



Trowel Talk

September 15 2020, Vol 11, no. 09

Drying Hydrangeas

Gail Labrosse

Drying hydrangea flowers from your garden for a winter table arrangement is easy. The best time for picking the flowers is toward the end of the growing season when they naturally start to dry out. Take a tall container of cool water with you when you plan to pick your bouquet.

1. Cut each flower leaving the stem about 30 – 45 cm long. Strip all leaves off. Place flower stems in cool water, but no water should touch the blossoms. For easier handling, wrap an elastic band around the bouquet halfway up the stems.
2. Boil a pot of water. Place the cut ends of the bouquet into the boiling water for 30 seconds to seal the stems. If using shorter-stemmed flowers, wrap blossoms in paper towels for protection from the steam.
3. Put the hydrangeas in a tall vase, with no water. Drape the flower heads with paper towels.
4. Mist the towels thoroughly with water and re-mist as the towels dry out for the first hour. Let the flower heads condition for 4 to 5 hours. Remove paper towels and arrange in your favourite vase without water. If you need to change the stem length, re-cut to desired length and repeat step 2.

Contents

◆ Drying Hydrangeas	1
◆ Ask a Master Gardener	2
◆ Naturalizing With Native Grasses	3
◆ Dividing Daylilies	5
◆ Invasive Plant Profile: Creeping bellflower	6
◆ Abundant Lemon Verbena	7
◆ Find us	9

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



Butternut squash
Susan Bicket

Lanark County
Master Gardeners



Ottawa-Carleton
Master Gardeners



Annabelle and panicle hydrangeas are long-lived flowers. Dried or fresh cut, they make great flowers to decorate your home or your table. Remember to avoid placing them in direct sunlight to preserve their delicate colours. ☺



Hydrangeas for the table
Gail Labrosse



Apple Lemon Verbena Jelly
Nancy McDonald

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan
Master Gardeners answer questions from the help-line.

I'm concerned about my spaghetti squash, as summer is ending, and the fruit seem far from ripe. Very few are turning yellow like those you see in the grocery store, even though the leaves are getting brown. Should I leave the squash until yellow or harvest now?

It's normal for the vines to start dying back at this point. You can leave spaghetti squash outside on the vine until there is danger of frost; pick them before a frost hits. During this time they 'cure', improving their storage capability. You can also cut them off the vine and let them cure outside until just before frost. Enjoy!

I have two amaryllis bulbs I have taken out of my garden and put on their sides to rest before planting in pots for the winter. How long should they rest before repotting them, and do they need a dark location?

Good job getting them out before frost. They need a rest period now of 8-10 weeks in a cool location (5-10 °C), out of bright light, but it doesn't have to be completely dark. Don't water them during this time. Afterwards, repot them in clean soil mixture, bring to a warm (17-20 °C) bright location, and start watering sparingly until you see new growth starting. When they're growing, you can water more frequently. ☺

Tip: . September is a good time to assess the garden. Plants can still be planted or moved and perennials divided. Plan for spring by marking plants and spaces needing renovation.

Tip: Plant spring bulbs in the middle or back of a perennial garden so the fading foliage is hidden as it feeds the bulbs for next season.

Naturalizing With Native Grasses

Edythe Falconer



Panicum

Edythe Falconer

Native grasses once covered vast stretches of the Canadian prairies including those in Ontario. When settlers began to arrive with their oxen and plows, grasses were soon replaced with waving fields of wheat, oats and barley, annual food crops. Helping Dad heft and position sheaves of grain was one of my favourite occupations. Now that native grasses have been recognized as valuable additions to modern gardens and public spaces, it is worth considering those that are best suited to today's lifestyles and to the variabilities of climate change.

I don't remember when I first became interested in planting grasses. Usually I was trying to keep them out of my gardens. My interest may have been sparked by lush photos in garden books, garden

tours, parks, garden centres and fine examples at Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm. Perhaps I was looking for low maintenance plants. Ornamental grasses are low maintenance but not no maintenance!

