

Cross Pollination

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



May Garden To Do List

- ❑ **Perennials** - Cut back leaving 6" (15 cm) stems for solitary bees. If you must cut back more, then stack stems at the back of flower border or against a fence. [Divide & transplant](#) fall blooming perennials as needed on an overcast day. [Hellebores](#) may benefit from tidying up and removal of dead or damaged leaves. Add wire supports/stakes around tall perennials, as needed.
- ❑ **Lawn** - Wait until your footprints are no longer visible before working on your lawn. Rake up loose/dead grass and top-dress lawn with 1/2 inch (2 cm) fine textured compost; over-seed bare spots in the lawn when lilacs bloom. If it's too cold seed may rot. Areas with moss indicate soil has been compacted and nutrient level is likely low. Aerate and [treat](#).
- ❑ **Prune** roses when the forsythia are blooming. Here's a basic [pruning video](#).
- ❑ **Trees** - Inspect trees before they leaf out for scale, fungus or other disease. Check these links for [fruit trees diseases](#) and [magnolia scale](#). **New research** suggests pruning trees from April to August to allow bark to heal. EXCEPTION: Oak trees should NOT be pruned April 15 to July 15 due to [oak wilt disease](#).
- ❑ **Tomatoes** - Start seeds indoors; monitor seedlings for growth and re-pot if necessary.
- ❑ **Corn** - Sow corn seeds when oak leaves are the size of a squirrel's ear!
- ❑ **Spring bulbs** - Take photos of your spring garden so that you remember which tulips are producing small blooms and need dividing and areas that might need some spring colour next year.
- ❑ **House plants** - Increase watering and feed, preferably with an organic fertilizer. If the soil is drying out quite quickly between watering, it may be time to repot, one size larger. Note-Hoya & Nile lily (Agapanthus) flower when slightly pot bound, so repot these less often.
- ❑ **Hummingbirds & Orioles** - arrive early May, so clean & put out your feeders. Even better, add bird friendly native plants to your garden that support food webs for breeding birds.
- ❑ **Weeds** - Remove flowers to reduce seed bank. Hoe (Garlic mustard) to prevent new plants from growing. Control tap rooted weeds, e.g. dandelions, [Canada thistle](#) (which is non-native), by cutting the root just below ground level with a sharp spade. Repeat as growth resumes.

Weed Wisdom

When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.

A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows.

Doug Larson



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Hedging Your Bets? Try a Native

Janet Mackey - Halton Master Gardener

Hedges offer much to gardeners. Many types of hedges are attractive in several seasons, whether it's spring flowers, fall fruit or bright foliage as we experience our first frosts. They provide structure in the garden, defining garden areas, property lines or as a backdrop for a perennial border. As a natural border they can create habitat and nourishment for insects and wildlife. Sometimes they can reduce noise, and create microclimates by minimizing windy weather events. Many gardens in our region contain non-native hedges of Boxwood, Privet and Cedar, however for this installment of **Focus on Native Plants**, we'll take a look at some native shrubs which you may want to seriously consider when creating a new hedge or replacing an ailing one. Since all of these are native, they offer incredible value to wildlife, whether it's our native solitary bees, fruit for local birds or as host plants/nectar sources for butterflies. There are so many options, not all could be included in this list, but the hope is that you consider these, ask for them at a nursery and look them over. Nativars are an excellent substitute for the true 'species' if they are only altered by size or form (rather than leaf colour, or flower form - i.e. double flowers).



Myrica gale - Sweet Gale

- Fast to grow, tolerant of cold conditions, Full Sun to light shade. Adaptable to infertile soil
- 125 cm x 100 cm
- Upright branching habit fills an area
- Frosty-lime green foliage
- Good Foundation plant

Diervilla lonicera - Northern Bush Honeysuckle

- Part-shade to shade, tolerant of dry conditions
- 100 cm x 125 cm
- Red foliage on new growth, mounding habit
- Prune back to make a dense plant
- Attracts bees
- Yellow flowers in summer
- Burgundy-red fall colour



Symphoricarpos alba - Snowberry

- Full Sun, part shade, shade
- 150 cm x 125 cm
- Suitable for dry to wet sites
- Pale pink flowers in early summer & white berries in fall



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Hedging Your Bets: Try a Native -Continued

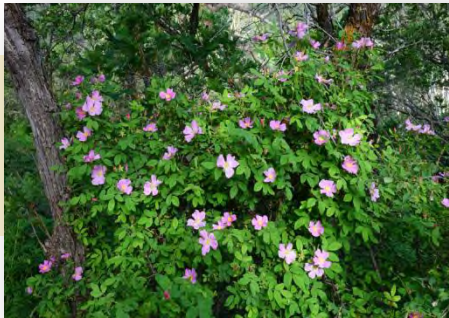
Comptonia peregrina - Sweet Fern

- Full sun to part-shade
- Adaptable to dry, gravelly nutrient deficient soil
- 150 cm x 200 cm
- Nice fragrance
- It IS a SHRUB and NOT a fern
- Narrow, deeply notched dark-green foliage
- Suitable for hedge or foundation planting



