



# Trowel Talk

July 15 2020, Vol 11, no. 07

## My Favourite Beets

*Rebecca Last*

You can start beets very early in spring, or mid-season for fall harvest. Plant seeds 6-10 cm apart and 5 mm deep in loose well-drained soil. Remove surplus seedlings from each little cluster by pinching them off at soil level. Beets will mature in 6-10 weeks, depending on variety and growing conditions. Like other root veggies, the shoulders of the beet will be visible above the soil when it's ready to harvest.

Here are my favourite varieties:

- **Bull's Blood** beet tops are a gorgeous, deep burgundy red, ideal to eat raw in salads, or lightly steamed, as the leaves age. The roots are very slow to develop, but if you have the space and patience, they will eventually produce small, dark beets (10 weeks+).
- **Detroit Dark Red**, a heritage variety developed in Ontario in the 1890s, these are globular, dark red, with a sweet, earthy flavour. Maturing in about 6-7 weeks, they also store well.
- **Cylindra beets** are my favourite for productivity because each one has about twice the flesh of a regular round beet. Its leaves are a little sweeter than other varieties, and the elongated root is ideal for slicing. It is ready to harvest about 6 weeks after planting.

## Contents

◆ My Favourite Beets	1
◆ Ask a Master Gardener	<a href="#">2</a>
◆ Meadowsapping	<a href="#">3</a>
◆ The Arrival of Japanese Beetles	<a href="#">5</a>
◆ Herb Containers: Fragrance Plus Flavour	<a href="#">6</a>
◆ Find us	<a href="#">7</a>

[Garden Activity Calendar](#)

[Vegetable Growing Calendar](#)



Common Milkweed - *Asclepias syriaca*, in bloom. This is not a milkweed for small gardens as it spreads aggressively, from both rhizomes and seeds.

*Susan Bicket*

Lanark County  
Master Gardeners



Ottawa-Carleton  
Master Gardeners





## Beets

Rebecca Last

### Expert Tips

Never take more than one-third of beet tops if you also hope to get roots.

For a less earthy flavour, and interesting look, try stripy Chioggia beets, or mild-tasting golden beets.



### Peony and Aquilegia after flowering

Deadheading annuals and perennials as flowers fade helps keep the plant looking fresh, prolongs flowering and prevents the formation and distribution of seeds. However to allow self seeding or to save seeds for another year leave one or two spent flowers to form seed heads.

Susan Bicket

## Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer questions from the help-line.

*I purchased a tomato plant in a pot. It gets lots of sun, but the bottom leaves are yellowing. Is there something I can do to stop this?*

How big is the pot that your tomato is in? It may be struggling with not having enough root room, and a smaller pot makes it hard to supply adequate food and water. If the pot is less than 45 cm in diameter, it should be ideally be moved to a bigger pot, 45 to 61 cm diameter. Going forward, remove the yellow leaves, and give it water as needed. Fertilize it with a top-dressing of compost every two or three weeks, or purchase tomato fertilizer and apply as per instructions. Let it have as much sun as possible. It should be fine. Enjoy those tomatoes!

*My bleeding heart plant has long since finished blooming, and the plant is starting to yellow and droop. Is it okay to cut back the plant, or does it still require leaves to store energy for next year?*

If the foliage is yellow and drooping, you can cut it back. Unlike tulips and other bulbs, bleeding hearts don't need to store extra energy for next year's show. They are heavy feeders, though, and it wouldn't hurt to put some compost or fertilizer around your plant in the spring..

**Tip:** When planting in dry soil, dig the hole, fill with water, allow to drain, repeat. This ensures there is moisture for the roots to find. Plant and water as normal, finishing with a mulch.

**Above all, I like to grow plants that like me—or, more accurately, my soil and situation. Yes I like a challenge but the majority of plants in my garden must enjoy growing there, they must be happy.- Alan Titchmarsh**

# Meadowscaping

*Julianne Labreche*



The author's front-yard 'meadowscape' garden

*Julianne Labreche*

If you're looking for a satisfying project this gardening season, why not consider turning your lawn into an urban meadow?

