

Cross Pollination

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



March
2021

March 'Garden To Do' List

- ❑ **General Pruning** - Use clean, sharp tools. Remove dead, damaged, diseased wood. Cut back branches to just above another branch or a bud. Do NOT prune spring flowering shrubs until after they bloom.
- ❑ **Evergreens** - Prune for health, and to shape only if needed. **Arbovitae, junipers and chamaecyparis** will not form new buds on old wood. How to prune here. Learn how to prune and remove multiple leaders and encourage growth of firs, **Douglas firs, spruce here!**
- ❑ **Hydrangea arborescens** - (Smooth Hydrangea or 'Annabelle') Prune before new growth appears. Remove old weak stems, leaving about 1/3 of stems 30 cm long for structure and support. More info here.
- ❑ **Apple, cherry, plum, pear trees** - Prune before flower buds swell. Remove any dead, diseased twigs and prune for open shape. Pear trees generally don't require pruning, except for shaping.
- ❑ **Raspberries** - prune your summer-bearing raspberries, cutting last year's fruiting canes down to about 10 cm. Leave the young canes to bear a crop this July.
- ❑ **Blueberries** - Early March, prune out dead, damaged, diseased wood to an open shape to increase air circulation. More info here about blueberries.
- ❑ **Houseplants** - Increase water and feeding as plants start actively growing.
- ❑ **Amaryllis** - After the flowers have faded, cut the flower stalk to within 1" of the top of the bulb. Give plants a maximum of sun and feeding to produce a large healthy bulb & flowers for next year.
- ❑ **Start seeds indoors** for broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower etc.
- ❑ **Bird houses** - Clean and repair bird houses for spring nesters
- ❑ **Read** - The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden
- ❑ **Watch** - Grow your own Lemon tree video
- ❑ **Garden Tools** - Get ready for spring! See page 7 of this newsletter.

This Titan Arum at the Gage Park Tropical Greenhouse is named "Kramer". Apparently it's quite common to name them. This species produces the largest inflorescence on Earth. When the flower is open it smells like rotting flesh. The flower produces its own heat to help spread the 'foul' odour- up to 35.5C! The massive underground corm (storage structure) can weigh 70 to 90 kg and fuels the rapid growth.



"Kramer"
at the Gage Park Tropical Greenhouse
in Hamilton
Photo: Isabel Belanger



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Wildlife in My Garden



March
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A fox finds a home in Liza's urban garden

Liza Drozdov -Halton Master Gardeners

Several years ago I was honoured to receive a plaque from the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF), recognizing my garden as a wildlife-friendly habitat. I'm very proud of that, and here's the best part: anyone can get one, and it's easy to do. Go to [The Canadian Wildlife Federation](https://www.cwf.ca/) to learn more and as well, visit the [Garden Habitat Certification Program](https://www.gardenhabitat.org/).

I have frequent visits from foxes, chipmunks and red squirrels, as well as the typical grey and black squirrels, raccoons, skunks and possums. Also, my garden is full of birds: hummingbirds, orioles, jays, cardinals, wrens, sparrows-as well as several red tailed hawks that swoop through, hunting for a meal.

Several toads are in residence and though I'd love to see some snakes I haven't been so fortunate-yet. Spring usually sees a few frogs in my pond, but they soon disappear after something gets into the pond at night, overturning plants, and splashing duckweed everywhere. The frogs vanish one by one and I've always blamed the raccoons-the prime suspect for all pond thefts-until I saw a mink slinking through the garden! A mink! It was thrilling-even more so because I don't live in the country. I live on a standard-sized, modest plot in a very urban and busy area in the GTA.

To make your garden more attractive to wildlife, you simply need to provide a few things: water, food and shelter. And, you need to ensure you don't use any toxic chemicals that will injure wildlife or the soil. This will help create a balanced ecosystem of plants, birds, mammals and insects-as well as organisms in the soil-that thrive together. The bonus is you get to enjoy the year-round visits from wildlife, which adds energy and joy to every garden.

You should plant a variety of **native** perennials, shrubs and trees to provide food and shelter for birds. These will also support pollinators and insects that need specific native host plants to survive and successfully reproduce, but you'll also increase habitat for migratory birds-many of which are vulnerable or at risk.



Canadian Wildlife Federation plaque

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Wildlife in My Garden - Continued

By Liza Drozdov

I feed birds year-round, though many people prefer not to feed in summer. If you plant a variety of shrubs that have seeds and fruit like serviceberry, elder, & viburnum, birds will happily feast on those. And if you plant perennials like Rudbeckia and Asclepias spp., you will be providing a buffet for wildlife.



Visitors to the author's garden.

