



# Trowel Talk

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## Calendula

Heather Clemenson

A few years ago, I purchased a packet of calendula seeds to sow in my vegetable patch. I had read that the flowers help to attract pollinators and dissuade certain pests from eating the vegetables.

A profusion of plants grew, around 45 cm to 60 cm tall. Calendula have yellow or orange daisy-like flowers and, with occasional deadheading, they bloom continuously from early summer until frost. They prefer full sun but will grow in partial shade. I have not purchased seeds since my initial outlay. At the end of the season, I let a few of the calendula flowers go to seed. I usually scatter the seeds in one corner of the vegetable bed and might cover them very lightly with a bit of soil, or simply just leave them. There is always a good patch that germinates the following spring.

*Calendula officinalis* is an annual flowering herb sometimes called a 'pot marigold' as it was used from early times in cooking. However, it is not to be confused with marigolds that are members of the *Tagetes* genus, such as French marigolds (*T. patula*), and African marigolds (*T. erecta*). Both species are in the sunflower family (*Asteraceae*). Calendula has many uses, not only for cooking but also for its essential oils and medicinal purposes.

If you have children and are looking for something easy for them to grow, calendula is almost failproof. Should your child try to eat what they grow, it is

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[Garden Activity Calendar](#)  
[Vegetable Growing Calendar](#)



Peony seedling. Peonies seeds have double dormancy. They need to go through two chilling and warm periods. The first for the root germination, the second for the leaf.

Susan Bicket

Lanark County  
Master Gardeners



Ottawa-Carleton  
Master Gardeners



good to know that the flowers are edible. Calendula seeds are available in most stores, whether your local grocery store, big box store or local garden centre. ♻️



Calendula

Nancy McDonald



Giant Alliums in Flower

Claire McCaughey

## Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer questions from the help-line.

*Is late June too late to divide hostas?*

You can divide them, but they will look very lopsided; they certainly will not look their best. By the end of June they are pretty well in full leaf. If you do, be sure to water them well each week until they are established. And when you replant them, add some compost to the soil so they will have a rich base to grow in. Early spring or late fall is usually the time to do this. But sometimes one has to do it when time permits.

*I purchased a lovely blue iris a couple of years ago, but it has not bloomed since. It is in a spot that only receives morning sun. Could this be the issue? How many hours of sunlight do irises require?*

Irises like at least 6 hours of sun a day, but 8 is better. They will still bloom with less, though. A likely possibility for their lack of bloom is that they are planted too deeply. Should you decide to move them, the tops of rhizomes should be allowed to show and the rootlets attached to the rhizomes should be spread out like a fan around them. A very thin layer of soil can be laid on top. ♻️

**Tip:** *As the foliage of spring bulbs dies down lift and divide clumps that are flowering sparsely. Separate the bulbs and replant with a generous helping of compost. This increases your stock. After a couple of years the bulbs will start to flower again. Also any indoor forced hardy bulbs can be planted now too. Alternatively, dry the bulbs, store in a cool dark, well ventilated place and plant in the autumn.*

# Garden Safely

Nancy McDonald



## Boots

Margaret Ryan

It's June and you have been busy in your garden. Hopefully you are enjoying and remaining injury free. A garden safety review is timely as prevention of injury is the goal. Are you properly geared?

Let's begin with footwear. You may not own a pair of steel-toed shoes (see photo) but ask yourself if your garden footwear:

- Is sturdy and can stand up to the abuse of weather, slippery and uneven surfaces and the occasional dropped garden tool?
- Is comfortable and easy to clean?
- Do you feel well supported when wearing?