The proper term is 'meadowscaping'. Loosely defined, it means replacing turf grass with plants and grasses appropriate to this zone. As these plants grow, they will attract birds and insects – including important pollinators.

Turf grass is a non-native plant with a short root system, a monoculture that requires regular cutting, fertilization and lots of water.

A meadowscape includes a variety of drought-tolerant flowers and grasses with a longer root system, better able to absorb rainwater and prevent runoff.

When we decided to 'go grassless' a few years ago, the changes seemed almost immediate. Noise from the lawnmower was replaced by sounds of buzzing bees and chirping birds. Instead of gas fumes, the scent of nectar from newly planted perennials wafted through the air.

Suddenly, the garden seemed alive, more interesting.



Monarch butterfly gathering nectar

*Julianne Labreche*

We had a good feeling too. Like others, we were helping to raise the bar on gardening. In our own way, we were making a difference. Meadowsclaping means not just a beautiful yard but one designed to preserve threatened and endangered wildlife species too.

There's no denying, of course, there is some work involved. We did the labour ourselves. Inevitably, there were start-up costs too — buying plants, for instance.

Looking back though, there are no regrets. Meadowsclaping the front lawn continues to save us both work and money. We just sold the gas mower, for instance, replacing it with a light push mower for the shrinking backyard lawn. There's more time to relax and enjoy the garden. It's fun taking photographs of Monarch and Swallowtail butterflies and trying to identify the pollinator insects that fly by.

Just to clarify, meadowsclaping does not mean leaving grass uncut or letting weeds grow into an urban jungle. That will just upset your neighbours, result-

ing in complaints to bylaw.

Meadowsclaping does mean careful preparation and a good design plan, including a way to remove existing turf.

In the end, after some experimenting, we found the easiest way to kill the grass was to use the 'lasagna method' — covering the grass with layers of newspaper, soil and mulch and then letting nature do the work. The best time is early spring or late fall, but the technique works well in summer too.

Any design should be functional and pleasing to the eye. A meadowsclape requires a sunny space. Unlike natural meadows, a meadowsclape often has some added elements. Walking paths, garden art, water features and mass plantings, for example, can create harmony and beauty.

Provide plants for pollinators from early spring to late fall. As plants fill in and grow, weeding will be reduced. Leave fall cleanup until late spring. Don't be too tidy. Garden debris, including fallen leaves, will provide winter protection and habitat for insects and wildlife.



Butterfly milkweed in full bloom

*Julianne Labreche*

My own favourite native plants for meadowsclaping in Ottawa and Lanark (zone 5a) include: swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), butterfly milkweed

(*Asclepias tuberosa*), pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and Ohio goldenrod (*Solidago ohioensis*).

Non-native plants fit well into a meadowscape too, especially plants that bloom in early spring and late fall when many native plants are not flowering. Alliums, crocus, muscari and primrose are good spring bloomers for pollinators. Flowering herbs including lavender, sage and thymes also are good additions in a meadowscape – tough and drought-resistant.

Asters and sedum provide bloom later in summer and fall.

Rules don't need to be too hard and fast. A diversity of plants will attract a wide variety of pollinators, including many species of bees and butterflies.

Raising the bar to welcome pollinators means opening your garden to a brand-new world of discovery. By thinking outside the box, replacing conventional grass, the journey will begin. 🌱

## The Arrival of Japanese Beetles

Julianne Labreche



Japanese beetles

Richard Hinchcliff

Typically, Canada Day is associated with fireworks and family BBQs. For gardeners, there is also another, less pleasant, association – Japanese beetles.

It's around that time of year when this big, shiny copper-coloured insect with its voracious appetite for about 350 different kinds of plant species starts to munch away on roses, hibiscuses, dahlias, hollyhocks, grapes, garden veggies and other plants.