Ideally you will provide a source of water, especially in the winter. All animals need water year round and while we may think to feed birds, we often forget their water needs. I have a pond that I keep open with a small floating heater, as well as a heated birdbath.

Basically, a wildlife garden asks you to do less, not more. Less clean up. Less maintenance. Less lawn. Don't cut perennials stems down in autumn. That will allow birds to eat seeds, and insects to hibernate in dry stems. Also, birds and small mammals will need to gather leaves and plant fibers to build their nests in spring. If you can't resist tidying then wait until after frost to cut everything down and leave the stems on the ground or piled in a hidden corner of your garden until spring, until after insects have emerged.

Hang on to your leaves and branches-don't put them out to the curb. Instead, pile them behind shrubs or behind a shed, to allow insects, amphibians or small mammals to have shelter, especially over the winter. Since brush and leaves aren't food waste there's no worry your piles will attract vermin, and they won't be an eyesore if tucked behind plantings.

Some people fear that wildlife gardens will look messy or that they will attract vermin, which isn't true. If you walked past my garden I doubt very much you'd dismiss it as 'messy'. It's full of blossom and fragrance, from both native and exotic plants and it's beautiful. I also have the benefit of frequent visits from local foxes and chipmunks, as well as dozens of bird species, butterflies and moths.

Of course I hear a lot about 'nuisance' animals, like raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, skunks and possums. They definitely visit my garden but whether they are in fact a problem is all a matter of perspective. Nocturnal mammals, like skunks, possums and raccoons, dig through the garden looking for slugs and beetles. Yes, they can make a mess, but it's only as big a deal as you make it. And they are beneficial- despite several recent bad years for Japanese Beetles, I never saw one in my garden. I have dozens of hosta plants and never have slug damage because the skunks, birds and chipmunks eat them all!



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Wildlife in My Garden - Continued

By Liza Drozdov

Sure, squirrels will dig everywhere—either looking for food or burying things randomly. But since I've been providing peanuts they aren't eating my plants. In fact, they're getting fat—which makes them easy prey for my fox friends who visit. Nature...it does balance out.

My dream is to have the garden full of foliage, fruit and blossom, but also to be humming with insect and pollinator life. Having all those insects in the garden encourages other creatures to visit, looking for food. Insects will feed on plants, and birds and mammals will feed on the insects. And, occasionally a larger mammal might come hunting. Everything in the garden is interdependent. It's a balance, just as everything is on Earth.



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Sidebar Possums

Many people think they are pests, but they are wonderful guests to have visit your garden. An adult possum will eat up to 5,000 ticks a year, and they also eat roaches, rats, mice and carrion. They are the garden clean up crew. They are the only marsupial native to North America, which has to count for something! Look at the poor mama carrying around her kids—if that doesn't soften your heart toward opossums...



Possum Fun Facts



•When they sense danger, possums play dead by flopping down with their tongue sticking out and mouth agape. They have no control over how long this will last as it's triggered by an involuntary reaction due to stress. They also secrete a smelly substance from their anus to make them smell like a corpse!

- They almost never get rabies.
- They slow the spread of Lyme disease by eating ticks.
- They have impressive memories for remembering where to find food (better than rats, cats, dogs and pigs).
- They can recall the smell of toxic substances up to a year after trying them.
- Females have two vaginal tracts and two uteri, and males have a forked penis.
- Read more about possums [here!](#)



Watch this great [possum video!](#)

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Our Native Conifers: Part 2 Pine and Spruce and Fir Oh My!

Allyn Walsh Halton MG



March
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As winter ends, we complete our two-part series on our native conifers. Part 1 [Dec/Jan Newsletter](#) reviewed some members of the *Pinaceae* family. This month in Part 2 we will examine *Thuja*, *Juniperus* and *Taxus* (cedar, juniper and yew) as well as looking at a near native *Chamaecyparis* variety. You will see there are some interesting contradictions in our common names (in brackets) for these species! This likely relates to confusion between botanical classifications of Family and Genus. So first a quick review: The Family *Cupressaceae* (cypress) contains 33 Genera, including *Thuja* (cedar), *Juniperus* (juniper), *Chamaecyparis* (false cypress) and *Cupressus* (cypress). We won't be discussing the latter as there are no natives or near-natives to our region. Instead, a member of the *Taxaceae* family, *Taxus* (yew) is our last conifer in the series. All set? Let's go!

Thuja (cedar)

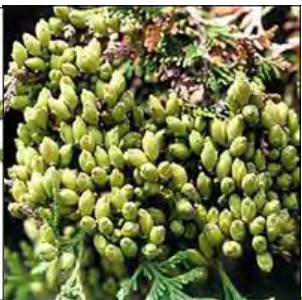
Leaves: Small scaley leaves covering fan shaped twigs.

