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Garden Magic: Planting Bulbs with Kids!

Andrew Arcello

Who doesn't love a little magic? As a parent, teacher, and kid-at-heart, I know I do! There is something spectacular about a dry bulb becoming a flower. It is planted in the fall, forgotten about in the winter, and marveled at in the spring. Now is the perfect time to think about taking the little ones (or not-so-little-ones) out into the garden to get dirty and get planting.

Guaranteed Success

When teaching a new task or concept to kids (and the garden is the perfect classroom), it is important to make sure that the students are set up for success. There is something about the satisfaction of first-time success that is thrilling. Since the flower is already hidden inside the bulb, success is all but guaranteed. Many flower bulbs like the tulip, hyacinth, grape hyacinth (*Muscari*), ornamental onion (*Allium*), checkered fritillary and crown imperial (*Fritillaria*), are sun-worshippers. Luckily, there are also bulbs that tolerate some shade. Good examples are *Tulipa tarda*, anemones, Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum nutans*), and striped squill (*Puschkinia*). Still, there are some bulbs that are so easy-going that they thrive in sun or shade. Consider daffodils, Grecian wildflower (*Anemone blanda*), Glory-of-the-snow (*Chionodoxa*), the snowdrop (*Galanthus*), and the Siberian squill (*Scilla*).

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Andrew Arcello, guiding his students in planting bulbs.”

provided by Andrew Arcello

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Fascinating and Fanciful Names

Everyone loves a little bit of fancy in their lives – especially kids. Bulbous plants have common names as well as scientific botanical names. Kids will love to learn the fanciful common names and, if you are excited, they will be too. Consider an art activity along with the planting. Start by reading some of the most glorious sounding names: grape hyacinth, foxtail lilies, crown imperials, starflowers, snowdrops, etc. Ask your young gardener to choose one (or a few) and draw, colour or paint predictions about what the flower will look like in the spring. This is a great way to be imaginative. For example, ask “what would a starflower look like?” or “does a foxtail lily have a tail?” Keep these works of art in a safe place to revisit in the spring when you can compare and contrast predictions with the newly bloomed flowers. Perhaps the art could be done again, using the bright new bloom as inspiration.

A Great Job for Hands of Little Explorers

Before you plant the bulb, grab a magnifying glass. You will likely be able to see some little roots appearing. Use scientific observations through senses to explore these bulbs. What do they look like? Feel like? Smell like? Why not take it one step further and cut open one bulb to see what is inside. The promise of the flower in the spring is already hiding inside. Can you find any pieces? Head outside in the cool, crisp air this fall. Dig a hole twice as deep as the bulb is tall. Put the bulb in, making sure the tip is pointing up. Afterwards, give the bulb a little water.

When They Bloom

Use your eyes and your nose. A sensory experience is always a delight for children. All kinds of hyacinths are fascinating to look at and smell marvelous. You can also find wonderful scents in daffodil varieties such as ‘Golden Dawn,’ ‘Cheerfulness,’ ‘Bridal Crown,’ ‘Golden Moon,’ ‘Geranium,’ and ‘Hawera.’ Another delight for the nose and eyes together is the ‘Princess Irene’ tulip with its orange colour and deep red “flames”.

Bulbs are fascinating gifts of nature that lend themselves perfectly to a child’s garden. The possibilities

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer questions from the help-line.

My roses have seed pods. Do they need to be removed before winter?

Wild and old-fashioned types of roses produce bright red or orange hips after they flower, which are high in vitamin C. There is no need to remove them unless you want to harvest them to make rose hip tea, jelly, etc. If you leave them on the bushes, they can provide a nice treat for birds, squirrels, and other wildlife over the winter.

I have a black squirrel who visits and wreaks havoc digging after every time I work in the garden. I want to plant bulbs this fall, including tulips. Will putting 1” wire mesh over the bulbs help protect them from the squirrel?

The 2.5 cm (1”) size should deter the squirrel. However, 1.3 cm (½”) mesh might be a better protection if your squirrel is determined and resourceful, and the smaller size will provide protection from smaller rodents like voles as well. Note also they are attracted to freshly dug earth and the smell of the bulbs, so you may be able to deflect/distract his attention by making sure neither bulbs nor bulb skins touch the surface of the garden, then cultivating lightly over the whole area, and watering afterwards. 🌱

are endless: dig, plant, paint, smell, draw, inspect, track, and map your bulbs. The added gift is the opportunity to spend quality time with the children in your life, creating magic in the garden. Happy planting! 🌱

Who Let The Moths Out

Gail Labrosse

A few European gypsy moths accidentally escaped in 1869 when a researcher in Massachusetts was experimenting with European gypsy moths and North American silk worms, attempting to create a North American silk industry. Since then this invasive species has established itself in Eastern Canada and Northeastern United States.