The Japanese beetle (*Popillia japonica*) is native to the main islands of Japan where it is not considered a major pest. It was first discovered in North America in 1916 and, without any natural enemies, continues to thrive. It has become one of the most destructive invasive pests in urban landscapes across many parts of North America.

It is fairly easy to control Japanese beetles in the garden – at least, on lower, easier-to-reach branches – by heading out in the early morning with a pair of garden gloves and a small pail of soapy water. Japanese beetles are sluggish in the morning so just hand pick and drop them into the soapy water. Watch out for their arrival and be vigilant. They emit pheromones as they feed, a chemical that attracts even greater numbers of the pest. For most gardeners, however, it is not a good idea to use a pheromone trap as this will just attract more Japanese beetles to your yard.

Another option to reduce their numbers is to remove some of your turf grass. These insects have a fondness for grass and lay their eggs in lawns in mid-summer. They overwinter in the root zone of turf as a white grub and then emerge as the flying Japanese beetle. 🌱

## Herb Containers: Fragrance Plus Flavour

Claudette Russell



Herbs in a container with coconut liner

Claudette Russell

**D**id you include herbs in your garden this year? Herbs are easy to grow and low maintenance. They're also a source of fragrance and flavour as well as being aesthetically pleasing. When you include an herb container on a patio or balcony near your kitchen, you will have a supply of fresh herbs all summer long.

Here are four essentials for setting up an herb container:

### **The Container:**

The type of container is largely personal preference. However, remember to choose a container that has good drainage and a large enough opening to allow herbs to grow and spread. For three to four plants use a container that is at least 30 cm wide and 10-15 cm deep. More herbs will need a bigger pot.

You can use a basket lined with sphagnum peat or coconut liner, but place a plastic bag inside the basket and poke some holes throughout the bottom so that the plants don't sit in wet soil. Clay pots work well for herbs that like dry conditions – thymes, sages and oregano, for example – but they tend to dry out quickly on hot summer days.

### **The Growing Medium:**

Select a growing medium that is suitable for potted plants such as a well-drained loam soil that is light and fluffy. Don't use garden soil, black earth, or soil from last year's potted plants. They will be too heavy or lack adequate nutrients. Top dressing with an organic vegetable fertilizer such as mushroom compost, blood meal, bone meal or worm castings once a month will help feed the plants.

### **Herb Selection:**

Generally, any type of herb can be successfully grown in a container as long as you provide the right growing conditions. Herbaceous herbs such as basil, cilantro and parsley require daily watering compared to woody herbs such as rosemary, sage or thyme which can be watered every other day. All varieties of mint can be invasive so they are best grown in a pot where their spread is contained.

### **Placement:**

All herbs love the sun. Place your container in a location that receives four or more hours per day.

Once the plants are established, prune regularly to promote healthy growth and stop them from flowering. Generally, the newer leaves at the top should be pinched back or snipped and used rather than the older leaves at the bottom of the plant. Basil and cilantro require more aggressive pruning otherwise they will become tall and lanky.

Now you're ready to enjoy the fragrance and flavour of herbs all summer long. 🌿

## Find us:



### On the Web

#### Lanark County Master Gardeners



Blog



Helpline



Calendar



Facebook

#### Ottawa-Carleton Master Gardeners



Website



Helpline



Clinics



Facebook

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.



## Trowel Talk team:

Julianne Labreche, Marion Runstedler, Susan Bicket, Kelly Noel, Amanda Carrigan, Ann McQuillan, Faith Schmidt, Judith Cox, Rob Stuart, Josie Pazdzior, Dale Odorizzi, Rebecca Last, Claudette Russell.

Letters to editor: [mgottawaeditor@gmail.com](mailto:mgottawaeditor@gmail.com)

*Banner Photograph: Lavender, 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.*