Trowel Talk

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Growing Food to Share

Julianne Labreche

Given the downturn in the global economy this summer because of the coronavirus pandemic, it's a good time for gardeners in our region to grow a harvest not only to eat but to share. No matter if you're an experienced vegetable gardener or just trying it for the first time, why not donate a portion of your harvest to someone who needs it?

Donating a few fresh, local vegetables this growing season is a good way to give back. Consider an edible gift to a neighbour struggling to make ends meet, a family member searching for a job or a friend recovering from illness. Your local food bank will be grateful for fresh food donations to feed those whose incomes are limited.

If you wish to donate local produce to a food bank in the Ottawa-Carleton region, go to:

https://www.ottawafoodbank.ca

Click on the Find Food tab and enter your address or postal code to find your closest local food bank. Be sure to check the hours and days of operation. You may wish to call first before delivering any fresh produce. Hours vary, as do refrigeration temperatures and space.

Lanark County growers can learn more about food donations at this site:

https://lanarkcountyfoodbank.ca

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Garden Activity Calendar
Vegetable Growing Calendar

Hazel (*Corylus* spp.) flowers. The small red brush is the female flower, the catkins the male flowers. The hazel is wind pollinated.
Susan Bicket

Alternatively, check out the website for this local non-profit organization, Just Food:

https://justfood.ca

Just Food encourages local urban and rural gardeners to plant-a-row and donate-a-row to give away. Useful information for gardeners is available on this site too. ❀

Share the harvest
Julianne Labreche

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer questions from the helpline.

I've been having issues with my Annabelle hydrangeas, with the leaves folded up over the flower buds. When I open them up, there are little green worms in them. In the past I've cut the leaves off, but I'm afraid I'll be cutting off all this year's blooms. What can I do now, and how can this be prevented?

I believe you have leaf tiers or leaf-rollers. The leaf tiers bind the leaves together for protection. In the case of the leaf-roller the caterpillar rolls or folds only one leaf, binds it with strands of silk, then feeds and rests within the nest created. In both cases, the damage is unsightly but will not destroy the shrub. Because it occurs early in the spring, if you remove the infested leaves and smash the caterpillars, the plant will have time to grow and flourish over the summer. Make sure to clean up the ground below the shrubs very well. Prevention is difficult, but it is always good to fertilize the hydrangea plant with fish emulsion and compost to encourage certain fungi that eat worms and keep pests away. This also creates a healthy plant and healthy plants can fight off disease and infestations much better. ❀

My Favourite Radishes

Rebecca Last

Radishes can be planted as soon as the soil thaws. The seeds are large enough for young gardeners to handle and will be ready to pick in about a month. Space seeds 2-3cm apart in loose well-drained soil about 2mm deep and water regularly. They are ready for harvest when the roots start to push out of the earth, and the radish shoulders are visible. Radishes do well in my nutrient-poor sandy soil. They are also a good companions for cucumbers and zucchini.

These are my favourites:

- **White Icicle** – an all-white variety with an elongated root like a miniature carrot. The flavour is

Radishes
Rebecca Last

mild, with a sweet, crunchy texture. Even in dry seasons, it resists going woody.

- **French Breakfast** is very similar but red with a white root tip and a bit spicier.
- **Cherry Bomb** is what most people imagine as the perfect radish – bright red and round with a pleasant peppery bite. In drier conditions with uneven moisture, it is prone to cracking.
- **Easter Egg** selection is a mix of species, including a few turnips and winter radishes that can get large and woody if left in the ground too long. The roots mature at different rates, but you get red, white, purple and pink roots, that look great together.

Expert Tip: If your radishes don't develop roots, you can let them go to flower and seed. Stir-fry the seedpods for a crunchy-spicy addition to your meals. .❀

Who Put the "Zinn" in the Zinnias?

Gail Labrosse

Zinnia
Gail Labrosse

The Aztecs called zinnias "plants that are hard on the eyes" because of their brightly coloured flowers. Native to Mexico, zinnias were taken to Europe in the 1500s by Spanish explorers where they became very popular. In the 1700s Dr. Johann Gottfried Zinn, a German professor, wrote the first description of this beautiful species. So, it was Dr J. G. Zinn who put the "zinn" in zinnias!

Bright cheerful pink, yellow, white, purple, orange and red zinnia flowers are long lasting in garden beds and survive up to two weeks in home arrangements when properly cut and cared for. Zinnias are annuals so need to be grown every year from seed. They also have two special features to consider, they attract butterflies and are deer resistant.

