



Trowel Talk

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Earth Day 2021: April 22

Julianne Labreche

To gardeners and growers, Earth Day has special meaning. We know that respecting our planet means conserving soil, water and air. We also share a responsibility as gardeners to protect bird, insect and mammal species, especially those that are rare or endangered. That means providing habitat to keep them safe.

Every year, Earth Day is celebrated on **April 22**. This year is special because it is the fiftieth anniversary of this international event.

Here are some practical ways you can garden respectfully to protect the planet:

- Plant a native tree to attract birds and local pollinators.
- Leave the leaves to decompose naturally or rake them into a compost pile to use later as leaf mould, a rich addition to soil.
- Recycle any plastic pots that you purchase, or better yet, purchase containers that are biodegradable.
- Purchase more native shrubs and plants or grow them from seed. Native plants attract a variety of birds and insects, including native bees and butterflies.
- Set up rain barrels to reduce water consumption.

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



My mom's rhubarb batter pudding.
 See page 3 about growing and harvesting rhubarb
Nancy McDonald

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- Use rainwater in dry spells to water your plants.
- Compost your organic waste, on-site if possible. Coffee grounds and broken eggshells can be mixed directly into the soil.
- Set up a bird feeder or birdbath but clean it regularly to avoid contamination.
- Consider the necessary steps to certify your garden as wildlife-friendly through groups such as Monarch Watch or the Canadian Wildlife Federation.
- Let parts of your garden go 'wild'. Leave a dead tree (called a 'snag'), if it can be safely done. Decaying wood is beneficial for many bird species, including woodpeckers and chickadees. 🌿



Monarch butterfly on Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), a native plant
Julianne Labreche

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer helpline questions.

When can I divide hostas?

If you want the hostas to look nice for the rest of the season, the best time to divide them is in spring as soon as they start coming out of the ground, before the leaves open. This is also when they are easiest to divide. They will survive fine if you divide them later in the season, but you will likely have uneven, messy-looking hostas for the rest of the year. You could also divide them in October, and cut them back for the season at the same time. When dividing the hostas, you can either dig up the whole plant and cut or pull the root ball into pieces, or simply cut through the clump while it's in the ground and only dig up the pieces you want to remove. In both cases, make sure each division you replant has at least three buds/shoots.

I have a large group of lilacs reaching to the second storey of the house, and 30 feet wide. Where do I start to do a major pruning/rejuvenation of these shrubs?

You basically have two options to rejuvenate your lilacs. Ideally, the rejuvenation pruning should be done in early spring (April), before the lilacs really start growing.

Method A: Cut everything back to 15-20 cm tall.
Pros: It's straightforward to cut everything to the same height, and you will have lots of new shoots.
Cons: You will have a large hole in the landscape until it grows back, and you won't have flowers for a few years. Some spindly growth will probably have to be thinned out the next season.

Method B: Cut back about 1/3 of the major (oldest) stems to the ground each year.
Pros: You will still have a shrub mass there, and flowers every year.
Cons: It will take 3 years, and the shrubs will probably look a little uneven partway through the process.



Rhubarb: A Glorious Spring Vegetable

Nancy McDonald



Early rhubarb

Nancy McDonald

We take joy in harbingers of spring – first robin, buds swelling, early shoots and blooms appearing. For me, spring is truly here when I see those pink-toned rhubarb stalks appear. I even time cleaning the freezer to be ready for rhubarb harvest.

Rheum rhabarbarum is a vegetable, a member of the buckwheat family. In our kitchens, it is most often prepared in dessert recipes, like many fruits. This herbaceous perennial, a native to Central Asia, was first used medicinally. Scientists continued developing varieties with good taste and cooking qualities. By 1829, rhubarb appeared in American seed catalogues.

Rhubarb is a perennial that is easy to grow, relatively resistant to pests. It grows from fleshy roots (rhizomes) producing large, edible petioles (stalks). A mature plant can be 60-90 cm. tall and wide. While both the stalks and leaves contain oxalic acid, the amount in the leaves is much higher and could be toxic so leaves are not eaten. Rhubarb leaves can be safely added to home compost piles or placed at the base of the plant to act as mulch.

Rhubarb can be grown from seed but be aware it

will take extra time before harvest this way. If you only want one or two plants, then a crown or plant division is the easiest way to go. Many of us are fortunate to have friends with a shareable rhubarb patch. In the spring, you will also find plants for sale at garden centres and local garden sales.

It is best planted in the spring or fall. Choose a full sun or semi-shade location with rich soil conditions. Take care to avoid wet locations that could cause root rot. Plant the crowns no deeper than 5 cm. Water well after planting and be attentive to watering the first season to ensure root establishment. I add compost, working it in gently after planting. Rhubarb is a heavy feeder so it benefits from a yearly application of compost or aged manure. Adding fall leaves to the rhubarb patch utilizes this free organic matter. Mulching around the plants helps retain ground moisture and aids in weed control. Resist harvesting stalks until the second year to allow the roots to establish well.