Gypsy moth caterpillars begin defoliating trees in the spring. They favour hardwood trees such as oak, poplar, and white birch. But when they have stripped the hardwoods bare, they will move on to almost anything else in their path including white pine. These moths cannot be eradicated from North America, but there are a few actions you can take to reduce their impact on your trees.

Do not wait until you see caterpillar damage to begin your battle with gypsy moths. Autumn is a perfect time to start interrupting their life cycle to reduce the number of caterpillars next spring. So, what can we do?



Gypsy Moth Egg Masses

Gail Labrosse

Actions to Reduce Gypsy Moth Impact :

Destroy Egg Masses

From late August until mid-May the following year
Egg masses are fuzzy, tan coloured, oval shapes found on trees, rocks, decks, etc.

Mix 3 drops of liquid dish detergent into 4 litres water.

Using a sharp knife and gloves carefully scrape egg masses from trees into a bucket of soapy water; leave there for several days to ensure they are dead before discarding.

Burlap Banding Trap (Large caterpillar stage)

From mid-May to late August

Wrap burlap around the tree trunk at chest height. Tie a rope at the mid point of burlap and fold the burlap in half over the rope. It will be helpful to ask Google for “images of burlap traps for gypsy moths”.

Collect caterpillars from between burlap layers every afternoon before they start their journey up the trees to start defoliation.

Drown caterpillars in soapy water and discard the carcasses in curbside recycling.

Handpick Caterpillars

From mid-May to mid-August

Young caterpillar/larva is tiny and black. In about seven weeks it grows to 6 cm in length with 5 pairs of blue dots and 6 pairs of red dots on its back. No other caterpillar has these markings.

Using gloves (the caterpillars have a histamine in their hairs, which can cause a rash) handpick the caterpillars and drop them into a bucket of soapy water. Leave them in the bucket to die before discarding in curbside recycling.



Gypsy Moth caterpillar

Gail Labrosse

Burlap Wrapping (Female moth stage).

From mid-July to late August

Wrap another burlap trap, in the same manner as before, but lower on the tree trunk. This trap collects the flightless females before they crawl up the tree to lay eggs.

Check burlap daily. Drown moths in soapy water and discard bodies in curbside recycling.

Pheromone Traps: (Male moth stage)

From mid-July to late August

Hang pheromone traps to attract male moths. Follow the package instructions for placement and disposal.

Interesting Facts about Gypsy Moth Outbreaks:

One moth can lay between 100 – 1000 eggs.
Gypsy moth populations reach peak outbreak levels every seven to ten years.
During severe outbreaks, an increase in viruses and fungi causes a collapse of the outbreak.

Deciduous trees recover from caterpillar damage as

they send out a second flush of new leaf growth. However, after defoliation expect the trees to grow slowly and have a much smaller crown the following year. Conifers may not recover enough to survive the winter.

Biological controls are available for managing gypsy moths. *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* (Btk) is available in a foliar spray. For it to kill the caterpillars, it must be applied when they are eating the leaves. Btk is also available as an aerial spray for woodlots, but it is an expensive application.

Sticky traps are available to capture caterpillars. They are usually a natural gum mixture which you apply to a foam strip wrapped around the trunk.

Dormant oil and lime sulphur, if applied in late winter, will smother eggs before they hatch.

Healthy trees are more likely to survive insects and droughts. Water your trees during severe dry spells. Mulch trees to maintain soil moisture. Supply food, water, and shelter for birds and small animals because they eat insects, including caterpillars and moths. If you have a large tree in trouble, ask a certified arborist for advice and assistance. 🌱

“Autumn leaves don’t fall, they fly. They take their time and wander on this their only chance to soar.” - Delia Owens, author

Tip: Now is the time to plant garlic, if you haven’t done it already. Prepare the soil by adding plenty of compost. Break the bulb up into cloves. Plant the cloves 15 cm apart, putting each one at a depth 3 to 4 times the height of the clove. Cover with a thick layer of mulch .

Tip: Leave perennials with interesting seeds heads for winter interest and forage for birds. If cutting down, leave about 30 cm of stem to catch snow for additional winter protection.

Native Plant Profile: Goldenrods (*Solidago* species)

Gillian Boyd

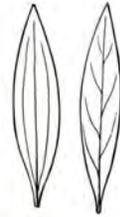
The goldenrods are a large plant family mostly native to North America and Mexico though a few native species occur in South America and Eurasia. They were introduced into Europe in the nineteenth century and prized as garden plants there long before being valued in North America. They still get a bad rap as the cause of itchy eyes and runny noses for those who suffer from seasonal allergies. In fact the real culprit is ragweed which flowers at much the same time and whose pollen is the true cause. The easiest way to avoid this irritant is to weed out any ragweed before it flowers.



