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Hello Aloe

Marion Runstedler

Every household should have an aloe vera plant. It is one of the easiest plants to grow and you have the bonus of having an immediate soothing remedy for minor cuts or burns.

Aloe vera (*Aloe barbadensis miller*) belongs to the Asphodelaceae family. It is a drought-tolerant, succulent, perennial plant which originated in Africa. It thrives in poor soil and is ideal for first-time plant owners or for those who tend to neglect plants. Coming from the tropical climates of Africa, this plant does need plenty of sunlight, minimal regular watering and warm temperatures. There are very few pests that bother it and diseases are rarely a problem.

The real magic of growing an aloe plant is contained in the gel within the leaves. It has medicinal properties that have been known and recorded since biblical times. Some of these properties include anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and antibiotic which have made it very popular around the world. Why not try to harvest part of this little wonder plant?

I transfer my Aloe vera to my outside garden in the late spring when all frost warnings have disappeared. It loves the acidic soil under my tall spruce trees in the backyard. Foraging squirrels do a little dance to avoid the sharp spikes on its "leaves". I

Contents

◆ Hello Aloe	1
◆ Ask a Master Gardener	2
◆ My Kingdom For a Clivia	3
◆ Gardener Beware: Bugleweed	5
◆ A Winter Garden for Birds	6
◆ Book Review: The Well-Gardened Mind	7
◆ Find us	9

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[Vegetable Growing Calendar](#)



Aloe vera in the garden, in the summer
Marion Runstedler

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am lucky enough to have offspring or “pups” growing next to the original plant. Every fall, I bring the entire plant indoors by digging it out and gently separating out a 5-8 cm tall “pup” or two. All plants are then put in separate well-drained pots and placed in my south-facing window.

I love having a piece of my garden inside. It makes the winter seem less dull and gives hope that spring will be here soon. 🌱



Aloe pup ready to be removed
Marion Runstedler



An aloe pup in sunny window in winter
Marion Runstedler

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer helpline questions .

How soon should I be starting seeds indoors for spring planting?

That will depend on the type of seeds you are planning to start. You may have to start things at different times. To determine when to plant indoors, you need to count backwards from when it is safe to plant the seedlings outdoors, taking into consideration how long they take to germinate and grow to a good transplant size. For example, peppers and eggplants can take 3 weeks to germinate and require a further 10-12 weeks to produce a good transplant. Tomatoes and squash germinate in 7-10 days. Tomatoes then need around 8-10 weeks growth, while squash can be as fast as 3-4 weeks.

Seed packets and seed catalogues will often tell you how long before the last frost date (mid-May in Ottawa) you should start things. This garden calendar can provide you with more information; you can enter your last frost date to get a chart on when to start different vegetables and annual flowers.

<https://awaytogarden.com/when-to-start-seeds-calculator/>

I have leftover seeds from other years. Are they still good?

Some types of seeds will last for several years, but not all. To see if your seeds are good, you can do a germination test. On a damp paper towel, place 10 seeds from your package. Fold the paper towel, place it in a plastic bag, and label it with the name of the seeds. Keep it in a warm place (at least 21° C). Check on it after a few days, then daily for 2 weeks (keeping the paper towel damp), and note how many seeds germinate. If most of them do, then your seeds are still good. If only a few sprout, you may want to get new seeds.

If handled carefully, your germinated seeds can be planted in small pots and grown on indoors until it is safe to plant them outside. 🌱

My Kingdom For a Clivia

Claire McCaughey



Clivia miniata flowers

Claire McCaughey



Clivia miniata var. *citrina*

Claire McCaughey

If you asked me to name my favourite houseplant, it would be Clivia (pronounced cly-vee-ah to rhyme with Clive). It is not widely available in Ottawa, although occasionally the plant pops up for sale in unlikely places like supermarkets.

A stellar houseplant from South Africa

Clivia originates in the Cape Floristic Kingdom at the Western tip of South Africa, the smallest of the six recognized floral kingdoms of the world. Back in the 1850s, British plant explorers named Clivia after Lady Charlotte Florentine Clive. She cultivated the plant in her conservatory near Kew, in London, England.

My attraction to Clivia began 20 years ago along with my burgeoning interest in all things gardening. At that time, Canadian gardeners had an interest in South African plants. Delosperma and Agapanthus were two that I wanted to grow as they were found to be hardy in our climate. A little research led me to [Silverhill Seeds in South Africa](#). I ordered Delosperma, Agapanthus as well as Clivia.