Cones: Growing in clumps, they are small green buds (7-12 mm), looking like brown flowers when open.

Shape: Tends to be pyramidal. Overall slow growing, hence small size is common.

Cultivation: Prefers moist - even swampy - soil. Tolerates some shade. Very salt intolerant.

Native species: *Thuja occidentalis* (eastern white cedar). Yes, the botanical names suggests "west" but the common name includes "east". Maybe that is why this is also called northern white cedar! Garden centres often stock black cedar, which is *Thuja occidentalis* 'Nigra', a cultivar. Instead of 'cedar', some growers use the term 'arborvitae'. It's all the same plant. Everybody confused now?!



Thuja occidentalis (L)



Juniperus virginiana (R)

Thuja and *Juniperus* have similar flat scaley leaves, but the *Juniperus* is prickly to touch. The cones are also quite different in colour.

Photos L-R: USDA Database, & Ontario Tree Atlas: Daniel Tigner, Robert Videki, Paul Wray

Juniperus (juniper)

Leaves: Bluish green, needle-like in young branches and scale-like leaves when mature. Prickly to handle.

Cones: Small round and blue-grey, berry-like appearance. Excellent food source for native birds and animals.

Shape: Pyramidal, similar shape to cedar.

Cultivation: Tolerates dry conditions, poor soil and salt, but intolerant of shade.

Native species: *Juniperus virginiana* (eastern red cedar). Yes, it is a juniper, not a cedar!

Cont'd on next page.

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Our Native Conifers Part 2 cont'd

MG Allyn Walsh

Chamaecyparis (false cypress)

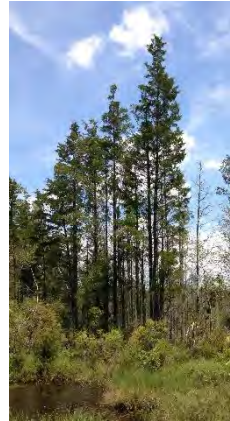
Leaves: Small, scale-like

Cones: Small round, brown

Shape: Horizontal short branches in flattened sprays. Narrow conical tree - used as masts in the past.

Cultivation: Rich acidic soil in very moist to swampy areas. Full sun is best

Native species: None! The closest is *Chamaecyparis thyroides*, native to the Atlantic coast, not to our area. It is commonly known as Atlantic cedar and Atlantic white cypress. Sigh - it's not a cedar! Other *Chamaecyparis* specimens are sold extensively in our area and usually are bred from Asian stock.



Chamaecyparis thyroides needles & cones (R). Thin, fibrous bark (C). Tall & straight, used for ships' masts in the past (R)

Photos: Wikipedia media (L), Unknown Author (C,R) is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

Taxus (yew)

Leaves: Single needles, pale green underneath, dark green to yellow-green on top.

Cones: Cup-shaped, berry-like aril exposing a single (toxic to humans!) seed at the top

Shape: Shrub, growing to 2 m.

Cultivation: Shade tolerant understory plant, prefers moist cool soil.

Native species: *Taxus canadensis* (Canada yew or ground hemlock). Oh dear, it's not a hemlock at all, although the needles are of similar flat shape.



Canadian yew needles are 1-2 cm long. Note red arils surrounding a single seed. The light green underside helps differentiate yew from hemlock needles. Note the short shrubby shape.

Photos L to R: Pixabay (L), Wikipedia (C), conifers.org (L)



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Learn more! These websites have great information and photos

[Ontario Tree Atlas](#)

[Guelph Arboretum](#)

[American Conifer Society](#)

[Identifying conifers](#)

[Ontario Trees](#)



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Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



Off to a Good Start: getting tools ready for the season

By MG Allyn Walsh



**March
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At this time of year, we are all dreaming about our gardens: the blooms, the pollinators, the scents and the sounds. Few of us are visualizing the tools in our sheds and basement and looking forward to getting them in top shape for the season. However, for the healthiest garden as well as the most beautiful one possible, now is the time to take stock of our tools and ensure they are ready for the hard use they receive.

Shine 'em up!

Well, perhaps that is an exaggeration! Certainly the shininess is long gone from my secateurs, spades, and hoes. In an ideal world, we would all have attended to regular tool cleaning, particularly when storing them in the fall. In that case, all the cleaning needed now is a quick wipe with disinfectant. For those of us who last used tools in a miserable cold damp fall day, it is possible that there may be more than a hint of dried soil and garden debris stuck to the blades. Get out the hose and a scrub brush (wire ones are great) and clean them well prior to disinfecting them.