Give your plant space to grow, allowing 90 cm between plants, and avoid planting near any competing shrub or tree roots. Rhubarbs are long-lived perennials and their massive roots make them difficult to move, so choose a permanent location for your rhubarb. It makes sense to add rhubarb to a perennial bed or in a dedicated bed rather than in a vegetable garden where annual digging occurs.

Stalks are ready for harvest when they are 25 – 40 cm long. Pull about two-thirds of the developed stalks. Leaving a third of the foliage ensures that the plant will continue to grow and produce during the summer. **And note** – I pull rather than cut. I support the base of the plant, go to the attached end and with a slight twist and pull, it is easily removed. I have read that pulling rather than cutting allows the plant to recover more quickly. Cut nubs of stalks are also a place for water to collect that may contribute to crown rot. In my garden, I harvest stalks periodically over 8-10 weeks. I have always removed flow-

er stalks but they can be dramatic in the garden and will do no harm to a well-established clump or patch. Just remove the stalk when it starts producing seeds. After several years of growth, your plant normally slows down production. This is an opportune time to rejuvenate your rhubarb by dividing the plant.

Some popular varieties of Rheum are 'Canada Red', 'Victoria' (stalks are red at base, green at top) and 'Valentine' with dark red stalks that stay red in the cooking process. I hope you are growing or will consider growing rhubarb. According to the National Day calendar, June 9th is national strawberry rhubarb pie day. Imagine the wonderful odours wafting from Ottawa kitchens if we all bake a pie that day! 🍓

Clematis: To Prune or Not to Prune

Dale Odorizzi,



Jackmanii Clematis

Dale Odorizzi,



Nelly Moser Clematis

Dale Odorizzi,

Few subjects in gardening are as confusing as the proper pruning of clematis. As Yogi Berra once said, “*you can observe a lot by just watching*”. The easiest way to determine the specific pruning needs of your clematis is to watch it grow through a season. It will not harm your plant to leave it unpruned for one season.

Group A — If a clematis blooms only in April and May, it belongs to Group A and flowers only on old wood (last season’s growth). To prune this group, remove any dead stems and weak growth as soon as flowering is finished. *Clematis alpina* and *C. macropetala* hybrids only grow to about two metres and should not be pruned heavily or next year’s flowers may be lost. *C. montana* and *C. armandii* grow so rampantly they may need to be cut back yearly to keep growth manageable.

Group B — If a clematis blooms in May and June and again in September, it belongs to Group B. This group have very large showy flowers on old wood in late spring and a smaller flush of flowers on the current season’s growth in late summer. A good example of this group is *C. ‘Nelly Moser’*. Remove dead and weak stems in early spring, just as the leaf buds begin to swell. The whole vine can be given a light pruning for shape at that time. Cut each stem separately, varying the lengths for a more natural look, rather than chopping all stems off to the same height.

Group C — If a clematis starts to flower in June or July and blooms almost nonstop through Septem-

ber, it belongs in Group C and flowers only on new wood. Their vines reach three metres tall. C. 'Jackmanii' is one widely grown variety. Prune this group hard every year to stimulate fresh new growth. This means cutting back each stem to two strong sets of leaf buds just as they begin to swell in early spring. On established vines, prune to within 60 cm of the ground. This hard pruning will guarantee flowers over the entire length of the vine. If a Group C clematis is not pruned hard, it will bloom but only on the current season's growth which will begin where last year's growth ended, leaving long bare stems. Late bloomers are usually classed with Group C for pruning. Most popular is C. tangutica, the hardy golden clematis with small yellow lantern-shaped flowers from July through September, fol-

lowed by attractive, fluffy seed heads. These too can be left unpruned to cover a fence or sprawl across the ground.

An overgrown or neglected clematis of any type can be invigorated by pruning hard, in early spring at any height you like if some leaf buds remain. New growth will appear quickly, thanks to the large, established root system of the vine. Flowers may not appear until next season if it is the type to bloom only on old wood.

Clematis vines can last for 15 to 20 years or longer. They like cool roots, so cover their roots with a thick mulch. With regular pruning these plants will provide beauty for years to come. 🌱

My Favourite Spring Edimentals

Rebecca Last

Edimentals are edible, usually perennial, ornamental plants, a term coined by Stephen Barstow. His website about edimental plants illustrates how many garden ornamentals are also edible.

Here are a few of my favourites:

Fiddlehead ferns (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) – You can pay a lot for fiddleheads at your local farmers market or grocery store. Many gardens have a stand of these graceful ferns in a shady corner, so why not use them? Pick when the fronds are just starting to emerge and still tightly curled. Wash carefully to remove any dirt and gently rub off the brownish papery coating. Boil or steam lightly and serve with butter, pepper and a dash of vinegar, preferably balsamic. Fiddleheads can also be stir-fried or sautéed, but only after first boiling or steaming.