If you answered yes to these questions, then you are on your way with a dedicated pair of garden shoes hopefully left conveniently by your door for easy access during gardening season. As well, good gloves, and sun protection measures (including sunglasses) are all part of your garden safety gear. Safety glasses recommended by ophthalmology associations and ear protection are two other measures to use when performing certain garden tasks. Another consideration is protection from ticks and mosquitos which carry Lyme Disease and West Nile respectively. Especially important

this year for us seeking a walk in a wooded area away from crowds will be to renew our knowledge of Lyme disease. Excellent information on protecting ourselves can be found at [Ottawa Public Health](#)

Remember to warm up those muscles and joints before you start. A brisk walk and some stretching will pay off with less muscle and joint stiffness. Take stretch breaks every 20-30 minutes during your gardening. It is often gardener pain and remorse felt the next day if you decided to spread that load of soil just because it was sitting in your driveway. Breaking up and varying garden activities can prevent these types of repetitive muscle and joint injuries.

Staying hydrated is important. Keeping the body hydrated helps the heart more easily pump blood to the muscles you are using allowing them to work efficiently. A part of your gardening gear needs to be a bottle of water to take with you and to drink from when you are on that stretch break.

Take a look at other ways you can garden safely. Are your garden tools right for you? New or ergonomic tools might make your gardening easier and reduce muscle and joint strain. As an example, even though gardening shears were on sale at a store, they didn't feel right in my hand. I tried several until I found a pair that fit my grip. They cost a little more than the ones on sale and are a better choice for my joints. My advice is to pick up that tool in the store before you purchase and safely mimic what you plan to do with it to see if it feels right.

As a retired nurse I invite you to write yourself a self-prescription this gardening season to prepare for and garden safely. This will go a long way to preventing injury while allowing you all the joys gardening can bring. Best of all being injury free in the garden is definitely more fun! You may wish to read more on this subject and here is the link to the recent article I wrote for [55 Plus Magazine](#). 🌱

## Planting to preserve and beautify your shoreline

Sheila Currie



Heliopsis on the shoreline

Sheila Currie



Shoreline garden in progress

Sheila Currie

The shorelines of freshwater lakes and rivers are special areas worthy of our attention and care. These 'riparian zones' are important buffers between land and water, with plants fulfilling multiple functions of reducing erosion, filtering runoff, and providing habitat for an abundance of wildlife. They can also be eye-catchingly beautiful gardens, while promoting a healthy environment.

Five years ago, we decided to naturalize a  $2.7 \times 1.5$  m area near the shoreline at our lakeside cottage that had years ago been a sandbox area for small children. In starting our naturalization project, we had to be careful not to disturb the natural features of the shoreline, which included a tiny red osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*) and twiggy sandbar willows (*Salix exigua*) poking up through the rocks around the patch. We also did not disturb the few volunteer flowers that had sprung up since the patch was used as a sandbox. These included brown-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*), goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) and crown vetch (*Coronilla varia*). We were unsure about keeping the crown vetch until I recalled signs along Ottawa's Sir John A Macdonald parkway marking roped-off areas rehabilitated with new plantings. It was there I learned that this plant, though sometimes considered a nuisance weed, can be used as a shoreline stabilizer.

We gradually removed shovelfuls of sand from the bank area to be used elsewhere in the garden and replaced it with soil and clumps of native plants and shrubs. We were modest in the application of compost, to avoid leaching nutrients into the lake. We planted native false sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*), wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) and purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*). When a neighbour offered a clump of shasta daisies, we made an exception for this non-native flower because their bright white colour complemented the riot of pinks and yellows. However, perhaps fittingly, over the years they have been overtaken and

replaced by native switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*). We will content ourselves with the white blossoms on serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*) and paniced asters (*Aster lanceolatus*).

Last summer we planted an American mountain ash (*Sorbus americana*) beside the patch, and plan to add a new shrub this year: a nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*), or perhaps a winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) to help sustain the blue jays who stay with us through the winter. Late last fall we tucked in a couple of false Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*), hopefully in time for them to settle in and survive the winter. Signs of life are slow to arrive in 2020, but we remain hopeful!

Our ongoing efforts to naturalize this buffer along our shoreline are well worth it. We are helping to protect our lake water while enjoying the sights and sounds of a naturally-beautiful garden teeming with life in the form of birds, butterflies, bees, frogs and snakes.

Note: Check with your local conservation authority for advice on legislation, any required permits and/or potential funding available to help you plan and implement work around shorelines.

