Cross Pollination

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners

June Garden To Do List

- ❑ **Spring Bulbs -** Cut spent flower stems of tulips/daffodils etc & allow leaves to grow, returning energy to the bulb. Lift, divide & replant spring bulbs if flowers were absent or very small or bulbs became too crowded.
- ❑ **Direct sow** warm season veggies like corn, beans, cukes and squash & flowering annuals like nasturtium, cosmos.
- ❑ **Veggies -** Stake or cage vegetables like tomatoes and beans as needed. Mound potatoes to maximize production & protect tubers from sun exposure.
- ❑ **Houseplants** - Gradually bring outside for a 'holiday' to a shady protected area, then move to suitable sun or shade location as needed.
- ❑ **Compost**- Use compost to mulch garden beds and trees. Turn your compost pile and water if dry. Read more about composting at this link.
- ❑ **Lawn** – Feed soil with fine compost or organic fertilizer. Mow high-3"/7.5 cm. Pull weeds on a weekly basis. For more information on healthy lawns see this link.
- ❑ **Perennials -** Stake & support tall plants, e.g. Ironweed, peonies, delphiniums.
- ❑ **Prune** spring flowering shrubs after they have bloomed as necessary. Overgrown shrubs may benefit from rejuvenation.
- ❑ **Roses** - Prune laterals of climbing roses to 6-8" after blooming to keep them flowering. Here's a great video on how to do it!
- ❑ **Water** - newly planted trees & plants regularly; lawn & existing trees less frequently, but deeply. Potted plants will need more frequent watering. Use soaker hoses for water wise gardening.
- ❑ Invasive watch – Inspect your garden for Garlic mustard, Star of Bethlehem & *Epipactis helleborine*. Goutweed, periwinkle and *Common Buckthorn* are **Category 1 Invasive Plants** and should be removed from gardens. Read the Grow Me Instead booklet for suggestions of alternate plants.

The stunning flowers of Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*). Photo: Janet Mackey

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- ❑ **Squash bugs** –all you need is duct tape & this cool video!
- ❑ **Aphids** –plant dill, fennel, parsley, Wild Bergamot, Bachelor Buttons or Alyssum near problem plants to attract hover flies which are basically aphid assassins!
- ❑ **Japanese Beetles -** appear in June. Take necessary steps for control: hand pick, knock into a bucket of soapy water, or use a hand vacuum to suck them up!
- ❑ **LDD (*Lymantria dispar dispar)* Moth** (formerly referred to as Gypsy Moth) - Wrap tree trunks with burlap bands to trap the older LDD moth caterpillar as it treks from the canopy to hiding places on the ground. Remove trapped caterpillars daily. Watch this cool video to see how it's done!
- ❑ **Remember** that not all 'bugs' are pests. Most bugs eat other bugs & birds need insects to **feed their young**. Many plants can survive minor infestations of insects, so avoid reaching for sprays which kill the beneficial insects that keep your garden in balance

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My Mysterious Tale of Woe

By Allyn Walsh, Halton Master Gardeners

I suspect that all of us stroll through our gardens with our inspector's eye searching for possible problems. Last summer it happened to me - it was my climbing hydrangeas (*Hydrangea petiolaris*), of which I have four. Some of the branches were dying, and on other branches the leaves looked stunted. Three of the plants are located on the north side of a fence between our house and the one next door. This side area receives little sun – at most 2 up to 3 hours a day. The ground was moist from rain water running off the walks beside both houses. Not every plant was equally affected – the one with the least sun was clearly suffering the most. The plants had been in place for 4 years and were growing nicely, covering the fence and and flowering. But not this year – there were no flowers at all. What could be wrong?

I searched through my gardener's guides and Dr. Google's reliable plant websites. "Climbing hydrangea are hardy and largely disease free". Hmm. "If there are problems, it may be the growing conditions". Aha! I knew these plants were in a tough site, with little sun and in a narrow 3 feet of soil between pavement and houses. Dutifully, I began watering the soil, added more leaf mulch to that which was there from the fall before. I couldn't do anything about the light conditions, but I purchased some all-purpose artificial fertilizer and spread it according to directions.