Growing Clivia

I started my Clivia plants from my Silverhills seed, growing two species – *Clivia miniata* ('Bush lily') and *Clivia miniata* var. *citrina*, a yellow-flowered variety of the orange-flowered *Clivia miniata*. The seeds were slow to germinate, but I ended up with a few larger plants of *C. miniata* and one of *C. miniata* var. *citrina*. My original, orange-flowered variety is still with me almost 20 years later. It has been divided many times, providing me with seeds that need to turn red before they are ripe enough to sow. I have shared Clivia divisions and seedlings with many friends and neighbours over the years. The plant can withstand cool night-time temperatures but is not frost hardy. Keeping the soil dry during an autumnal/winter resting period is necessary for it to flower. Good drainage is essential to prevent root rot. It does well with average houseplant soil.



Clivia miniata flowers and seed pods
Claire McCaughey

Beautiful in every season

There are so many reasons to love Clivia – tidy stacked strap-like leaves, orange trumpet flowers, red seed pods, and adaptability to be moved from indoors to outdoors in the summer. Clivia is in the Amaryllidaceae family, and is a bulbous plant rather than a bulb. Its thick tuberous roots are a challenge to divide, involving the use of spades, a sharp knife, and a lot of muscle. My plant often flowers twice a year – first indoors in late winter when I start giving more water, then again a few months later after it has been outside for a while.

While it is difficult to go out and look for this plant during the pandemic, this is a good time for more research and finding potential sources of plants and seeds. It is a very desirable plant. If you ever see it for sale, grab it. You will not be disappointed! 🌿



Clivia miniata ready to divide
Claire McCaughey



Clivia miniata lining footpath in Pretoria National Botanical Gardens, South Africa
Susan Bicket



Gardener Beware: Bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*)

Gail Labrosse

This is the first in a series of articles on non-native invasives that are popular garden plants in the Ottawa area. Some will be familiar; you'll be surprised to find they are invasive.

Bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*)



Ajuga reptans

Gillian Boyd

A perennial native to Europe, *Ajuga* is an herbaceous flowering plant in the mint family. Introduced as an ornamental, it became invasive in parts of North America where conditions were right. It spreads rapidly by stems called stolons that creep along the ground. Be careful where you plant this fast spreader. It can escape very easily, invading lawns and flower beds.

A low growing ground cover, it forms a thick carpet of foliage with brilliant bluish purple spring flowers. *Ajuga* prefers moist, well-drained soil with good drainage. It will grow in full sun to partial shade, spreading rapidly when the conditions are right.

Hand pulling is the best way to control *Ajuga*. Water the day before for easier pulling or loosen soil with a garden fork. Remove all roots as even small bits will regrow. Keep a watchful eye on the area,

pulling all shoots as soon as they re-appear. You will need to be persistent to succeed. **DO NOT** discard the foliage in your compost but use curbside garbage pickup instead. The City of Ottawa recommends that this plant should not be planted near natural areas.

As an alternative try Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), a native perennial to eastern North America. Its lovely white flowers resembling small water-lilies are some of the first to emerge in the spring. It prefers partial or deep shade. ♻️

Tip: Other possible substitutes for *Ajuga* include wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*), wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*), Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*), and large leaved aster (*Aster macrophyllus*). These native groundcovers are always the best choice because they have more benefits for our native wildlife and they adapt well to our local soils and climate conditions.

Tip: Many of our native plant seeds require exposure to cold before they will germinate. This is called **cold stratification**. It is not too late to sow seeds in a seed tray or pot which can then be placed outside for the rest of the winter. Alternatively winter exposure can be simulated by placing the seeds in a sealed container with a moist growing medium in the fridge for a few weeks. Check the seed packet for specific instructions!

“To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is to forget ourselves” —Mahatma Gandhi, civil rights leader in South Africa & India

A Winter Garden for Birds

Julianne Labreche



American Goldfinch

Julianne Labreche

Mly bird feeders are a source of life in the stillness of winter.

From my backyard window, I can watch the fluttering of wings at the edge of the garden. Northern cardinals perch on snow-covered evergreen branches. Woodpeckers hide black sunflower seeds in the crannies of a dead cherry tree nearby. Chickadees swoop in quickly to grab seed from a feeder, retreating to eat it in the safety of cedar hedges close by.