At the time of writing, disinfectant solutions have become easier to come by, including the commonly recommended isopropyl alcohol and disinfectant prepared wipes or spray such as Lysol. The advantage of a 70% alcohol solution is that the solution is stable and doesn't corrode metal tools. It can be wiped on with a clean cloth without soaking required. Household bleach is quite inexpensive and is also commonly recommended. Preparing a batch of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water is easy and inexpensive (note that this is considerably stronger than the formula we have been using to disinfect our houses during the COVID emergency). Unfortunately, bleach can cause corrosion and tools must be well rinsed after a 30-minute soak. Worse, the solution can't be stored for future use since it degrades rapidly and must be prepared freshly. It is however VERY effective at eliminating pathogens clinging to our tools thus avoiding spreading disease from one plant to another.

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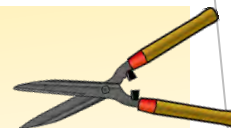
Off to a Good Start: getting tools ready for the season cont'd

Lookin' sharp!

We all have our favourite tools and the hard use we put them to means that they must be sharpened certainly at the start of every season and likely more often. Dull blades and badly mended tools may allow disease entry and damage to both plants and gardener! The ease of using sharp tools compared to those which have been allowed to become dull is nothing short of astounding. Many gardeners are intimidated when it comes to sharpening tools and are concerned they may do more harm than good to their tool. In fact, it is quite easy, as many online videos demonstrate. A metal file or sharpening stone slid along the edges of the blade angled according to the bevel will quickly sharpen the blade. It is possible to purchase sharpening tools designed to make this job even easier and there are usually videos to accompany them. Examples include the [AccuSharp](#) and [Speedy Sharp](#) tools. Generally, shovels, spades and hoes benefit from sharpening using a hand file. Most of us have appropriate files or whetstone lurking in the workshop already.



This video shows how easy tool sharpening is: [How to sharpen tools](#)
This one demonstrates how to easily restore a pair of garden shears which are in even worse shape than the pair I inherited from my father. Maybe I'll give it a try after all. [Restoring garden shears](#)



Maintain, maintain, maintain

Make the regular cleaning and disinfecting easy and convenient, and you are much more likely to do it after each use. The garden hose is a standby for rinsing tools after using, but also keep a clean rag and brush near to hand to facilitate thorough cleaning and prevent rust. A spray bottle of disinfectant will ease a quick wipe down after each use. A look at the internet demonstrates that there are diverse opinions about how to keep garden tools oiled. It is not uncommon to recommend pushing tools in and out of a bucket of sand with motor oil added to it. The organic gardener shudders at the thought. Alternatives include using a spray of cooking oil or application of boiled linseed oil. Silicone spray is also suggested. Household oil in small amounts can be dropped into the mechanism of secateurs or shears. Wooden handles can benefit from beeswax or linseed oil. When tool parts start becoming loose, tighten them before damage occurs, either to the tool - or to the user. Finally, store tools safely and appropriately. They should be put away clean and dry, to prevent rusting and hung up to avoid damage.



Further reading

[Tool maintenance review from Fine Gardening](#)
[Excellent review from U. Wisconsin](#)



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NATIVE BEES OF ONTARIO - Eastern Carpenter Bee, *Xylocopa virginica* by Halton MG, Hariette Henry

Native carpenter bees are so named because fertilized females bore into wood, excavating tunnels in which to lay eggs. Carpenter bees resemble bumble bees as they are similar in size and have a similar heavy appearance. Their main difference is that carpenter bees have a shiny hairless abdomen and bumble bees are quite hairy.

The eastern carpenter bee, *Xylocopa virginica*, can nest either solitarily or in small groups, usually with daughters. In southern Ontario, near the northern edge of the range of this species, most nests are social, containing groups of two to five adult females. Although social nests are much more frequent than solitary ones with this species, they produce no more brood, so per capita brood productivity is actually lower for social females.