I removed the dying branches and the worst of the stunted ones and wondered if I should cut the plants to the ground and try again.
And then, one day as I was inspecting my poor sad plants I saw that some of the leaves had notches along the edges. Finally a more specific clue! I searched the internet again, this time for "notches on climbing hydrangea leaves". Bingo! I had an infestation of **black vine weevil!**

The early stages of damage – it got much worse!

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My Mysterious Tale of (Weevil) Woe - Continued

By MG Allyn Walsh

The black vine weevil, *Oriorhynchus sulcatus* is native to Europe and was probably originally imported on balled plant stock. With no natural predators here, it feeds on many ornamental plants and is particularly destructive to broad-leaved evergreens. It is often difficult to detect until the adults begin feeding on leaves at night. Because they drop to the ground with any disturbance, it is very difficult to detect these weevils in action. These insects feed on plant roots in their larval stage, which is when most of the damage is done. They may also girdle the lower stems, disrupting the plant's flow of nutrition.

Typical leaf damage, larva and adult weevil

The larvae become active feeders in May and June before pupating into adults. During the adult stage, the insects feed on leaves at night, making a characteristic C-shaped notch along the margin of the leaves. A second generation of larvae often hatches and begins feeding on roots in late summer and early fall. The notching of leaves is not harmful to plants, it is primarily just a cosmetic issue, however the root feeding can severely damage and even kill the plant. Since these weevils resemble other common weevils and because they hide in leaf litter during the day, they can be hard to identify. Mostly it is their characteristic damage that is the give-away.

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It was obvious that I had been doing all the wrong things – increasing soil moisture when both larvae and adults prefer moist soil. Adding organic material allowed the adults a cozy daytime spot. And using a granular all-purpose fertilizer which likely did no good although probably little harm…

Cultural management included allowing the soil to dry out between rains. All leaf litter and mulch was removed. Adults can be handpicked and destroyed in the spring. After nightfall plant parts can be shaken over a sheet and the dislodged weevils gathered and disposed of. I did not have good results, but it is worth a try.

Tanglefoot or other sticky material can be wrapped around the trunk to prevent adults from ascending. (This is hard to do with a climbing hydrangea!).

If neither the cultural nor mechanical/physical approaches work, it is possible to use a biologic one - beneficial nematodes, applied as a soil drench. Eventually, this is what I had to do. Conscious of the temperature and light sensitivity of nematodes, I followed the directions carefully. With a final application this spring, my plants are thriving once again!

TIPS FOR MYSTERIOUS PLANT WOES

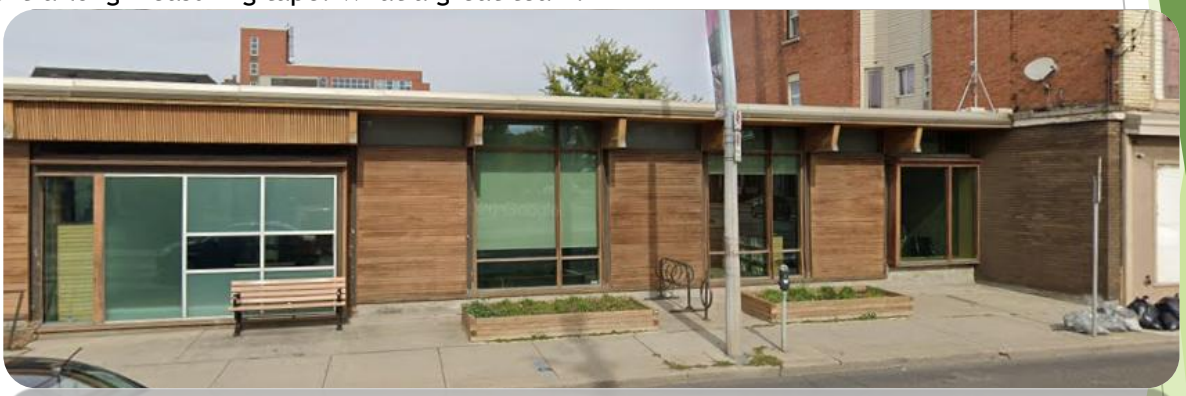
- **Identify the cause of the problem, don't give up**
- **Decide if you really need to do something about it or if you can leave it**
- **Start with the most ecologically friendly approaches**

Halton Master Gardener Library Site Consultation

By MGs Claudette Sims, Bev Wagar & Pam Macdonald

Halton MGs have been doing site consultations for home owners for a few years now. We were delighted to receive a request from a public library recently. They were seeking a designation as a Hamilton Pollinator Paradise and wanted ideas about plants for raised planters and possibly some other garden areas.

