. Be aware that if you are digging the whole peony, you will be blessed or cursed, depending on your viewpoint, with a number of divisions.

With a gentle rocking to and fro, usually pieces

of the root system will pull apart into divisions. If not, a sharp knife will divide the peony into pieces. Set aside in a shady but warm spot and let the soil around the divisions dry out.



Japanese peony 'Do Tell' (Auten, 1946)

Japanese peony 'Bride's Dream' (Krekler, 1965)



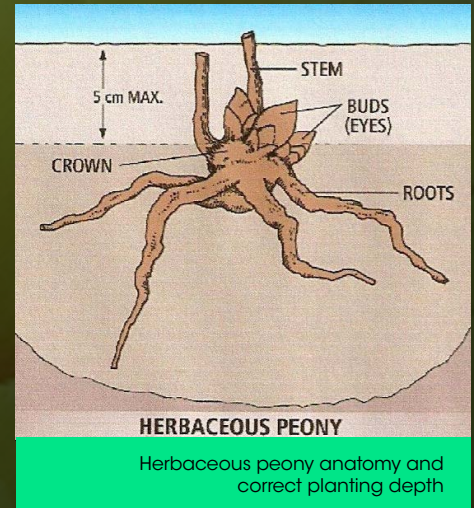
# As a bit of anatomical information...

## 01

Peonies have three parts - the crown, or, underground stem portion; the buds, called eyes, which form the leafy shoots that will emerge next spring; and the large roots, which provide the food to the plant. You can trim away the string-like feeder roots growing out from the sides of the large roots and any portion of the large roots that are damaged in digging or diseased.

## 02

When planting divisions, it is best to plant those that have between 3 and 5 buds or eyes, and the buds or eyes should be planted roughly two inches below the ground level. Planting peonies too deeply will almost always result in little or no flowering. A well-drained site, which receives four to six hours of sunlight, is best. Avoid planting peonies where standing water will collect.



## 03

Dig the soil deeply, 61 cm (24 inches) deep and wide, to give the roots room to grow. Peonies are heavy feeders so add well-aged compost at the bottom of the hole. Fresh manure will burn young plants, so well-aged, composted manure is best. Tap down the soil around the peony to ensure it doesn't sink after planting. Watering after planting is required only if the soil is dry.

## FYI...

If you are someone prone to mulch, it is important to remember that peonies do not like excess moisture on their crown area, so avoid putting the mulch directly on top of the crown.

Peonies should be spaced about 1-1.3m (3 to 4ft.) apart. There are dwarf varieties that can be closer than this. Don't plant your peonies too close to shrubs or trees because they will compete for soil moisture and nutrients.

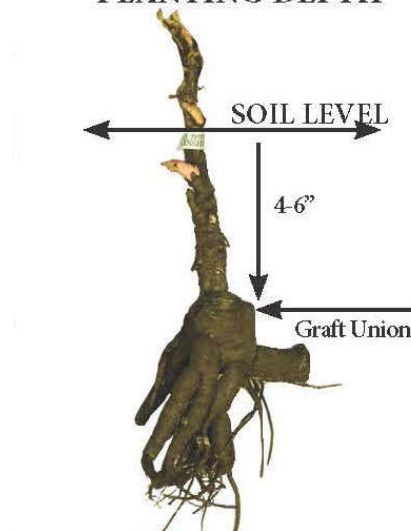
And peonies can be somewhat temperamental. They do not like being replanted in the same place they came from. If you must plant them there, use new soil when filling the hole to trick them into thinking they have moved to greener pastures.



## Now for peony idiosyncrasies

Aren't there always these. There are different types of peonies – herbaceous, species, Itoh and tree peonies. The points on the previous page are largely for herbaceous varieties, which are the ones most people love. Species peonies are ideal for planting in shady or woodland gardens. Again, plant species peony eyes two inches below soil level. With Itohs (or "intersectional" peonies, as they are a cross between a herbaceous and a tree peony), the eyes may appear on the stems as well as on the crown. So, care must be taken when cutting them back in the fall. Tree peonies are almost always grafted, and they must be planted with the graft 10-15cm (4-6 inches) below soil level. And you do not cut back tree peonies in autumn, as they have woody stems on which next year's growth comes forth in the spring.

### CORRECT PLANTING DEPTH



Correct planting depth for grafted tree peonies

## And now for some fun folklore.

When planting, you might try and place in the hole a handful of Epsom salts and some blackstrap molasses. The latter is high in calcium, magnesium, iron and potassium. It also contains sulfur and a host of micronutrients. Using molasses as fertilizer provides plants with a quick source of energy and encourages the growth of beneficial microorganisms. Epsom salts is made up of hydrated magnesium sulfate, which is important for healthy plant growth. It ensures the plants are better able to take in valuable nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorus. It also helps in the creation of chlorophyll, important for photosynthesis. And, importantly for peonies, it contributes to flower formation.

