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Welcome Back

Julianne Labreche, Coordinator, Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Dale Odorizzi, Coordinator, Lanark County

It began as a seed of an idea, really. A few months ago, members of Master Gardeners in Ottawa and Lanark County decided to collaborate on a new publication to replace our two existing newsletters. Despite a few growing pains along the way, the good news is that it has finally sprouted. Welcome to our first issue!

Gone is **The Edible Garden**, a publication focused on growing local edibles. It included useful gardening tips and recipes too, as well as Bee Line— a column focused on pollinators, especially bees.

Gone too is **Trowel Talk**, a newsletter that also included useful information and tips mostly on ornamental gardens, along with TO DO lists and a calendar of where you could find our members giving talks and holding advice clinics

We've kept the name **Trowel Talk** because we liked it, but that's about it. In its place is a new, merged publication that hopefully will offer some good tips and inspiration for both edible and ornamental gardens.

Like you, we care passionately about the environment, worry about climate change, work to protect

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Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis* - first flower of spring
Susan Bicket

Lanark County
Master Gardeners



Ottawa-Carleton
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our pollinators, are saddened about a growing list of animal and plant species dwindling worldwide and want to green up our local community.

As gardeners and volunteers, we want to learn together, sharing ideas on ways to garden responsibly— no matter if it's vegetables, fruit or a butterfly garden. Hopefully our new **Trowel Talk** will reflect those views.

Stay tuned in the coming months for new content, new writers and this new look. Welcome back, readers. We'd love your feedback. 🌱

Covid-19

Despite the challenges of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, Master Gardeners in Ottawa-Carleton and Lanark County remain available to provide good gardening advice, free for the asking.

If you require advice, please contact the Email Helpline for assistance. A Master Gardener will respond within 48 hours. We have knowledge in many areas of gardening, including growing fruits, vegetables and ornamental plants.

As avid gardeners and environmentalists, we encourage you to explore gardening as an option this gardening season to keep you and your families healthy. Consider growing a vegetable garden that you can plant with your children, or create a pollinator or wildlife garden to discover the joys of nature in your own backyard.

Gardening is a great therapeutic and recreational activity for people of all ages.

To contact the Ottawa-Carleton Master Gardeners Helpline:

Email: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

To contact Lanark County Master Gardeners Helpline:

Email: lanarkmg@gmail.com

Telephone: 613.264.8135 🌱

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer questions from the helpline.

When do I thin vegetable seedlings and how? Do I pull them out or cut with scissors? I have carrots, swiss chard, and beets about 2" high.

You can thin the seedlings whenever they are big enough to prick out. The information on the back of the seed packages will tell you the ideal spacing. You can eat the extra chard and beet seedlings as babies in salads (very gourmet). If the plants are very close to each other, though, you may have to cut the excess seedlings rather than pull, so you don't disturb the roots of the remaining plants.



Partially thinned seed tray. The seeds were very small and dust-like.

Susan Bicket

Do you have any tips on how to sow tiny seeds so that many do not fall in one spot?

For spacing tiny seeds you can get hand-held (or even roll-along) seeders that allow you to adjust the rate at which seeds will come out for planting. Many seed catalogues and nurseries or garden supply stores stock them. Another old trick is to mix fine sand with the seeds when you are sowing them, so you have fewer seeds being planted per distance. 🌱

Planting Tomatoes to Prevent Problems

Dale Odorizzi, Lanark County Master Gardeners



Harvested Tomatoes—Centre tomato shows mild growth crack

Dale Odorizzi

Late last summer and early last fall, our help lines were full of “What is wrong with my tomatoes?” questions. Most of the time, there was little we could recommend to correct the problems in late summer. We must go back to spring planting time.

Choose a planting site that receives direct sunlight most of the day — 6 to 8 hours is best, an open airy site with good airflow. This helps to reduce foliage diseases. To produce their wonderful fruit, tomatoes need a moderate to highly fertile soil. Sandy loam warms up quickly but will require more watering in the hot weather. Tomatoes grow well in soils rich in organic matter. Well-rotted manure or thoroughly decomposed compost can be worked into the soil before planting.

Tomatoes are a warm season crop. Rushing your planting date does not mean you will get earlier tomatoes. In fact, you will likely get fewer tomatoes. It is not just that all danger of frost must be over before tomatoes can be planted outdoors. Cold soil or overnight temperatures below 10°C can cause chill injury or planting shock, slowing flower production or causing flower drop.

Give your plant lots of room. Planting tomatoes too closely together decreases yield. Plant the tomatoes 60 cm apart in rows 90 cm wide.