It's easy to set out bird feeders. Keeping them filled, regularly cleaned and mounted on a pole with a baffle to deter busy squirrels is usually all that is needed. However, to create a true garden for the birds, bird feeders are not enough. In an otherwise stark landscape, hanging a bird feeder is like creating a fast-food drive-through. Birds may visit but they are unlikely to stay in your garden for long.

To provide a true winter garden for the birds, year-

round habitat is needed. It is important to establish a bird-friendly habitat that includes shrubs and trees. Like us, overwintering birds want a safe, secure environment with food, water and shelter.

In open spaces, songbirds are so vulnerable. They can fall prey to predators such as hawks, owls and roaming cats. In a more varied, layered habitat, there are places to hide and seek safety. Come spring, there will be diverse spaces for nest building. Fruit-bearing shrubs will provide food later in summer and fall.

A good mix of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs is ideal. Native plants are preferred. Even in a small garden, this mix can be accomplished with a little research and a solid design plan. A variety of perennials, annuals vines and groundcovers will add further diversity throughout the seasons.

My garden contains a mixture of mainly natives and a few non-native bird-friendly shrubs and trees. Some favourite fruit-bearing shrub varieties include serviceberry (*Amelanchier*), currant (*Ribes*), elderberry (*Sambucus*) and cherry (*Prunus*). When mature, elderberry bushes have rich hanging fruit in summer, attracting robins, grosbeaks, waxwings, doves, finches and other bird species. Grey dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) is a native shrub that tolerates urban pollution and also attracts many bird species with its creamy-white berries.

Trees provide an additional source of food— including juicy caterpillars and insects found on their leaves. Birches, maples and pines offer seeds and nuts, as well as shelter and protected nesting space. Eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) trees and hedges provide food and safe places to hide. Arriving robins and cedar waxwings in early spring always enjoy the dried fruit of the old crabapple tree in my backyard.

Larger trees such as oaks offer a cornucopia of food

for birds. Situating any big tree well away from the house not only will prevent structural damage but is safer for birds, easily stunned or killed by crashing into windows. I keep the blinds down to avoid reflection from the glass. Window tape or film, appropriately placed, will also prevent bird crashes. In the summer, goldfinches will enjoy the seeds of black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) and many varieties of coneflower and other plants.



Male northern cardinal

Julianne Labreche

Book Review:

The Well-Gardened Mind: The Restorative Power of Nature, **by Sue Stuart-Smith**

Julianne Labreche

[Scribner](#), July 2020

ISBN-10 : 1476794464

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352 pages (Hardcover), \$36.63

Gardening proved a wildly popular activity this summer during the global pandemic. Donning masks and hand sanitizer, gardeners flocked to garden centers, leaving many store shelves empty.

There was a good reason for this trend. For anyone lucky enough to have an outdoor patch of soil,

Vines that attract birds include American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and wild grape (*Vitis riparia*). A native species in our region, glaucous honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*) is popular with ruby-throated hummingbirds that pollinate the plant.

Come fall, you may feel compelled to tidy up your garden but it is best to leave the garden rather messy, delaying cleanup until late the following spring. This will help to protect over-wintering insects that are a valuable source of food for many bird species. When snow covers the ground, there also will be seeds and dried fruit.

It is always good to have clean, reliable sources of water year-round for wildlife. In summer, my concrete birdbath is cleaned daily. In winter, a heater can be used to prevent water from freezing in a birdbath.

With more birds in the garden, winter will never seem too long or dreary. Instead, it will be action-packed and far more interesting than mere still life.



the garden provided a quiet escape from a stressed-out world. No matter if it was a vegetable plot, a wildlife garden, or just growing a few pots of herbs on a back deck, plants seemed a positive life force to help cope with a multitude of mental health issues – grief, isolation, and loss.

With gardens now covered in snow, mental health issues persist. There's no better time to turn to a few good gardening books. One carefully researched, thoughtful book is **The Well-Gardened Mind: The Restorative Power of Nature** by British psychiatrist and psychotherapist Sue Stuart-Smith.

It was released around the time that the pandemic started. Although timing was purely coincidental, it couldn't have come at a better time.

Stuart-Smith's book explores the reasons why gardens have always been places to go to restore hope, find beauty and calm a troubled mind.

Throughout history and across countries and cultures, there is a pattern of people returning to the garden in dark times.