Grasses come in many shapes and sizes. Some are 'clumpers' that stay in one place - relatively. Others are 'spreaders' that can be quite aggressive, which is fine if that is what you want. One of my first purchases (non native) was a beautiful Pennisetum. I was disappointed the next year when it did not reappear. I pulled out the tag and belatedly noted that it was an annual, albeit a fine one. I read tags and basic information more carefully now. If a grass is at its best in the fall, it is a 'warm' variety and will need to be cut back in early spring. If a grass is at its best earlier in the year, it is a 'cool' variety and should be pruned later in fall. Most grasses prefer full sun. Others are better in partial shade. Some are more drought resistant than others.

When I have failed with a grass it is usually because of a lack of basic research, or from trying to juggle too many things at the same time.

Here is a modest list of native grasses that usually succeed in our Canadian climate, including those of Ottawa-Carleton and Lanark.

Andropogon gerardii, Big Blue Stem is true to its common name as its foliage takes on a bluish tinge in the fall. It has an attractive inflorescence and is especially useful in boundaries and screens, growing to 1.2 to 1.8 meters, with a bonus of interesting seed heads. Clumper

Andropogon scoparium, Little Blue Stem is a warm season grass that is comfortable with sun or part shade. When I was introduced to this grass it was called *Schizachyrium*. It rises to 60 to 90 cm. Clumper

Chasmanthium latifolium, Northern Sea Oats produces attractive dangling coppery tassels in fall and does well in both sun and shade, growing to 90cm. Clumper.

Bouteloua curtipendula, Side Oats Gramma, for example ‘Blonde Ambition’, grows to a modest 30cm. It is a fine ground cover – as are Little Bluestem and Chasmanthium. Clumper

Hierochloe odorata, Sweet Grass is quite fragrant when dried. It prefers moist, rich loam and grows to 60 or 90cm and does best in full sun. First Nations peoples are experienced in its many uses.

Hystrix patula, Eastern Bottlebrush earns its name because of its unusual seed heads. It tolerates sun and part shade and grows to 30 to 90 cm. Clumper

Panicum virgatum, Switch Grass has a graceful fountain shape, delicate textured inflorescence and varied coloration. It is fine with sun or part shade and grows 1.2 to 1.5 m. Clumper

Sorgastrum nutans, Indian Grass favours hot dry sites and grows 1.2 to 1.5 m with greyish blue foliage. Clumper

Spartina pectinata, Prairie Cord Grass is suited to slope stabilization and does well with sun or part shade. It grows to 30 cm and can be moderately invasive. Spreader.

Sporobolus heterolepis, Prairie dropseed is a heat and drought tolerant grass that can be used as ground cover and along paths and walkways. It has a mounded form that grows to 60 cm and produces excellent fall color. Clumper

Last Words

Location and aesthetics – Plan the final location of your choices carefully, anticipate form and colour, seasonally and as they grow to maturity. Provide the best soil that you can.

Fall cleanups – Consider leaving some grasses standing when you prune cool season grasses in

the fall. Birds enjoy visiting remaining stalks through winter, and so might you, when you wake to see stalks clad in silvery rime.

Maintenance – A plant may be advertised as drought resistant, but don’t take this for granted – especially in a year like 2020. Weeding is advised if you want your grass to stand out and thrive without too many greedy competitors at its base. In spring aim to prune warm season grasses before the new blades start to emerge.

Availability – There are many garden centres in Ottawa that feature a wide range of ornamental grasses including native grasses. ☀



Chasmanthium

Edythe Falconer

References:

Grass Scapes – Quinn and Macleod, excellent data

Grasses – Nancy J. Ondra – excellent photos and useful design options

[Canadian Wildlife Federation Native Grasses for the Modern Landscape](#), zeroes in on native grasses while the other references feature both native and non-native grasses.

Dividing Daylilies

Kelly Noel



2 forks inserted

Kelly Noel



The daylily is pulled apart

Kelly Noel

If you have a clump of daylilies and you want to spread the joy – move some to another part of the garden or trade with a friend - September is a good time to divide them. It is at least two months before the soil will freeze – which is lots of time for the transplant to settle in and establish some new roots.

If it is a large clump and you want to dig up part of it and leave the rest where it is, drive a shovel straight down through the roots where you want to divide it, and then dig out around that root ball and lift out the piece. Some roots will be damaged and some foliage may end up detached but this is not a problem.