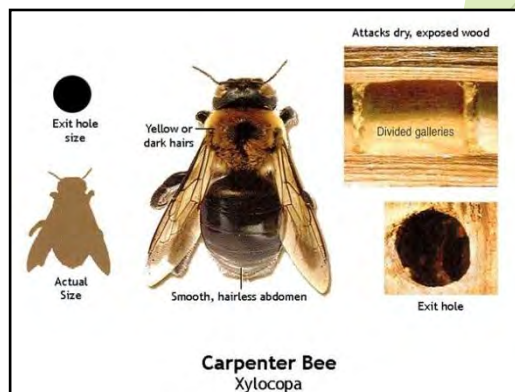
Eastern carpenter bee, *Xylocopa virginica*,
Donna K Race, bugguide.net



Carpenter bee with shiny abdomen (left), bumblebee (right)
Image: M.F.Potter, <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef611>

Adult carpenter bees overwinter individually and emerge in spring to mate. Soon after, the fertilized females begin their tunnelling and after boring a short distance the bee makes a right turn and continues to tunnel parallel to the wood surface. Inside the tunnel five or six cells are constructed for housing individual eggs. The female bee provisions each cell with pollen and a single egg, sealing each chamber with regurgitated wood pulp. Hatching and maturation occurs over several weeks, with the pollen serving as a food source for developing larvae. Later in the summer the new generation of adult bees emerge and forage on flowers returning to wood in the fall for hibernation.

Carpenter bees prefer un-painted, weathered wood to excavate, especially softer varieties like redwood, cedar, cypress and pine. Painted or pressure-treated wood is much less susceptible to attack. The perfectly round, nickel-sized holes that mark the entrance to their tunnels can be found in eaves, rafters, fascia boards, siding, wooden shake roofs, decks and outdoor furniture.



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NATIVE BEES OF ONTARIO - Eastern Carpenter Bee, *Xylocopa virginica*



Though not as destructive as termites, carpenter bees can cause damage especially when the same pieces of wood are infested year after year. Holes in the wood surface also facilitate moisture intrusion, rot and decay. The best time to control for carpenter bees is before tunnels are fully constructed in spring.

Note complex gallery of cells excavated by carpenter bees
Image: US Forest Service

The carpenter bees' natural predators are badgers, mantises, predatory flies, and some birds such as shrikes and woodpeckers. Woodpeckers unfortunately add to the damage caused by carpenter bees by drilling into the wood beside their nests to get at the larvae.



Keep Calm and Garden On



These insects are important pollinators of native plants, gardens and even some crops. Males have no stingers and females only sting when really provoked. Consider deterrents before taking more extreme measures.
(see next page for details.)



Male eastern carpenter bees have white faces.
Like other male bees, they are incapable of stinging.

Image: nature.mo.udc.gov



Image: Gardening Humour FB Group



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NATIVE BEES OF ONTARIO - Eastern Carpenter Bee, *Xylocopa virginica*

The following are a few preventive measures that homeowners can take to make their homes less attractive as nesting sites:

- Ongoing maintenance including painting or varnishing exposed wood surfaces should afford some protection
- Filling cracks, nail holes and splinters in wooden surfaces is recommended as existing damage provides an appealing place to start a nest
- Decoy wasp nests are available for purchase or you can make your own, as carpenter bees will avoid nesting near wasps (So the theory goes...I couldn't find any evidence that they work)
- Bee hotels are usually provided as nesting sites for mason bees however these structures may provide alternate sites for female carpenter bees looking to nest
- Citrus oils, a repellent that can be purchased at local retailers may deter them as they don't like the smell, but re-application is necessary on a regular basis
- **Beware of bee & wasp traps:** In 2017 Loblaw's pulled a wasp trap from its shelves after a homeowner complained and posted photos on social media that showed the product also trapped small birds.



You can also establish a place for carpenter bees to nest (other than your home) by drilling some holes into (but not all the way through) a block of wood or a log.

Image: forestparkforever.org

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Additional Reading

- Conservation Halton, [Help Native Bees](#)
- Seeds of Diversity, [Pollinator profile](#)
- Wild Pollinator Partners, [An Introduction to our Native Bees](#)

BEES
PREPARING
FOR THE
MURDER
HORNETS



Cross Pollination

“What’s Growing On”

Halton Master Gardener Meetings continue to be held **virtually** until further notice. We are still accepting new members! Our next meeting will be Wednesday, March 3rd. Interested? Email us! We are still answering your garden questions, so send us an email! It’s what we do best! HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com

Gardening Events are Virtually Everywhere!

SEEDY SATURDAY EVENTS



MILTON & DISTRICT HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY SEEDY SATURDAY

MARCH 27, 2021

• [Free Registration](#)



Haldimand Horticultural Society

- Online: seedysaturdayhaldimand.com
- Saturday, March 20, 2021 at 9 AM EDT
- Price: Free



Streaming Videos for You!



- [A Virtual Wildflower Walk with Alonso Abugattas](#)
- [Grow Native Master Class: Native Alternatives](#) with James Faupel
- [No Dig Potatoes from seed to harvest](#) with [Charles Dowding](#)
- [Garden Invader - Periwinkle](#)

Don’t forget! We are still answering your garden questions!

Contact us at

HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com

And we have lots more information on our website at haltonmastergardeners.com



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