Itea virginica - Virginia Sweetspire

- Prefers moist, rich soil in part sun to part shade
- 150 cm x 200 cm (nativars are smaller)
- Blooms on previous season's wood
- 5 - 15 cm long-lasting flowers
- Attractive deep burgundy fall colour
- 'Little Henry Sweetspire' is a Nativar shown in photo



Rosa carolina - Pasture Rose

- Full sun best for flowering but tolerant of part-sun; average to wet soils and salt tolerant
- 175 cm x 200 cm
- Summer flowers and attractive rosehips in fall



Aronia melanocarpa - Chokeberry

- -Full sun to part-sun
- -Adapts to wet, dry or sandy soils & is salt tolerant
- -125 cm x 150 cm
- -White flowers in spring, fruit in fall/winter
- -Bright red fall colour
- -Nativars available offering different sizes and colours
 - 'Low-Scape Mound', 'Brilliantissima' (brighter fall colour) & 'Viking'

Further Info:

[Native Hedges and Hedgerows: Beauty and Biodiversity](#) - Ecological Landscape Alliance

[Native Shrubs to Consider for Ecological Landscapes in the Northeast](#) - Ecological Landscape Alliance

[Hedgerow Revival: Grow a Living Fence](#) - Blog, Prairie Nursery



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The Problems with Privets

Allyn Walsh Halton Master Gardener



On a short walk around any urban or suburban neighbourhood, it will not take long to find a privet hedge, which in our area is usually *Ligustrum vulgare*. Rapidly growing, it has been used to provide a quick privacy screen and set boundaries for many years. It is native to Europe and North Africa and likely was planted in North America because it was familiar to European settlers. Apparently, privets were planted around properties in the UK as replacements for metal railings requisitioned for the war effort in WWII!

A lush and healthy looking specimen in summer

Image 15299 from Pixabay



An early winter view showing the berries, toxic to humans and dogs, although enjoyed by many birds

Image by Alicja from Pixabay

Sadly, like many imports, privet has also become invasive in some areas, infiltrating forest understories and crowding out our native plants as well as forming dense thickets in fields and roadsides. Considered a “*Category Four*” invasive species in Ontario, privet has shown great adaptability to different soil and light conditions and is susceptible to few diseases and pests. Furthermore, privet propagates easily through root and stump shoots as well as through seed dispersal from birds which like its berries. All in all, it’s the perfect storm for making an aggressive and in some areas invasive plant!

Anyone who has had a privet hedge knows that it does not provide privacy after its leaves fall, and has a tendency to die off at the bottom, making it unattractive. But its worst feature must be that it is not a food source for our native pollinators which then begin to disappear as privet displaces native plant species.

Fortunately, it has been shown that removal of privet from forests allows the return of native plants within a few years, and within two years there will be a dramatic increase in the number and variety of pollinators in the location. Gardeners can join the effort to increase pollinator numbers by not planting privet in the first place, and by replacing existing plants, particularly any close to a woodland. So much better to plant one of the beautiful native plants described in the preceding article!

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The Problems with Privets continued

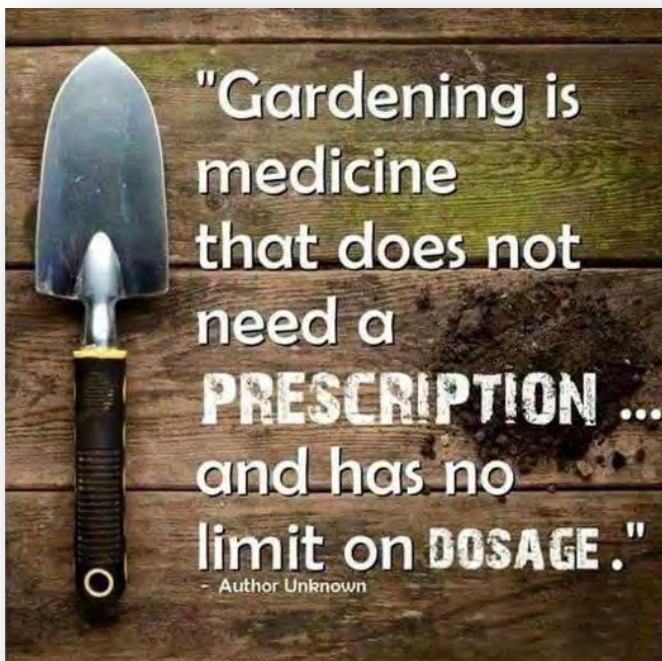
To remove privet requires dogged and on-going efforts. Cutting them down to the ground tends to actually rejuvenate this determined plant. Shoots will come up from the smallest bit of root left behind. It is generally recommended to cut the plants down to about 15 cm from the ground and then dig them out, using a shovel to get under the main root ball. Often large plants are removed using a chain and towing vehicle although this technique may require professional help. A search for any small bits of roots remaining must be done prior to filling in the hole with soil. It will be necessary to carefully watch for and remove any sprouts and seedlings for a few years after.