If it is a smaller clump then harming as few roots as possible means faster recovery for the divisions.

Using a garden fork instead of a shovel, dig and lift all around the edge. Slowly loosen the hold of the roots until you can lift the whole clump with most or all of the roots intact. To pull it apart into two clumps, put two garden forks back to back through the clump and rock the handles back and forth – toward each other, away from each other – until the roots pull apart. If it is a large enough clump, you can repeat this process with each piece, but if you make the division too small it won't bloom next year. I have also soaked small clumps in air temperature water and then teased them apart by hand. Which-ever method is used, the foliage is not damaged but it will wilt somewhat until the division is planted and has re-established the small roots that take up water from the soil. I only trim the foliage back if it is really droopy.

Whatever size the division, spread out the roots when you plant it, put the crown about 3 cm below the soil surface and water frequently until freeze up. Daylilies are resilient - don't be surprised to see new growth before winter! ☺

Invasive Plant Profile: Creeping bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*)

Josie Pazdior



Pretty bluebells make a show

Josie Pazdior



Some of the tuberous roots

Josie Pazdior

Information on the web:

Ontario Invasive Plant Council
www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca

Ontario Nature (formerly the Federation of Ontario Naturalists)
<https://ontarionature.org>

University of Minnesota Extension
<http://extension.umn.edu>

Invasive species are a problem affecting our individual gardens as well as the natural landscape and ecosystem. Of course, we are concerned about how our own little corner of nature may be spoiled, but we can also play a role in the bigger picture, to help or hinder the overall spread of invasive species.

What makes a plant invasive? Most of these plants are non-native species that out-compete native ones, and can even take over large areas of wetland, forest or meadow. Common characteristics are:

- Rapid growth and maturity
- Prolific seed production and successful dispersal over wide areas by water, wind, and other agents
- Ability to spread by underground roots and re-establish quickly when disturbed.
- Adaptation to a wide range of growing conditions
- Lack of natural predators to act as biological controls that could keep the population in check

Many gardens, urban and rural, contain buckthorn trees, Japanese knotweed, dog-strangling vines and other such alien invaders. We may even unwittingly purchase and bring home invasive perennials like goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria*), dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) and lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*), to name a few. We are also seduced by the pretty blooms or lush foliage seen at local plant sales, but perhaps we should be suspicious to see many pots of the same species. (If the plant is so desirable, why are you getting rid of it?)

Do not underestimate invasive plants! How many times have I heard a gardener say "I thought I could control it, but..." Often the visible parts of the plant are the tip of the iceberg, and tuberous roots have grown deep into the ground, as is the case with creeping bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*). This plant has its overwintering buds situated just below the soil surface. It spreads by under-



Creeping bellflower is winning in this garden

Josie Pazdzior

ground rhizomes and produces deep, taproot-shaped tubers, both white and fleshy. Because any piece of the roots can sprout into a new plant, it is extremely hard to eradicate.

Creeping bellflower has my vote for the most pernicious plant ever. Sure, it has lovely blue bellflowers that look great in a vase, but it will also keep creeping into your perennial beds once it has a foothold. Many small single leaves can cover the ground before sending up the flower stalks. The bellflower stems reach from 30 to 80 cm in height and appear from June through September. Each plant can produce 15,000 seeds, and the roots will continue indefinitely growing their network deeper and wider, competing with the plants around it for water and

nutrients.

I have been pulling the creeping bellflower leaves appearing around a prairie sage (*Salvia azurea*) for years. I finally realized that I had to dig over 15 cm deep to get the long roots all out. Of course, they are not all out, but are now showing up mixed closely with the prairie sage stems where I really cannot get at them without digging up all the sage. One internet source ([The Invasive Weeds Council of BC](#)) recommends trashing the whole plant that is “contaminated” with the bellflower.

There is another very similar garden genus called ladybells (*Adenophora*), which is very hard to distinguish and identify precisely. A difference can be found by careful examination of the flower parts, some of which have a glandular disk at the base of the style. The *Adenophora* have it, *Campanula* do not. It is confusing, as some people say the *Adenophora* is invasive, while others don't find it so. So beware, apparently if you order the *Adenophora*, you'll probably get *Campanula rapunculoides*, sometimes called the evil twin.