<https://watersheds.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/The-Riparian-Zone-Final.pdf>

<https://www.rvca.ca/stewardship-grants/shoreline-naturalization/shoreline-naturalization-program> 🌱

## Garden Mint

Heather Clemenson



Mint leaves  
Kathleen Lang

**W**hen I was a child growing up in Wales a favourite Sunday dinner in season was fresh lamb served with homemade mint sauce. Not mint jelly, but sweet and vinegary mint sauce made from fresh mint that my parents grew in their garden. For many years I believed that the only mint one could grow was 'garden mint' as it is referred to in many British recipes.

Mint is a perennial herb belonging to the genus *Mentha*. It has distinctive four-sided square stems and opposite leaves. The varieties most grown in home gardens are spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) or peppermint (*Mentha X piperita*). You have probably heard of both, but while they look similar, they taste quite different. Spearmint contains less than one percent menthol and has a mild taste, whereas peppermint contains 40 % menthol giving it a much stronger minty aftertaste.

A great variety of mints are now available each with its own distinct flavour. Some of the more common varieties include: apple mint (*M. suaveolens*), banana mint (*M. arvensis* 'Banana'), chocolate mint (*M. X piperita* 'Chocolate'), ginger mint (*M. X gracilis*), lavender mint (*M. piperita* 'Lavender'), and lemon mint (*M. piperita* 'Citrata'). As well as for sauces, mint is useful in hot or cold drinks, as a garnish for hot vegetables or salads and many varieties have medicinal uses. It a versatile plant well worth growing.

While growing mint is easy, be extremely careful that it does not take over your garden. It is classed as an invasive plant as its roots spread quickly

below ground sending up new shoots in abundance. I have grown spearmint for many years without it invading my garden. I cut the bottom out of a straight-sided pot about 30 cm in diameter and about 25 cm deep. A minimum depth of 15 cm is probably enough. The pot was buried with the rim

about 2.5 cm above the soil surface. Into this enclosure I planted mint. Keeping the rim higher than the soil surface prevents the plant from creeping into the adjacent soil, but a watchful eye is still needed to prevent a stem from bending outside the pot and rooting. 🌱

## Onions Galore!

Claire McCaughey



Chives in Flower

Claire McCaughey

**T**his year consider growing some plants from the onion or *Allium* genus. There are so many to choose from – by some estimates 700 species – including a huge variety of both edible and ornamental plants (some fulfilling both roles). Most alliums do best in full sun and well-drained soil, and most grow from bulbs and are perennial.

The first appearance of the alliums in early spring is chives (*A. schoenoprasum*). Hardy and easy to grow, they have pink flowers. Two other edibles - Garlic chives (*A. tuberosum*) and Japanese bunching onions or scallions (*A. fistulosum*) - follow soon after.

Ornamental alliums come in many heights. The tiny yellow-flowered *A. moly* appears in mid-spring. Later in spring the Star of Persia allium (*A. christophii*) grows to 40 cm and blooms with a large starburst of flowers while Giant allium (*A. giganteum*) grows to 120 cm or more. Alliums are beneficial companion plants known to repel aphids. Also consider planting ornamental alliums amongst other perennials as the allium foliage becomes quickly unattractive. One notable exception is *A. X 'Millenium'*, a shorter early summer allium that retains attractive narrow leaves all season.

Wild Nodding Onion (*A. cernuum*) and wild leek or ramps (*A. tricocum*) are two of Canada's native onion plants. The latter has protected status and should never be transplanted from the wild.

Purchase Allium bulbs as well as garlic (*A. sativum*) and shallots (*A. oschaninii*) online or in garden centres for planting in the fall. Start regular onions (*Allium cepa*) early indoors from seed or later outdoors from onion sets. 🌱

***There are just too many great plants in the world for us to plant the same things over and over or to plant disease prone monocultures - Augustus Jenkins Farmer***

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

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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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*Banner Photograph: Paul's Scarlett Hawthorn, Susan Bicket .*



### 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.**

*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.*