

# Cross Pollination

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



## November Garden To Do List

- ❑ **Stems & Seedheads** - 5 Good reasons why you should leave them on your perennials & grasses: 1. Shelter for beneficial insects 2. Seedheads for birds 3. Winter interest 4. Insulation - stems collect snow & protect your plants. 5. It's way easier!
- ❑ **Bulbs** – You can still plant spring flowering bulbs such as crocus, tulip, hyacinth & daffodil as long as the soil is workable. Water bulbs after planting. You may also have time to divide & replant overcrowded spring bulbs and [fall crocus](#) which have finished blooming.
- ❑ **Lawn & Leaves** - A few leaves on your lawn? Simply [mow & mulch and leave in place](#). Lots of leaves covering the lawn? Rake or mow leaves (with grass catcher attached) and remove to garden beds or bags for use in spring. Be aware that using a mulching mower on leaves can destroy overwintering beneficial insects.
- ❑ **Bare Soil** – Cover bare soil with organic matter such as compost, leaves, straw, mulch or manure to protect soil from damage due to rain & erosion. [Avoid tilling](#) which destroys soil structure & soil organisms and encourages weeds to germinate.
- ❑ **Garden Ponds** – Remove fallen leaves in ponds with a bamboo rake to prevent them from decaying and affecting water quality.
- ❑ **Houseplants** - Decrease watering as the days become shorter. Increase humidity by misting plants. Check for pests weekly & treat as needed. Increase lighting with [grow lights](#) or reflective surfaces.
- ❑ **Trees** – Deciduous trees can be planted now until freeze up of soil. Watch this great [video on planting trees](#). Find native tree suggestions for our area in the Ontario [Tree Atlas](#).
- ❑ **Invasive Plants & Weeds** - Remove any [Common Buckthorn](#) and [Garlic Mustard](#) seedlings. Continue to hand pull, rake or cut off weeds at ground level with a sharp spade or garden tool. Remove seedheads to reduce the seed bank in your soil.
- ❑ **General Garden Care** – Empty & store/cover pots & watering cans in a dry place to avoid damage from freezing. Turn off outside water connections & remove hoses. Hang garden hoses to drain before storage.
- ❑ See our [October newsletter](#) for any garden jobs that you may have missed!



Seed pods of butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) look stunning in the fall garden  
Photo: C. Sims

Romaine calm!



If vegetables could talk...



This is not a dill!

I believe I have the fennel say on that...



Am I being stalked?

I yam who I yam!



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## Seed Collection of Native Plants

### COLLECTION, CLEANING AND STORAGE OF SEEDS

Brenda Van Ryswyk – Terrestrial Ecologist, Conservation Halton

*This is Part 2 of a two-part series on the collection, preparation and storage of native plant seeds. Please refer to the [October 2021 issue of cross-pollination](#) for Part 1.*

**Collection Methods:** The method used to collect the seed will depend on the seed type/species you are collecting. Always try to collect only one species at a time and do not mix species (unless you want that mix for reseeding at the restoration site). It is best to collect after the weather has been dry for a few days to ensure seedheads are dry. (Wet seedheads do not yield up their seeds well at all).

- I typically will use a clean bucket or paper bag. I grab a seedhead, tip it into the bucket/bag and give it a good shake. A hard-sided bucket works best for species like monarda and mountain mints as they have fairly hard seedheads with small seeds inside small tubes.
- For fluffy seeds like asters and goldenrods, I will shake them into a bucket or a bag, but often find holding the stems with one hand and flicking a finger against the portion in the bag works well. It shakes the branch in the bag and knocks seeds off. Fluffy seed must be thoroughly dry.
- Sometimes I collect asters by hand plucking each seedhead off one at a time. This works well as sometimes asters grow in mixed bunches and picking by hand ensures I get only the species I want. I do this for New England Aster especially since it sometimes 'hangs on' to its seed a bit longer. It also has nice dense flowers so I can pluck quite a few seeds with each pick.
- Careful collection also means there is less chaff in with the seeds.
- For some species such as Echinacea you will have to clip the entire seedhead and work to get the seeds out by breaking it apart.
- When possible, collect in paper bags, and always transfer *bucket collected seed* to a paper bag as soon as possible. Paper 'breathes' and allows air flow. This is vital for the seeds to continue to dry after harvest. Seed stored in plastic will often go rotten, or have its viability lowered. For seed that is moist at time of collection, lay it out in a thin layer on a piece of cardboard or newspaper for at least a few days to allow it to dry out.

**Cleaning:** Cleaning may or may not be needed. Careful collecting may result in clean seed, needing little cleaning. Some seeds will just need a quick run through a kitchen sieve which will remove all the extra seedhead, stem and leaf. For other seeds, if they have lots of tiny chaff, I will place them in a bowl and gently blow on them, not too hard or you'll blow your good seed away, but just hard enough so the chaff will go flying out leaving you with (mostly) clean seeds. Bad, non-viable, seed is also much lighter and so they may blow away easily as well.



