



# Trowel Talk!

March 2020

## Historic ginkgo, ideal urban tree

Walking round my neighbourhood, I am always interested to see a certain property which has two ginkgo trees on the front lawn. I assumed they must be male and female although I'd never seen any fruit. Then one year I saw that one of them had produced what looked like small yellow plums. The plums ripened and fell, with some staying on the bare branches until mid-November.



**Male and female ginkgo trees**

Photo: Gillian Boyd

Ginkgo "plums" are really seeds surrounded by a fleshy seed coat and they are always described as having an extremely disagreeable odour. Out of curiosity, I collected some seeds to test their bad name first-hand. After squashing them and sniffing closely, I found the smell only mildly unpleasant, though I have friends who find it very offensive. The rotting seeds under the tree also had no detectable odour to me. Perhaps their offensive reputation comes from trees growing in warmer climates, or ungathered rotting fruit detected by more sensitive noses than mine!



**Fruits and leaves of ginkgo trees**

Photo: Gillian Boyd

To avoid the problem of possibly smelly fruit, it is usually male ginkgos that are sold in nurseries. They make an ideal tree in urban landscaping because of their strong immune systems and resistance to pollution, pests, diseases, storm damage and fire. 'Autumn Gold' and 'Princeton Sentry' are recommended among many good cultivars now available.

The leaves are fan-shaped and finely-veined, usually with a central notch but often variable. Trees grow extremely slowly and may reach 30-40 metres in height. In historical documents, 50m trees with girths of 30m have been recorded in open areas. Individual trees are very long-lived and records in China exist of some that are more than 3000 years old. Ginkgos are unlikely to produce flowers and seeds for at least twenty years. My neighbourhood trees are about seven metres high so 2006 was perhaps their first year of flowering.

The name ginkgo comes from the

Chinese for silver apricot. The trees were venerated by Buddhist monks and planted in monastery and temple gardens in China, Korea and Japan. Engelbert Kaempfer, a German physician, botanist and traveller, was the first Western scientist to see and describe the ginkgo which had previously been thought to be extinct. He had accompanied a Dutch trade mission to Japan in 1690 and brought seeds back to the Utrecht botanical garden. One of the first European ginkgos still grows there and many notable trees are now documented world-wide.

The seed kernels are pale and similar to pistachios although nearly twice the size. They are used in traditional Chinese food and as an aid to digestion. They taste of bitter almonds but lose their bitterness when cooked. Seeds and dried leaves are used in herbal medicines for many disorders and are particularly valued as an antioxidant brain tonic to help memory, hearing, vision and balance.

The ginkgo appears in the fossil record from more than two hundred and fifty million years ago and is thus a living link to the remote past. After the atomic bomb explosion devastated Hiroshima in 1945, four ginkgos within a 1-2 km radius survived the blast and still flourish today. Because of its remarkable longevity and adaptability, the ginkgo will certainly survive future global changes. Dating back into the mists of time, the ginkgo will outlast us all.

*adapted from an article by  
Gillian Boyd, Master Gardener*

Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

E-mail Help Line: [mgoc\\_helpline@yahoo.ca](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca) - monitored daily  
Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

CLINICS:

~~Ottawa home + garden show,  
Thursday May 26 to Sunday March 29, **Cancelled**  
Thursday, Friday 12:00 pm to 9:00 pm,  
Saturday 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Sunday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm  
EY Centre, 4899 Uplands Dr, Ottawa  
Ticket purchase required~~

Friends of the Farm plant sale

Sunday May 10, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm  
Parking lot beside K.W. Neatby Bldg at Carling & Maple Drive

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

**Due to COVID-19 events and clinics may be cancelled on short notice. Please check before hand**

~~March 13–22 , Canada Blooms in Toronto - Cancelled~~

Monday, March 16, 7:00 pm  
**Climate Change and Your Garden**  
Rebecca Last – Master Gardener  
Queenswood Heights Community Center, 1485 Duford Dr.  
Gloucester Horticultural Society – doors open with coffee at 6:15pm

~~Tuesday, March 17, 7:30 pm  
**Kitchen Gardens Through the Ages** **Cancelled**  
Judith Cox – Master Gardener  
Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society.~~

Tuesday, March 24, 7:30 pm  
**Garden Design and Plant Selection**  
Mary Ann Van Berlo – Master Gardener  
Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Road, Ottawa  
Ottawa Horticultural Society – no guest fee

Monday, April 6, 7:30 pm  
**Garden Design – Looking at the Elements and Principles of Garden Design**  
Mary Ann Van Berlo – Master Gardener  
St.Peter's Anglican Church, 4333 Bath Road, Collins Bay  
Collins Bay Horticultural Society – no Guest Fee

Tuesday, April 7, 7:30 pm  
**Savvy choices for Spring: How do new introductions really fare**  
Mary Shearman Reid – Master Gardener  
Old Town Hall, 821 March Rd.  
Kanata March Horticultural Society

Wednesday, April 15, 7:30 pm  
**Plant Guilds – Taking Companion Planting to the Next Level**  
Rebecca Last - Master Gardener  
St Andrews United Church Hall, 2585 County Rd No 29  
Pakenham Horticultural Society



Ginkgo tree in autumn

Photo: Kelly Noel

March To Do

- Start cannas and summer bulbs in pots indoors.
- Start seeds, and take cuttings from plants overwintered indoors, such as coleus, geraniums, or rosemary.
- Check tools and equipment and do any required cleaning and sharpening, make sure you're ready for the garden season.
- Choose an overcast day to take protective covers off plants.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions.