The two big late-summer problems last year were:

- Growth cracks in the tomatoes are common when long, dry periods are followed by rainy periods. The fruit puts on a growth spurt and the skin cracks.
- Blossom End Rot is an ugly rotted spot on the blossom end of the tomato. It is caused by inadequate or uneven water supply. It is often reported, incorrectly, that Blossom End Rot is caused by a lack of calcium and that putting crushed eggshells around the plant will help. There is usually enough calcium in the soil, but an uneven water supply limits the plants ability to absorb the calcium.

The best time to deal with these problems is at planting time. Sometimes, when we grow our own tomatoes from seed, they get leggy. This can be a good thing. Dig a deep hole and plant the plant deeply. Remove any leaves that are below ground. Roots will form along the tomato stem, allowing the plant to pick up more water and nutrients. The soil 5 cm below ground retains more moisture than the soil right near the top.

Mulch your plants well with compost, leaves or straw. As the mulch decomposes, it will provide more nutrients. Mulch helps retain moisture, preventing the soil from drying out quickly and helping the water percolate down into the roots. Rain on bare soil too often runs off before it is absorbed by the soil.

A little trick I like to use to prevent transplants falling victim to cutworms is to put a toothpick close to each stem with a half the toothpick above ground and half below. Cutworms do not like to wrap around a toothpick. 🌱

Grow A Pizza Garden for Children

Lesley Peace



Peace family pizza with homegrown ingredients!

Lesley Peace



Family photo of author and her brother as children

Lesley Peace

Suggested reading:

Gardening with Emma: Grow and Have Fun by Emma Biggs. It's a fantastic book for children written by a young girl.

As the snow melts, everyone is eager to get outdoors. Meanwhile, why not get a garden started inside with your children? Growing items to make a pizza garden is a great way for children to participate in gardening.

Start by talking to your kids about their favourite pizza items. Let them draw and colour their favourite ingredients to grow. You can start tomatoes, herbs, sweet and hot peppers indoors in early April. Have the children plant the seeds and water them with your help. Then place the pots in a warm, sunny spot to grow.

After any risk of frost, plant the seedlings outside.

Young plants need at least 6-8 hours of sunlight per day, either on your balcony, patio or in your yard. Fertilize them every fourteen days. Water and weed as needed.

A few easy plants to grow include: tomatoes, bell peppers (different colours), hot peppers, basil, onions and garlic. Each individual bulb of garlic can be planted in the fall and harvested late the following summer.

As an extra nutritional bonus, plant a few cherry tomatoes, beans and colourful carrots for snacks.

Have children check for insects and teach them about the good ones and the pests.

When everything is ready to harvest, make sure your children help to make the pizza.

Growing up, 'Homemade Pizza Fridays' were one of my favourite days of the week. I continue that tradition as an adult too. 🌱

Native Plant Profile: False Blue Indigo, *Baptisia australis*

Josie Pazdzior



Baptisia australis—False Blue indigo

Josie Pazdzior



The pea-like blooms attract pollinators like this bee

Josie Pazdzior

Baptisia australis is a garden-worthy perennial that truly has it all: beautiful flowers, attractive foliage, architectural form, and low maintenance. It is native to North American prairie regions, and hardy to zone 4, maybe 3.

This long-lived plant forms a sturdy, dense vase-shaped mound 90-120 cm tall and wide. Its pea-like flowers are borne on tall strong spikes (racemes) with flowers on short stalks along the upper stems. They bloom in June and are often mistaken for lupines, also members of the pea family. The species *B. australis* is a glorious indigo-blue, and new cultivars appear at nurseries every year, displaying a wide range of colors from cream to yellow to burgundy, sometimes in combination.

The clover-like blue-green foliage looks fresh all season, and seems unaffected by pests or diseases. The attractive dark gray seed pods make an intriguing rattling sound in a breeze.

Baptisia grows well in a sunny, well-drained spot, in average soil. It takes some time to establish itself, especially if germinated from seed, but will eventually form a large drought-tolerant clump. Purchasing the largest plant available is advised. The deep thick root system makes moving it difficult, and so it is important to plant it in the right spot initially. It will grow in part shade, but flower less vigorously.

Basic maintenance simply means cutting back the stems, best done in fall. As a native plant, it doesn't need regular fertilizing. Add some mulch to suppress weeds, possibly some compost, and your *Baptisia* should flourish for a long time! 🌱

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Master Gardeners of Lanark County are member groups of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to the public.

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Helplines - are monitored daily
Send questions and photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for Identification.

Article suggestions box

This is your chance, as a reader, to suggest an idea for an article you would like to see in Trowel Talk. Click on the button.



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Clinics

Ask a Master Gardener, face to face, gardening questions.



Talks and Events

Due to the current COVID19 emergency all clinics, talks and events are cancelled for the foreseeable future.