*Cont'd on next page.*



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## Seed Collection of Native Plants – Cont'd

Brenda Van Ryswyk – Conservation Halton

### Cleaning cont'd:

- For larger seeds you can use a series of large and small sieves. A small sieve will hold back the seed but allow small chaff to pass through, and the larger sieve will remove larger chaff and allow seed to pass through.
- I do not try to clean the fluff off of aster or goldenrod seeds. It is just not feasible without expensive or complicated equipment. Dry well and store with the fluff attached. Grass seed is similar, I do not try to remove the outer seed coating of grass seeds, it is too time consuming and labour intensive.
- For some species you can remove the outer seed shell if you only have small amounts to clean by gently rubbing between sandpaper, until the outer seed casing is broken, then rub in your hands to remove any remaining seed coating.
- Sandpaper can be used for seed scarification if your species needs scarification seed treatment.
- Tree or shrub seeds often have a fleshy coating and this should be removed before storage. If you have a fair amount of seed to clean one method to do this is in a blunt blender. Find a used blender and cover the blades with a few layers of duct tape, put the seeds in with some water and blend for a short time. You want to remove the seed pulp/fruit, but you do not want to damage the seeds! Do it in short, few seconds bursts.
- But also do your research as some species, such as dogwoods (Cornus), should be kept moist at all times and are best planted right away. If dried and stored these species may enter an extreme dormancy that will take longer to break (often needing a period of [warm moist stratification](#) followed by cold moist stratification).
- Tree and shrub seeds can also be checked for viability by floating them in water. Good (viable) seed will be heavier and will sink to the bottom whereas bad (non-viable) seed will float on the surface.



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Watch Brenda's [Fluff Free Milkweed Seed Harvesting](#) video

YouTube

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## Question of the Month "Cleaning up" the Fall Garden

by Halton MG Claudette Sims

We get a lot of questions asking how to "clean up" the garden in fall-what to cut and what not to cut. Here are some suggestions and things for you to ponder....

- Mother Nature is not really "dirty" therefore you really don't have anything to "clean".
- Stems, leaves and seedheads are important to overwintering insects and wildlife. When you throw away plant material, you may be throwing away butterflies or food for native birds!
- Plant material left in place tends to "capture" more snow, which is a great insulator for your perennials during winter.
- Leaving plant material standing adds winter interest to your garden. Tall grasses and seedheads look especially decorative when it snows or there is ice.
- If you must cut plant material, return nutrients to the soil by chopping it up in place with your secateurs.
- Exceptions to the above may be plant material which is diseased and could infect plants next year.
- Leaves can be raked/blown (no gas blowers please) into garden beds, put in bags to overwinter to use as mulch next year, or mulched in place with your mower on lawns (they will actually reduce weeds next year & add nutrients).
- For veggie gardens, try and leave roots in the ground rather than pull them out completely. This preserves soil structure.
- Fall is however a great time to remove invasive plants and weeds as the wet soil makes them easy to pull, roots and all.



### Learn more! These websites have great information and photos

- [The right way to leave stems for native bees](#)
- [What to do with Fallen Leaves](#)
- [Six reasons to NOT clean up the garden this fall](#)
- [Smart gardeners mulch fallen leaves into lawn to save money](#) (and stop weeds)



Can you see the "Comma" butterfly hanging upside down on this dead leaf? When you throw away the leaves, you also throw away the butterflies!

Photo: C. Sims



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## "What's Growing On"

Halton Master Gardener Meetings are still **being held virtually** using Zoom.

Fill in our [online contact form](#) if you're interested in coming to a meeting, joining our group or requesting a speaker for your club or interested group.

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

### WEBINAR: A Fresh Look at Gardening: Why Native Plants Make a Difference

- With Halton Master Gardener Cathy Kavassalis
- **When:** Wed, November 10, 7:00 p.m.
- Register [here](#)



Hamilton Naturalists' Club  
Protecting Nature Since 1919

- **Rubber Boot Walk at [Sheelah Dun Dooley Nature Sanctuary](#)** with Jen Baker
- **When:** Sat, November 6, 9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
- **Description:** Register with Rachel Jones at [events@hamiltonnature.org](mailto:events@hamiltonnature.org)
- **WEBINAR: Butterfly Counts: What have we learned in 25 years**
- **When:** Mon, November 8, 7:30 p.m. – 9:00pm
- Zoom Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83351442796> Passcode: 199072
- More information [here](#)

Check for more Hamilton Naturalists' Club events [here](#)!

### Educational and Inspiring Videos

- [Amaryllis Unboxing & Planting!](#)
- [University Place: Invasive Jumping Worms](#)
- [How Wolves Change Rivers](#)

You know if you don't rake the leaves they turn into soil, right? They don't break into your house and drink all your wine or anything.



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