**For more information on peonies, please visit the  
Canadian Peony Society website: [www.peony.ca](http://www.peony.ca)**



# Falling For Plants!

---

Now that you know how to perfectly plant a peony, you're all ready for the OHS online plant auction & sale! Choose from a selection of glorious peonies, ready for fall planting, along with a diverse array of daylilies and many other lovely perennials and indoor plants – some for auction, some for immediate sale.

The plant selection is rounded out with an enticing array of indoor and outdoor garden-related art, unique garden services, and offerings from members of the Ottawa Flower Market.

**The auction is live starting at 9 am on Thursday, September 3rd and runs until 5 pm on Saturday, September 12th, with purchases to be picked up on Sunday, September 13th at the park at Tom Brown Arena. Full details and information about the auction website appear on the OHS website here: [www.ottawahort.org](http://www.ottawahort.org).**

**Join the auction fun and contribute to this important OHS fund-raiser – our only one this year.**

**Peruse the auction and register for bidding at [www.32auctions.com/OHS2020](http://www.32auctions.com/OHS2020)**







NATIVE PLANT PROFILE:

# American Pokeweed

— *Phytolacca americana*

Tuula Talvila

Several summers ago while in Toronto, I spotted an interesting plant growing in a little city-maintained garden. Some research disclosed that it was American pokeweed, or *Phytolacca americana* – also known as pigeonberry, dragonberries, pokeberry, or simply poke. The plant itself wasn't all that eye-catching despite its height (up to 8 feet), but it had fantastic-looking berries! The stems become a bright magenta colour and the fruit are a deep purple, making for a striking contrast. Also the arrangement of the slightly flattened berries along the stem gives it an interesting appearance overall.

I was pleased to discover that pokeweed is native to eastern North America and I now know it will grow in Ottawa. It has also naturalized in other parts of the world and is often considered a pest species.



## EDIBILITY VERSUS TOXICITY

Poke is part of the traditional foods in Appalachia and the American South, and the young shoots of pokeweed plants can be made into “poke sallet” or “salad”, while the leaves can be made into a tea.

Care must be taken however if ingesting pokeweed as it can induce violent vomiting and, according to the Canadian Poisonous Plants Information System, “the plant material should be boiled at least twice to get rid of the toxin, according to literature reports. Failure to do so has caused poisoning in humans. Ingesting a few berries does not cause problems, but larger quantities, if uncooked, can be toxic to humans. Cattle, horses, sheep, and particularly swine, have been poisoned by ingesting pokeweed plant material. The berries have poisoned young turkeys experimentally.”



Poke Sallet (from <https://www.saveur.com/poke-sallet/>)

Some interesting reading about poke’s history as a “stretch” food and traditional medicine can be found on the Saveur website here: <https://www.saveur.com/poke-sallet/>.

## POKEWEED DYES AND INKS

My personal interest in pokeweed developed further last fall when I was taking a class in which we were learning to make felt with paper fibre incorporated, thereby making a textured felted surface that can be painted or drawn on like paper. As part of that, we were exploring inks made from a variety of dried and fresh plant materials. I was happy to see pokeweed appearing on a list of plants that can make light-fast dyes and inks. Apparently, the common name “poke” derives from a word for blood or dye in an indigenous North American language, “probably Powhatan or Virginia Algonquin”, according to the website *Wild Abundance*: <https://www.wildabundance.net/pokeweed/>.

I put out a request for pokeweed berries on the OHS Facebook page and received a couple of donations (thanks!). When used, the pokeweed ink is a bright pink colour, as shown on this felting sample (the greenish ink is from marigold flowers and the black from charcoal). Pink’s not my favourite colour, so it’s unlikely I’ll continue to use the pokeweed ink, but it was interesting making it and trying it out. While I do have a section of my garden devoted to native plants, I’m not sure I have room for pokeweed just yet, but maybe in the future.





My favourite tree

# Manitoba Maple

Edythe Falconer

**M**y favourite tree is a huge Manitoba Maple that resides within view of our dining room window. It is a constant source of wonderment and amusement as we sit reading, eating, arguing or paying bills and juggling donations.

Visually it is monumental – ten feet in circumference and probably four stories tall with seven tremendous muscled branches, some with impressive “waistbands” almost as large as their parent trunk. Its branch spread is more than equal to its height.

The Box Elder or Ash Leaf Maple, *Acer negundo*, is a home unto itself, and if not quite a home, then a playground for at least three kinds of squirrels and dozens of birds – chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, goldfinches, robins, cardinals, waxwings, blue jays and many more. On paper it is now ours but in fact it is owned collectively by the flora and fauna that share it with us.

How many decades has it been here from its infancy as a tiny v-shaped air-borne seed? Is it old enough to have greeted an Algonquin family in the early 1800s – I think not as the average life span of a Manitoba Maple is less than a hundred years. Nor was it likely there for the last Pandemic – the Spanish Flu in 1919. It is possible though that it occupied an important



corner of a farm in the early 1920's and 30's and may have had companion trees that sheltered many of the farmsteads.

When the last farmer sold and the city divided the area into blocks, this particular block was taken up by a veteran of WWII. That's about 56 years ago so probably it was young - 30 or 40 years perhaps.