On a personal level, she recounts the story of her own grandfather whose physical and mental health was restored through gardening after escaping captivity as a prisoner of war in Turkey after his British submarine ran aground during the Gallipoli campaign in the spring of 1915. Somehow, he managed a four thousand mile journey, arriving home malnourished and nearly dead. He was given only a few months to live. He survived and later received post-traumatic stress support through a therapeutic horticulture program. Later, he studied horticulture, eventually found work as a gardener on a cattle ranch in Alberta and then returned to Britain where he and his wife raised their family and farmed. It was through tending gardens and his greenhouse that his health improved.

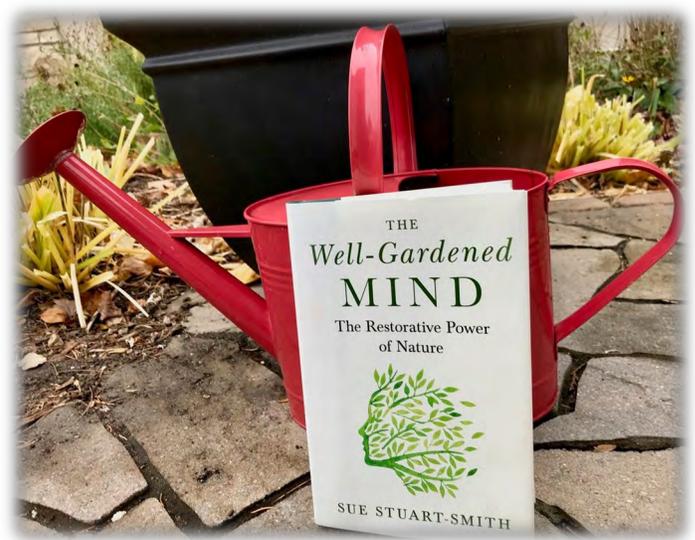
The author recounts stories of others with post-traumatic issues or those struggling to adapt to recent disabilities or end-of-life issues who find hope through nature. Healing gardens and horticultural therapy programs in many parts of Europe and North America are described in detail with useful lessons for anyone working in the field of mental health today.

Stuart-Smith takes a look back in history too. During the horrors of the First World War, for instance, soldiers on both sides turned to dugout gardens in the trenches. In the book, she quotes American journalist Carita Spencer who wrote about British trench gardens when she visited the war zone at La Panne near Ypres. *"First they had a little vegetable garden, and next to it for beauty's sake a little flower garden, and next to that a little graveyard, and then the succession repeated."*

Perhaps because she is a psychiatrist, Stuart-Smith also writes extensively about the father of modern-day psychiatry, Sigmund Freud. He frequently found solace and inspiration in the garden throughout his long, illustrious career. His own life ended peacefully in a London garden, fulfilling his hope to see it through four seasons. This London location became his home away from home after being forced into exile during the war years. His two sisters were not so lucky and died in Auschwitz.

Sue Stuart-Smith explores a few difficult passages in her own life too. These included drastic cuts in mental health services in the UK that seriously impacted upon services that she and her colleagues were able to deliver, as well as her hip injury that required months of hospital care and rehabilitation. Her spirit re-awakened when she returned home to her own garden, a very special one. She and her husband, Tom Stuart-Smith – a celebrated garden designer in the UK – have spent thirty years creating the wonderful Barn Garden near Hertfordshire.

Of course, a well-gardened mind does not guarantee a well-tended garden. Weeds will continue to grow – in my garden, at least. But for many of us going forward, gardening will help to keep our minds healthy and that's probably a good bottom line. 🌱



The Well-Gardened Mind

Julianne Labreche

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

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Letters to editor: mgottawaeditor@gmail.com

Banner Photograph: Dried hydrangea heads, S Bicket .



Clinics

Closed

Monday March 8, 7 pm
Judith Cox—Ottawa MG

Flowers with Vegetables: Beauty and the Eats
[Manotick Horticultural Society](#)

Tuesday March 9, 7pm
Dale Odorizzi—Lanark MG

The Science of Soil
[Perth Horticultural Society](#)

Saturday, March 13, 1:30 pm
Rebecca Last—Ottawa MG

Phenology for You and Me -a talk about cycles in nature
[Ottawa Valley Rock Garden & Horticultural Society - OVRGHS](#)

Tuesday March 16, 7:30 pm
Judith Cox—Ottawa MG

Kitchen Gardens – from Monasteries to Victorians to war time to now
[Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society](#) 🌱



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.

Wednesday March 3, 7 pm
Rob Stuart, Candace Dressler - Ottawa MGs
Colour through the Season – using perennials for year round colour
[Greely Gardeners](#)