Creeping bellflower is native to Europe and western Siberia and became invasive after its North American debut, choking out native plants. It is almost impossible to eliminate thanks to its successful propagation by seed and roots. We can only attack it as soon as its presence is known, and show no mercy. Interestingly, the Wikipedia photo was taken in an Ottawa garden. ☺

Abundant Lemon Verbena

Nancy McDonald

If you are like me and grow lemon verbena, you now have a very large plant. What started as a small seedling in the spring has grown in size approaching 60 cm (2 feet). So, what to do with this abundance?

Let me share information on this delightful herb. For citrus lovers, lemon verbena (*Aloysia citrodora*) pos-

sesses an intense concentration of lemon flavoured oils. Lemon verbena has been an attractive and much-loved garden plant since Victorian times. In the 17th century it was brought to Europe from South America. The aromatic oil from its leaves was first used in the perfume industry and still is today. If you were a fan of Little House on the Prairie you will know that Laura's teacher Miss Beadle

wore lemon verbena perfume and in Gone with the Wind, lemon verbena was a favourite scent of Scarlett O'Hara's mother. Always good to know these obscure facts in case you are ever on Jeopardy!



Lemon Verbena

Nancy McDonald

Best of all, because of its growth you only need one plant. That's the lovely thing about herbs, they often require little real estate. In our 4B-5A planting zone, plant it outside in the spring after the danger of frost has passed, in a sunny spot and if in a container, one of at least 30 cm (12 inches) in diameter. Water it when the top two inches of soil feel dry and with this summer's heat, that meant daily. It is one herb that benefits from fertilizer and I use an organic water-soluble type safe for edibles. And like other herbs, the more you pick, the more it gives.

Some gardeners in our area have successfully overwintered lemon verbena indoors. When the

temperature dips to 4-5 °C (40 °F), the plant will drop all its leaves. Allowing it to do this outside will prevent bringing insects into your home. You will be left with branches for the winter. Avoid overwatering the plant while it is in this dormant state.

Lemon verbena is an amazing culinary herb. The leaves can be pureed with a bit of water and added to many sauces and marinades. Sauces should not be reserved for dessert dishes only; think of lemon verbena sauce for fish or chicken dishes . Use the leaves in place of lemon zest. My favourite use and the easiest is as a tea either by itself or combined with mint leaves. This year I am growing Hillary's lemon mint and this combination straight from the garden in a tea far exceeds any flavour you will purchase in a box. Add it to iced teas or a light summer wine such as pinot grigio or sauvignon blanc. Even Buckingham Palace, according to a recent news report, is infusing dry gin with lemon verbena, hawthorn berries and mulberry leaves from their gardens and selling to help their income during the pandemic.

It's wonderful to preserve lemon verbena for use during the winter when its lemon scent will remind you of warmer days. If you haven't already, you can dry leaves and store in a jar in a dark location for winter use. Just crumpling the dried leaves will release the lemon flavour and I use it in winter teas. Or the leaves can be chopped or pureed in water and frozen. Another lovely idea is to add chopped leaves to softened butter to store in the fridge or freezer. I infuse the leaves of lemon verbena with calendula flowers in white wine vinegar for winter use. It is excellent in jellies and this year I made an apple lemon verbena jelly. It is one I will make again.

There are many recipes to be found online for this wonderful herb. I hope I have shared some ideas and possibly inspired you to try something new with your abundance of lemon verbena. And if you are not growing this herb, try adding it to next year's plant list. ☺

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.



Clinics

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

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, Judith Cox, Rob Stuart, Josie Pazdzior, Dale Odorizzi, Faith Schmidt, Nancy McDonald, Edythe Falconer, Gail Labrosse, Stephanie Sleeth, Rebecca Last, Gillian Boyd, Heather Clemenson, Sheila Curry, Mary Ann Van Berlo, Margaret Ryan

Letters to editor: mgottawaeditor@gmail.com

Banner Photograph: *Helenium mariachi*, Susan Bicket.



Talks and Events

While COVID19 prevents our in-person events, we are busy adapting, finding new ways to connect with home gardeners

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.