At times its muscled branches have reached out and have encroached upon our eaves and roofs, and threatened chimneys. Then it becomes necessary to do some serious pruning. These delicate operations require the skills of seasoned arborists and ours have always been from Manotick Tree. The branches have also reached across to hover over our neighbours' yard on the east side of our property. So far that has required lesser modifications.

Our maple tree has evolved into an enormous living sculpture. As the collars around the wounds have healed something else has emerged - rugged wooden faces at each rupture - some animal-like and some humanoid. Come May, our monstrous beauty has leafed out. The woody creatures are soon obscured by the curtain of leaves where we find shade again under its generous canopy.

Manitoba Maples are important to me in another way. Settlers going West to occupy homesteads on the prairies often planted Manitoba Maples as shelter belts around their homes and fields. This tree is not particular about soil types and is tolerant of sporadic flooding or droughts. The maples that surrounded my grandfather's farmstead were still there when I last visited Saskatchewan.

Not a tree to intentionally plant on an urban plot and sometimes criticized for size, brittleness in storms and ground-level roots that

travel far, our Manitoba Maple is still one tough tree. It has been pruned into its impressive sculpted self and we do love it.

This little story was crafted in mid-May. Just recently the neighbours have noticed a crack at a serious junction in the tree. We've had the problem appraised and have signed a contract for a combination of cabling and reduction of the spans of some of the branches. Manotick Tree is currently backed up but hopes to get this work done in July and August. In the meantime we and our neighbours are hoping that there will be an absence of gale force winds. We didn't plant it there and would not plant a Manitoba Maple again if this one had to be taken down. However, it's there and we love it and will do what we can to keep it there.

Apparently Manitoba Maples can be tapped. We have no intention of doing so.

## IS THERE A SPECIAL TREE IN YOUR LIFE?

Is there a tree in your neighbourhood that has special meaning for you? Is there a tree that evokes fond memories or one that you find yourself inspired by? Is there a tree in the Arboretum or Gatineau Park that you love to visit? We want to showcase some of the beloved and most beautiful trees in the National Capital Region.

**Please send in your nominations to:  
Jamie Robertson**

**[jamesrossrobertson@gmail.com](mailto:jamesrossrobertson@gmail.com).**

Please include a photo if possible and a brief write-up of why this tree is special.





# CALLING ALL CREATIVE GARDENERS!

**D**o you create arts or crafts that are inspired by the garden and plants, or designed to be displayed in a garden? We would like to create a recurring short segment about the garden-inspired artists amongst our membership, including a short description of the inspiration for your work, along with some photos.

If you would like to have your work appear in an upcoming issue of this newsletter, please contact **Tuula Talvila at [tuula@ncf.ca](mailto:tuula@ncf.ca)**.





# The OHS SHOWS CORNER

A NOTE FOR EXHIBITORS &  
POTENTIAL NEW EXHIBITORS

BY MAUREEN MARK Convenor

I hope everyone has been busy snapping pictures for the first OHS Virtual Flower Show. Consult the Show Schedule regularly on the website (<http://ottawahort.org/2020-virtual-flower-and-plant-show/> - you will need the members password to access) and take your photos from August 22 to September 9, 2020. You may submit pictures as you take them. If you send in more than your limit of 3 per class, only your last 3 submitted will be eligible for voting. Don't worry if you take a flurry of pictures on September 9: you have until 7:00 pm on September 11 to submit them.

**Send each entry to OHSVirtualShow@gmail.com with the class number and description in the subject line.** One e-mail for each entry please. The email will include one photo, the name of the entry and the name of the exhibitor.

Entries will be posted on the OHS website and you will get a chance to vote for the best entries. Voting will be open until midnight September 23rd. Look for the link to vote in the September Grapevine.

There will be prizes awarded for best entry in each Section, highest aggregate in each Division, and the Best in Show.

Any questions, contact:

**Maureen Mark**

**613-521-4597**

**mmark@rogers.com**



To: OHSVirtualShow@gmail.com  
From: mmark@rogers.com  
Subject: Class 1 Flowering plant  
Entry: Hibiscus 'Hot Peach'  
Exhibitor: Maureen Mark





# ABOUT US

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

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

**PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSIONS TO:**  
[info@ottawahort.org](mailto:info@ottawahort.org)

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

**EDITOR:**

James R. Robertson

**DESIGN & LAYOUT:**

Kat B. Design Studio  
[www.katbdesign.com](http://www.katbdesign.com)

**EDITING / PROOFREADING:**

Tuula Talvila  
Lori Gandy

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

Edythe Falconer  
Marilyn HS Light  
Blaine Marchand  
Maureen Mark  
Jennifer Mix  
Tuula Talvila  
Ottawa Public Library



## Follow us on Facebook

EXCHANGE GARDENING TIPS, MEET FELLOW GARDENERS AND CHECK OUT WHAT PEOPLE ARE GROWING IN YOUR CITY!

## Visit [Ottawahort.org](http://Ottawahort.org)

STAY UP TO DATE ON CURRENT EVENTS IN THE OHS OR REVISIT THE PAST ARCHIVES.