Tip of the Month

Dormant oil or horticultural oil is a petroleum or vegetable oil based product, which has surfactants added so it can be mixed with water. It is used most often on fruit trees and bushes (apple, plum, pear, quince, currant, gooseberry), as well as some woody ornamentals such as roses, to kill off overwintering pests, such as aphids, scales and mites, and insect eggs. The oil will suffocate the pests. Traditional (heavy) horticultural oil can also harm actively growing plants by clogging leaf and bud pores, which is why it is generally applied while things are still dormant in early spring. However, applying too early isn't necessarily effective, as the target insects won't have woken up yet (they

continued

don't respire enough while dormant to be affected by the spray). Lighter horticultural oils can be found that are less likely to damage plants, and can be used on many woody plants while in leaf if needed, although it's a good idea to try spraying a few leaves first, then look for damage after a few days before spraying the whole plant.

The best time to spray dormant oil is often late March or early April, before buds begin to swell on the target trees. However, it shouldn't be too cold out – you want a temperature of at least 4 °C for 24 hours, but without rain or high winds. Dormant oil won't remain long on plants, and has low toxicity for humans, pets, and other wildlife. It can harm beneficial insects as well if it hits them, so it's perhaps best to use dormant oil sprays only when absolutely necessary (if you need to spray in order to get a harvest of fruit, for instance).

Mix the oil solution as per instructions (usually 1-3 percent in water), and fill your sprayer. Work from the top down, and all around the tree - try to get the oil into all the cracks and crevices.

Dormant oil can also be combined with the fungicide lime sulphur for early spring spraying, for the prevention of fungal diseases such as apple and pear scab. The two products can be sold together as a kit as well as separately. Follow the package directions for mixing. Later in the season, the two products should be used a couple weeks apart to avoid damaging plants.

*Amanda Carrigan  
Master Gardener*

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton
- <http://mgottawa.ca>
- Vol 11, number 3
- Editorial team—Josie Pazdzior, Amanda Carrigan, Judith Cox, Kelly Noel, Susan Bicket, Rob Stuart
- [newsletter@mgottawa.ca](mailto:newsletter@mgottawa.ca)



Thursday, April 16, 7:30 pm

**Garden Design – Looking at the Elements and Principles of Garden Design**

Mary Ann Van Berlo – Master Gardener  
City View United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Nepean  
Nepean Horticultural Society – no guest fee

Saturday, April 18 11:30 am to 12:30 pm

**Gardeners, Contain Yourself!**

Rebecca Last – Master Gardener  
Ottawa Public Library, Rideau Branch  
377 Rideau St., Ottawa

Monday, April 20, 7:00 pm

**Perennials for Colour**

Candace Dressler – Master Gardener  
Queenswood Heights Community Centre, 1485 Duford Drive  
Gloucester Horticultural Society

Tuesday, April 21, 7:00 pm

**Our Gardens and Climate Change**

Diane McClymont Peace – Master Gardener  
Building 72, Central Experimental Farm  
Purchase an individual lecture for \$12 as FCEF Member or \$15 as Non-Member or purchase the series of 5 for \$50 Member and \$60 as a Non-Member

Monday, April 27, 7:30 pm

**Container Gardening: choosing the right plants and nurturing them throughout the summer**

Mary Shearman Reid – Master Gardener  
St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church, 537 Highway 105, Chelsea, Quebec  
Gatineau Valley Gardeners

Wednesday, April 29 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

**Gardeners, Contain Yourself!**

Rebecca Last - Master Gardener  
Ottawa Public Library, Stittsville Branch  
1637 Stittsville Main St, Stittsville

Monday, May 4, 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

**Gardeners, Contain Yourself!**

Rebecca Last – Master Gardener  
Ottawa Public Library, Greenboro Branch  
363 Lorry Greenberg Dr, Ottawa

Tuesday, May 5, 7:00 pm

**Colour through the seasons**

Candace Dressler and Rob Stuart – Master Gardeners  
Building 72, Central Experimental Farm  
Purchase an individual lecture for \$12 as FCEF Member or \$15 as Non-Member or purchase the series of 5 for \$50 Member and \$60 as a Non-Member

Wednesday, May 6, 7:00 pm

**Made for Shade: Planning and plant selection for sun-challenged gardens**

Mary Ann van Berlo—Master Gardener  
Martintown Community Centre, 4850 County Road 20 (Apple Hill Road), Martintown  
Martintown Horticultural Society – no guest fee



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>