Our newly created and appointed "Coordinator of Public Requests" MGiT Pam MacDonald takes these requests from the public and finds MGs in our group to fill them. These visits allow us to continue supporting the gardening public, even during the pandemic. Her email was quickly answered by Claudette and MGiT Bev Wagar. We agreed to meet, socially distanced and masked, outside the library. This was the first time the three of us had worked together. Claudette brought garden gloves and a trowel to check the soil composition. Pam brought a measuring tape and had the whole area measured before we all arrived. Bev brought a backpack load of books and an extra-long measuring tape. What a great team!



The 2 raised planters contained uninspired plantings of non-native day lilies and some kind of grass which we suspected might have been Canada rye. The librarians proposed a third raised planter tucked against the wall to the right.

Our librarians had, not surprisingly, done some homework. Looking at their list of possible plants, we were thrilled to see that they were all native-- perfect for a pollinator garden. We went through the list and discussed plants that might work. Some like Blue Lobelia and Cardinal flower needed more moist conditions. We thought others like Wild Bergamot, Pearly Everlasting (American Lady caterpillar host), Butterfly Milkweed (Monarch host), Grey-Headed Coneflower, Golden Alexanders (Black Swallowtail host) and Anise Hyssop would work well. Asters, goldenrods and native sunflowers were also suggested because of their importance as "keystone plants". Dill and parsley, also host plants for Black Swallowtails, could be added to share with the community. What a great learning opportunity for local children to watch the green caterpillars grow! We suggested some grasses to bring the design together: Little Bluestem, Switchgrass and Tufted Hair Grass. We had to consider the soil (loose but shallow as the planters are built on the sidewalk), light conditions (the area faces south), viewing (what would the planter look like from inside the library) and watering (everything needs to be hand watered from a tap inside the library.) The librarians would be in charge of the maintenance, so creating something sustainable was important.

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Library Site Consultation - Continued

Pam followed up the meeting with **an email containing a summary of our discussion and** salt tolerant plants that she researched for possible future plantings in garden areas adjacent to sidewalks. As a new MG, this gave her a perfect opportunity to extend her knowledge. Claudette offered some Tufted Hair Grass and Liatris seedlings left over from last year's winter sowing. The librarians gratefully accepted all of this additional support.

Everyone had something positive to say about the experience!

New Master Gardener in Training Pam….

'Watching and listening to an MG in action is a great way to learn the ropes, and I was able to contribute by being the note taker and doing some research on a question raised by the clients-a great experience!'

Claudette on left with librarians Emily & Melissa and donated plants. Photo: Pam MacDonald

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Our librarian friends….

"We learned so much …. 'were blown away'… "and excited to get gardening in the next couple of weeks".

Claudette…

'Supporting this library move towards more ecologically productive plantings may encourage other public and commercial properties to make this important and necessary change. We hope these plantings also inspire local homeowners to see the beauty and life that native plants bring to a garden'.

How do librarians move plants? A library cart of course! ☺ This one filled with Pearly Everlasting, Butterfly weed, Joe Pye Weed, plus a gift to the community of 3 cherry tomato plants!

Bev…

'I was encouraged by the librarians' diligence championing this project. I hope they document the process and promote library gardens to their own professional networks. I'd love to see more of these projects happening next year.

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Meet our Master Gardeners

June 2021

Connie Booth, Master Gardener in Training has been doing volunteer work in her church's gardens since early summer of 2020. David Marshall, one of our most experienced Master Gardeners and Connie's mentor, has been advising Connie and the church's gardener (Peter Coffey) regarding reorganizing and rejuvenating the gardens. On Monday, May 3rd, David generously donated 83 perennial plants and shrubs for use in Connie's church gardens. This was greatly appreciated by all concerned!

Pictured left to right are David Marshall, Connie Booth and Peter Coffey.

David is the longest serving member in our Halton Master Gardener group, and will be earning his 30 year volunteer badge this year. Imagine all the knowledge that he has acquired in those years! You may remember David's excellent seed starting series in our 2019 newsletter and blog post. In a 2011 interview, David stated his worst gardening mistake was "moving plants around without being absolutely sure that there is no mint or lily of the valley hiding in the clump!" We are so lucky to have such wonderful members in our group.