Growing zinnias is easy. Zinnia seeds can be planted indoors 4 to 6 weeks before the last frost, then transplanted when the soil starts to warm in your garden. Alternatively, in the spring, after all

Painted lady on Zinnia
Gail Labrosse

Zinnias and hydrangeas
Gail Labrosse

danger of frost has passed, sow the zinnia seeds in a sunny location just below the soil surface, 6 – 10 cm apart. Seedlings will appear in 4-7 days. Thinning may be necessary as good air circulation is important for keeping your zinnias looking good all season long. It usually takes 60 to 70 days from seed to bloom. By planting seeds every two or three weeks until the end of June, you will have blossoms from mid-summer through to early autumn.

Caring for zinnias is easy. Water well weekly but keep the leaves as dry as possible to reduce the possibility of powdery mildew. Water in the morning to give the plants time to dry in the warm sun or use a soaker hose at the base of the plants. Zinnias prefer soil that is consistently moist but do quite well in dry soil too. Mature plants are drought tolerant requiring less water.

Cutting zinnias for bouquets is easy. Using a clean sharp knife, cut in early morning when new blossoms are just beginning to open. Cut the stem just above a leaf axil and a new bloom will form to replace the one cut. This is multi-tasking at its best: harvesting flowers and encouraging new growth at the same time. Place cut flowers in cold water immediately after cutting so they remain hydrated, and strip off leaves that would be below water in the vase. Dissolving a packet of cut flower preservative in the water will supply food for the zinnias and reduce bacteria growth. For long lasting bouquets recut stems at a 45-degree angle under water to ensure the stem can fully absorb moisture.

Zinnias are said to symbolize lasting friendship and affection, goodness and endurance. Shouldn't you have zinnias in your garden this year? ❀

Native Plant Profile:
Vernonia: Bold and Beautiful Ironweed

Josie Pazdzior

Vernonia at Montreal Botanical Gardens
Josie Pazdzior

Ironweed flowers
Josie Pazdzior

I discovered this gorgeous perennial when asked by a friend to identify the tall purple blooms in her garden - not so easily done, as ironweed was rarely seen in Ottawa gardens. This is changing, as demand for native plantings increases, and you can find Vernonia at native plant nurseries, or germinate it quite easily from seed. In the few years since then I have grown ironweed in several spots, and recommend it as a gardener's joy year round. Once established in the right spot, it takes little maintenance and grows steadily to a substantial clump.

The garden species likely to be found in the Ottawa area is probably *Vernonia noveborascensis*, New York ironweed, whose sturdy stems reach about 2m in height, and carry brilliant magenta-purple flowers in late summer. *V. gigantea* grows to 2.5 m in the Montreal Botanical Garden, where the neon-bright flower heads make an impressive display.

Vernonia, hardy to zone 4, is native to North America, specifically the eastern and Midwest states and southern Ontario. A good pollinator plant, it hosts the larvae of American painted lady butterflies. In nature it prefers riverbanks and wetter areas, but it survives in my very dry garden.

Like many species, it takes a season or two to settle in and be its spectacular self. However, extra water may be necessary during our periods of summer drought, especially until it is well established. I learned this one summer when the leaves of my original clump shrivelled up, blackened and died, after being transplanted the previous fall. Happily, it recovered the next year.

The only essential maintenance is to make sure it has enough water. Keep a 4-7 cm layer of mulch around the crown and cut off the stems in spring. I like to leave them over the winter because, true to the name, the strong ironweed stems left undisturbed will stay upright until spring, adding interest to

Ironweed (or Vernonia) stems in April after seeds have finally let go
Josie Pazdzior

the winter garden. If the seed heads are left on, you may have a pleasant surprise one April day to notice delicate sprays of bleached-white bracts from which the seeds have finally flown. (See photo.) As a native plant, it doesn't need fertilizing, though adding some compost now and then wouldn't hurt, to enrich the soil with organic matter.

Divide or move ironweed when it is dormant, in early spring or late fall. For better impact in a garden bed, the stems can be cut back by 1/3 to 1/2 in June to get shorter, denser plants, as we do with chrysanthemums and other perennials.

The back of a sunny border, with consistent soil moisture and preferably not exposed to strong winds, would be the ideal spot for this bold plant. The alternate dark green leaves are narrow, smooth or slightly hairy, but not particularly attractive; planting suitable perennials in front to hide the lower stems may enhance the overall effect. Plants that set off Vernonia well are yellow rudbeckia, helenium, goldenrod, white boltonia (Bolton's Aster) and other fall blooming asters, and Japanese anemones in white and pink. ❀

Pictures from the Garden

Rhubarb, *Rheum rhabarbarum*
Nancy MacDonald

Blooming *Helleborus* 'Peppermint Ice'
Penka Matanska