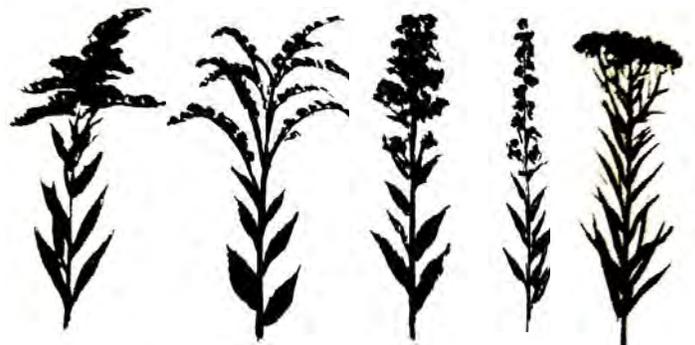
Ragweed (left), Goldenrod (right)

Gillian Boyd

Goldenrod species can be very hard to identify but dividing them into five types of flower and noting if the leaves have feather or parallel veins is a simple way of narrowing choices.



Flowers can consist of a single plume or have side branches as well; they can have an upright club-like shape or look more slender and wand-like. Finally they can be flat-topped.



I started out by growing Canada goldenrod (*S. canadensis*) but it never settled in or looked at home in my mixed wildflower and perennial garden so I moved it to a new home. I discovered the stiff goldenrod (*S. rigida*) as a garden plant while volunteering at an organic nursery when I asked the name of the spectacular yellow flower clump I didn't recognise. At the end of the season I was invited to choose a few of the plants on sale as a thank you and *S. rigida* was my first choice. I have had it ever since.

I found the slender goldenrod (*S. tenuifolia*) in a damp ditch south-east of Ottawa when looking for tough roadside plants. It was fragrant and also flat-topped and did so well in the garden that it became much too invasive and sadly had to go. The only other goldenrod I now grow is the zigzag goldenrod (*S. flexicaulis*). I had never heard of this species until I began working in the Fletcher Wildlife Garden and a volunteer brought it from their property in Quebec for the backyard garden-to-be. It grows well



Solidago rigida
Gillian Boyd



Solidago flexicaulis
Gillian Boyd

in shade and flowers September-October. The common name refers to the plant stem which adjusts its direction between leaf nodes instead of growing straight.

Goldenrod can be used in herbal medicine to reduce inflammation, as a diuretic and kidney tonic to counter bacterial infections or kidney stones and to stop muscle spasms. It can also be used for gout, joint pain and skin conditions, and historically, the leaves of goldenrod were chewed by some Indigenous peoples to relieve sore throats and the roots to ease toothaches. Young leaves are edible and flowers can make an attractive garnish.

After the famous Boston Tea Party in 1773 when colonists rebelled against the tea tax imposed by the British and dumped the imported tea chests into the harbour, they searched for substitute local plants and goldenrod became one of the so-called “liberty tea” substitutes. Goldenrod tea is made by steeping 1 or 2 teaspoons of the dried leaves in boiling water for 5-10 minutes and then straining.

About a hundred years later, the inventor Thomas Edison tried experimenting with goldenrod leaves as a rubber source. They had been found to contain some natural latex and his friend Henry Ford actually gave him a Model T with goldenrod rubber tires. Unfortunately, the quality of the rubber wasn't good enough for it to become commercially viable.

Goldenrods are very easy to please and grow in all sorts of conditions. They bloom in the late summer and fall and are very attractive to pollinators when there are fewer flowering plants available. In order to create a reliable source of pollen and permanent home for the many species of bees, flies, wasps and other pollinators, we need to provide flowering plants from April thaw to the first frost and goldenrods help extend the season.

Whether they are considered weeds, wildflowers or treasured garden plants, goldenrods make an invaluable contribution to pollinator gardens and are top of the list for biodiversity. 🌱

Fallen Leaves: Some Collective Wisdom

Julianne Labreche



Maple leaves
Julianne Labreche

It's that time of year when leaves start to fall, causing homeowners to heave a collective groan and pull out their rakes and leaf bags. Many people just bag their leaves for curbside pickup. What do Master Gardeners do with leaves? I decided to ask them.