Image: Reddit

Gardening Humour FB Group

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Native Bees of Ontario - Halictid Bees (Sweat Bees)

by MG Hariette Henry

Halictids, or sweat bees, are a large, diverse group of short-tongued bees that make up the family Halictidae. Within this family there are roughly one hundred and nine species within eight genera in eastern Canada. Most are abundantly present within our region. Halictids are often referred to as sweat bees due to their habit of landing on humans to obtain moisture and salts from perspiration. Other common names for sweat bees are furrow bees, nomiine bees or shortface bees.

Bicoloured Striped Sweat Bee, the black and bright-green colour pattern makes *Agapostemon virescens* the most easily identified bee species in Eastern Canada, not to mention that it is Toronto's Official Bee. Image: Wikimedia Commons

Most sweat bees are small, 1/4 - 3/4", and not aggressive. Halictid males are more slender than females. Females carry pollen on the tibia and femur of their hind legs, except for parasitic sweat bee species in the genus Sphecodes which do not carry pollen at all. These kleptoparasitic (Klepto- meaning stealing) halictids sneak into the nests of other (mostly halictid) species, eat the egg of the rightful owner, and lay their own egg on the food provided

Wood-nesting Sweat Bee, *Augochlora pura*. You'll find this bee anywhere that fallen trees are left to rot, such as ravines and clearings. Image: BugGuide.net

Most sweat bees are black or brown, but some, such as members of genus *Agapostemon* are easily recognized by their brightly coloured metallic greens and blues. Females of most *Apapostemon* species are bright green all over, whereas males have a bright coloured head and thorax with a yellow-and-black striped abdomen. Members of the genera *Augochlora, Augochlorella* and *Augochloropsis* are also bright, metallic, green in colour.

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Lasioglossum, is by far the most common genus of sweat bees throughout temperate and boreal Canada. With 71 species, Lasioglossum is the most socially diverse genus of bees, with many solitary, a few communal and many eusocial (living in a cooperative group in which usually one female and several males are reproductively active and the non-breeding individuals care for the young or protect and provide for the group) species known.

Most sweat bees are generalist pollinators, meaning they gather pollen and nectar from multiple plant species. There are however, a few oligolectic species (those that will only gather pollen and nectar from a single plant family). All halictids are mass provisioners, that is, the adults provision each cell with all the food a larva will need until it emerges as an adult.

An interesting fact about Halictids is that they are some of the smallest bees that can buzz-pollinate. In this process, the bee grabs the anther of the flower in its mandibles, curls its abdomen around the anther and vibrates its wing muscles, causing the anther to release its pollen.

Evening Primrose Sweat Bee, *Lasioglossum oenotherae*, is loaded with pollen! These bees are common in urban gardens because they collect pollen only from sundrops and evening primroses. Image: iNaturalist

The plight of Halictids as well as all wild bees should be a concern for us all. Fortunately homeowners can help native bees greatly in their own backyards. Plant diverse native flowers that will bloom throughout the season, especially early and late season when fewer pollen and nectar sources are available. Avoid pesticides and plants or seeds treated with neonicotinoids.

Sphecodes bee, *Sphecodes spp.*, is one of the species of kleptoparasitic bees. Getting eggs into a host nest is not always easy. Females often have to fight their way into the nests of social *Lasioglossum* bees and thus have developed a thick armour to protect themselves. Image: Wikimedia Commons

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"What's Growing On"

Halton Master Gardener Meetings are being held virtually until further notice.

We are still answering your garden questions, so send us an email! It's what we do best! HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com

CBC Radio Online Chats are Back!

Halton Master Gardeners Liza Drozdov, Patty King, Janet Mackey and Claudette Sims team up with Toronto Master Gardeners Tina Cesaroni & Tena van Andel along with Royal Botanical Garden experts Jon Peter & Alex Henderson to answer your garden questions. Watch our Halton Facebook page for instructions on how to ask a question.

Grab a cuppa & join us!
Every Monday in June from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

June 2021

Our very first Lunch & Learn Webinar Series

A Fresh Look at Gardening

was a great success!
Almost all of our 6 presentations were sold out.
Thank you to everyone who signed up and
stay tuned for our next project.

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