Early spring, and an overgrown privet shows its bones. When it leafs out, there will be almost no foliage on the lower half of the hedge.



Further info:

[Removing privet without chemicals](#)
[Summary Of Invasiveness from CABI](#)
[With Privet Gone, Native Plants and Pollinators Return](#)



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Beneficial Insects - Create the Right Habitat & They Will Come!

Hariette Henry - Halton Master Gardener

The following article is the first in a series focusing on Beneficial Insects. While some insects can be pests to home gardeners, over 99% are considered beneficial.

Ground Beetles (Coleoptera)

Ground beetles are shiny, hard-shelled insects, 1/8" - 1 1/2" in length with large mandibles. They feed at night on soft-bodied slugs, smaller beetles or other small creatures that come within their range. They are especially useful at controlling cutworm populations that ravage the stems of tender vegetable seedlings in spring gardens.

When both adult and larval ground beetles are not consuming vast quantities of mites, snails, caterpillars, earwigs, vine borers, aphids and lots of other insects, they are hiding in grasses or underneath objects in daylight. If you flip over a rock or a log you may just find some scurrying about!

Daytime shelter is critical for these dark-coloured insects. Mulches, bunching grasses and established perennial plants can serve as refuge during the day. Because they like to take shelter in grasses, building a specialized habitat known as a beetle bank is a way to encourage this insect to thrive in your garden. For more information on beetle banks read the post from Savvy Gardening below. As with all other insects, the use of pesticides is strongly discouraged, as beneficials not only will come into direct contact with the sprays but will also consume pesticides by eating the prey insects.

Larval ground beetle (centre) feeding on cutworms.



Image: UC Statewide IPM Project

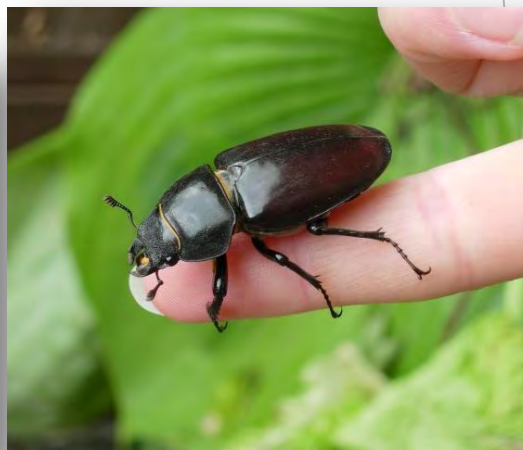


Image: Common Ground beetle beneficialbugs.org



Image: Big-headed Ground Beetle - Alex Bairstow iNaturalist

Further Reading

[Beetles of Ontario](#) – iNaturalist
[Ground Beetle](#) – GrowVeg.com
[Ground Beetles](#) – Beneficial Bugs of North America
[Attracting Beneficial Insects](#) -Fine Gardening
[Invest in a Beetle Bank](#) - Savvy Gardening



Question of the Month

What's Making Holes in My Tree?



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We've had a few questions lately about holes in trees on our [Master Gardener of Ontario FB Group](#).

This is the work of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*). (Woodpecker Image Wiktionary) They make those **neat horizontal rows** of holes. They feed on the sap that exudes from the holes and insects that get trapped in it.



Other woodpeckers (e.g. Downy & Hairy) tend to make random patterns as they search for insects under the bark.
Image: Black Bear Cam

Is this a bad thing?

The holes created by the sapsuckers support a great deal of other species. A family of sapsuckers will typically farm a group of trees in their territory for a few years before moving on to another set. Most trees recover. Overall, I see it as a good environmental indicator, though in crop trees they can be problematic..



These holes were made by a wood wasp and are being used by solitary bees.



Does that mean my Apple tree is dying?

No, not at all! The members of the sapsucker group use healthy trees. They are tapping them for sap and what sap attracts-insects!

Can I stop the woodpeckers from drilling holes?

There are things you can do to deter them if you so choose. If the damage threatens the health of a tree, a burlap wrap or mylar balloons or something "scary" can be used to get the birds to move along.

Further Reading

[Who Made That Hole?](#)

[Woodpecker Tree Damage: Preventing And Repairing Woodpecker Damage](#)

[Sapsucker Damage on Woody Plants](#)



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"What's Growing On"

Halton Master Gardener Meetings are **cancelled** until further notice.

Shelter in Place Gardening Events

We are still answering your garden questions, so send us an email! It's what we do best! HaltonMasterGardeners@gmail.com

Community Gardens

On April 25th, the province announced that Community Gardens can reopen with appropriate physical distancing and safety precautions.



World Naked Gardening Day

Saturday, May 2nd

Dress - casual

Suggestions - avoid pruning roses & raspberries

Webinars

LANDSCAPING FOR BIRDS WEBINAR

May 5, 2020 @ 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm



BEAUTIFUL NATIVE PLANTS Online Webinar

June 9, 2020 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

Streaming Videos

Gardeners World episode 6 2020

Hope for the Wild 2019 - Doug Tallamy