It turns out that leaves are pure gold for many gardeners because they are full of nutrients that break down and enrich the soil. Here are some replies:

"I leave most of my fall leaves on the garden beds until late winter or early spring. Then I collect them all (now semi-decomposed) and put as many as I can onto the compost pile so they can finish de-

composing." - *Rebecca Last*

"I trench leaves into vegetable plots late in the fall. Others, I leave between perennials and shrubs. Some, I leave close to the composter for layering with kitchen wastes." - *Edythe Falconer*

"Leaves are definitely a "project" at the cottage. I used to rake and pile them up for compost, but when weather permits (i.e. when the leaves are dry), I now just mulch them with a lawn mower right over the lawn area. For the flowerbeds, I leave them to decompose - free mulch! In the city, I have very little lawn, so I just let them decompose. By spring, it's amazing how most of it has been dealt with by micro / macro organisms. Nature at work!" - *Claire Leduc*

"After two years of saving dampened leaves to rot down in plastic bags, they are partially rotted and usable as a soil medium. If forgotten for five years as happened to a batch once, they turn into a perfect rich leaf mould than which there is nothing better. If forgotten for five years, as happened to a batch once, they turn into a perfect rich leaf mould. There is nothing better. I never had enough of either kind, even when I used to collect large numbers of neighbours' leaf bags or now when an obliging neighbour brings me all the leaves from his eight mature sugar maples." - *Gillian Boyd*

"The smaller leaves from the crabapple tree I mow over then rake around the base of nearby shrubs. With the growing piles of maple leaves from my neighbours I'm planning to get more intentional this year: chop with the lawnmower then overwinter in a back corner and spread as garden mulch in the spring." - *Mary Crawford*

"The leaves that fall onto the grass are left there for the mulching mower to deal with. They may need a second mower mulching if there are a lot of leaves in one spot. Leaves that fall in the flower bed are

left for the winter and in the spring we collect and compost any excess dry leaves.” - *Gail Labrosse*

“I leave the fall leaves where they fall (that’s the start of a tongue twister.). Seriously, if the leaves have been formed from the nutrients in my soil, I’m going to make sure that organic matter and nutrients go back into my soil. So I let them to decompose where they fall. The ones on the lawn get chopped up by the lawnmower and the worms pull them into the soil. The leaves on the flower beds make great mulch. Just remember, no one runs through the forest clearing the leaves off the plants and they emerge just fine.” - *Mary Ann Van Berlo*



Before: Leaves left to decompose naturally in the fall garden

Mary Ann Van Berlo



After: The same garden next summer

Mary Ann Van Berlo

“I collect mine (plus those from several other houses in my neighbourhood), chop them up with my leaf vacuum, and store them in garbage cans at the side of my shed until the following season when I use them to mulch my raised vegetable beds and large planters and to get my compost bin started for the year.” - *Gayle Quick*

“I don’t have many useful ones, as the maple leaves that blow in have black spot, and I put those out in the yard waste. However, I do scrounge clean birch and other leaves, and pile them in a corner of the compost area to make leaf mould. They must be kept wet, according to Monty Don, and I think turning them now and then is probably helpful. I plan to use it in the garden eventually as mulch/compost.” - *Josie Pazdzior*

“I leave my leaves. On the lawn, they are cut up when I mow. On the beds, they join the general detritus (I practice messy gardening). When I mulch the beds, I do so over the leaves. So far, so good.” - *Susan Bicket*

“Ash, birch and maple leaves fell in time to be mulched by the lawn mower so they stayed where they were. But an oak tree somewhere in the neighbourhood held on to its dead leaves well into winter—long after the mower had been retired for the season. In spring the melting snow revealed lots of clearly identifiable brown oak leaves that showed little sign of breaking down. Apparently the extra tannins in oak leaves makes them hang on to the tree longer and decompose more slowly. Since it was too early to get the mower out, I raked them up and put them in the yard waste for pick up by the city.” - *Kelly Noel*

“I protect tender or newly planted roses by placing four bamboo stakes in the ground, wrapped in a white winter blanket and stuffed with fallen leaves. I also like to save a few leaves to use for decorating. Colourful sumac and maple leaves and branches, for instance, along with other fall items such as pumpkins and gourds, adorn my front door step for several weeks in the fall. I also dry or press some to enjoy indoors and on my Thanksgiving table.” - *Stephanie Sleeth* ♻️

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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: *Hylotelephium spectabile* syn *Sedum spectabile*. Unknown variety, Susan Bicket



Clinics

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



Talks and Events

We are doing some talks for Garden Clubs and Horticultural Societies using Zoom or other virtual meeting software. Attendance is by invitation from the host organization. We are planning to offer our own series of virtual presentations in the new year. We very much hope that we are able to resume in-person clinics at farmers' markets next season.

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