Tradescantia or widow's tears (*Tradescantia virginiana*) – Harvest the young shoots of this native spring flower when they are 20-45 cm tall. The young leaves are supposedly edible, but they taste like grass to me. I use the base of each shoot. I

braise them like asparagus, or chop and eat them raw in a salad. The indigo-blue flowers are also nice in salads.



Tradescantia stems
Rebecca Last

Hostas (*Hosta* spp.) – Cover one-third of emerging spikes with a bucket or box to deprive them of sunlight. Harvest them a couple of weeks later and enjoy raw in a salad.

Never harvest more than one third of a perennial edimental in any season. You need to leave enough of the plant to regenerate. You should never eat anything unless you are sure of the proper plant identification. ♻️



Gardeners Beware: Creeping Jenny—*Lysimachia nummularia*

Gail Labrosse



Lysimachia nummularia 'Nayland'
Gillian Boyd

This invasive ground cover is a native to Eurasia but naturalized in Eastern North America. It is popular with gardeners for its ability to cover tricky slopes and damp areas. Creeping Jenny is an herbaceous perennial that thrives in a variety of light conditions, colonizes quickly, and smothers native vegetation in its path. It's not a plant you want to grow in your garden, especially if you are close to a natural area.

Creeping Jenny – or moneywort, as it is sometimes called – forms a thick, low growing carpet of small toothless, round leaves on long horizontal creeping stems. New roots will form at each leaf node that touches the ground. Creeping Jenny can be controlled by digging it out. Any plant fragments left in the soil will re-grow, so continue to check and remove new growth every few weeks until it is gone. This plant can be very persistent so keep pulling. Be sure to remove any flowers that develop before they go to seed.

Native alternatives to creeping Jenny:

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) – is a showy but ephemeral early spring bloomer that favours moist rich soils. Its bright white flowers are short-lived but benefit pollinators.

Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) – is a ground-cover for woodland gardens or shade. It has large, deeply lobed umbrella shaped leaves and early spring flowers that attract bumblebees.

Look for these and other native plants at specialized garden centres and plant sales. But remember, all groundcovers can be fast spreaders in the right growing conditions ♻️



Creeping Jenny 'Aurea'
Amanda Carrigan

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Helplines - are monitored daily
Send questions and photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for Identification.

Trowel Talk can be found on the [Lanark County Master Gardener's blogsite](#) and [Ottawa Carleton Master Gardener's Website](#)



Clinics

Closed



Talks and Events

For information on gardening in and around the Ottawa valley:
<https://gardeningcalendar.ca/>

Talks given by Master Gardeners for garden clubs and horticultural societies using Zoom or other virtual meeting software. If you wish to attend please contact the host organization. .

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.



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Banner Photograph: *Crocuses*, Susan Bicket.

Tuesday, April 20, 7:00 pm

Lesley Peace

Our Gardens and Climate Change

Master Gardener Lecture Series, [Friends of the Farm](#)

Wednesday, April 21, 12:00 pm—*French*

Claire McCaughey – Master Gardener

Les bases de Jardinage

[Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa](#)

Wednesday, April 21, 7 pm

Judith Cox

Hey! You! Over Here! – attracting pollinators to your garden.

[Kemptville Horticultural Society](#)

Tuesday, May 4, 7:00 pm
Candace Dressler and Rob Stuart
Colour Through the Seasons
Master Gardener Lecture Series, [Friends of the Farm](#)

Wednesday May 5. 12:00 pm
Rebecca Last -Master Gardener
Organic Gardening 101
[Ottawa Public Library](#)

Tuesday, May 11, 7 pm
Rebecca Last
**Waterwise Gardening – save water, save money,
save the environment.**
[Old Ottawa South Garden Club](#)

Wednesday May 12 12:00 pm—*French*
Odette McIntyre
Jardinage biologique 101
[Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa](#)

Trowel Talk Live

You are invited to
Learn over Lunch
with Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton.

When:

Tuesdays at 12:30 pm (Eastern)
from April 6 to November 2, 2021.

Each Zoom session will include a presentation on the topic of the week followed by Q&A – 25-30 minutes total.

Click [here](#) to register for these meetings – attend as many as you can.

Registrants will receive a confirmation email with the Zoom link and a weekly email reminder with upcoming topics. If you have questions on these topics, send them to mgoc.ttl@gmail.com. And remember, we are always happy to answer any gardening questions on our email helpline: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca.



April 20
Tropical Tubers
Candace Dressler

April 27
Cold weather crops
Odette McIntyre

May 4
Eat your Blooms!
Nancy McDonald

May 11
Perennial edibles
Rebecca Last