

Vermicompost, or My Pet Worms

Candace Dressler

My husband and I have had the same light teal-coloured 45 litre Rubbermaid bin with my worm compost since 1993, or it might have been 1991. I was living in Edmonton and remember the store where I bought the pound of red wiggler worms, but I am not positive which house I was living in at the time. When we made the move to Ottawa, the worms came too via moving truck in their Rubbermaid home.

Red wiggler worms have a vegan diet, but, just like people, they like fat. For example, they love avocados and watermelon (yes, watermelon has fat). They will also quickly make any leafy vegetable scraps into compost. They are happiest if the veggies are a bit mouldy and already starting to break down in the compost pail before you feed them. They are not as fussy about acidic foods so we don't give them too many citrus scraps

My compost is very low maintenance. We (usually my husband) remove about 2/3 of the compost 2-4 times a year. How much and how often depends mainly on how much we feed the worms. When the bin is getting full, we simply start putting the food on one side of the bin, waiting a few days till they migrate to where the food is and then remove the fin-

Contents

◆ Vermicompost	1
◆ Ask a Master Gardener	2
◆ A Primer on Seed Documentation	3
◆ Botanical Art and Gardening	5
◆ Book review	9
◆ Siberian Pea Shrub	11
◆ Find us	12

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Vermicompost
Candace Dressler



ished compost. The more you feed them, the more they eat and breed. The ratio of worms to scraps affects the speed that they consume what you have put in the bin. We have shared worms with friends and neighbours several times over the years.

Our bin sits in a convenient spot to the kitchen: outside in the shade when the weather is above freezing, inside in winter, sitting either on the floor by the back door or at the bottom of the basement stairs. Worms like to be warm (25°C), but not too warm.

We have never had a fruit fly infestation although there was one when we had a house sitter a couple of years ago. To avoid this, the food scraps should always be completely covered with bedding material (we use peat moss and any shredded paper, cardboard and leaves). Also don't feed them too many bananas. Bananas and other fruit often come with fruit fly eggs attached, so washing your fruit helps. We have also never had a bad odour problem. Again, I think it is because we use enough bedding material and make sure the rotting food is always covered.

The worms like to have some crushed egg shells to use as grit to help them break down the food they are ingesting. They also produce liquid, so the bin has six 5mm holes drilled in the bottom that allow the liquid to drain into a boot tray below the bin. I remove the liquid with a turkey baster and mix with water to feed my houseplants.



Vermicompost
Candace Dressler

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan and Ann McQuillan

Master Gardeners answer helpline questions.

What should I do to prepare some of my plants, like hibiscus and bougainvillea, for bringing indoors during the winter? I've had issues with whitefly on the hibiscus in the past and would like to eliminate it, if possible.

General preparation for bringing plants indoors might include: repotting, cutting back plants (if needed) to make them more manageable, as well as dealing with pests. While houseplants are outdoors for the summer, a whitefly problem (or any pest problem) usually isn't as bad as it would be indoors. Natural predators outside will keep them in check.

Before bringing in your plants, you will want to inspect and treat them for whitefly to prevent them from hitching a ride. Follow these steps:

Step one: Spray the plants with a good blast of water to dislodge the pests, including spraying under the leaves.

Step two: Inspect underneath the leaves for eggs or attached whitefly nymphs. Remove any affected leaves and dispose of them. Don't throw them on your compost heap. Take care to prevent these pests from getting back to your plants.

Step three: Spray the plant with insecticidal soap solution, including underneath the leaves. Before you bring your plants inside, you may want to wait a week or so. Then repeat the spraying and inspection, just in case any pests escaped the first round.

You can also put yellow sticky traps up near the plants. Shake the plants. The yellow traps will attract and capture the whiteflies as they fly up. When you bring the plants inside, keep them quarantined apart from other plants initially. Continue to

I have discovered that by feeding the worms pumpkin innards, including seeds in the fall, they don't eat all of the seeds and I get good pumpkin seedlings in the spring. I have also had success germinating avocado seeds in the compost

After 30 years, cherishing my worms for their compost is just part of my regular kitchen routine. 🌱

A Primer on Seed Documentation

Rebecca Last

A rose by any other name may smell as sweet, but failing to document seeds that you have collected or purchased can lead to great frustration for gardeners.

For example, here is a bag of mystery seeds that emerged from a recent tidy-up. I'm pretty sure they were collected this year, but I have absolutely no idea what they are or where they came from.



A bag of mystery seeds with no label highlights the importance of seed documentation.

Rebecca Last

Just naming seed packages is not enough. Here's another example. This package was a gift from a fellow Master Gardener. The label tells me these

monitor and control for these pests, preventing future problems.

These steps may help with some other pests too, but a proper identification is needed first to determine the right treatment.

What can I do to get rid of creeping Charlie in my lawn? It seems like it's worse every year

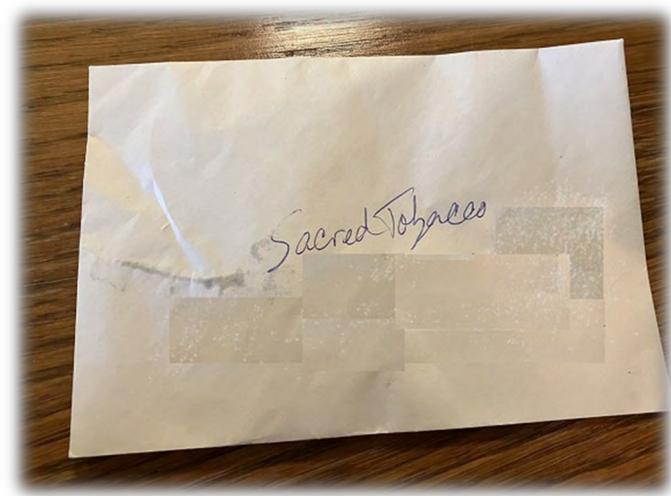
Creeping Charlie (*Glechoma hederacea*) can be a nuisance if you're looking for a weed-free lawn. Its aggressive running habit has led to it being considered an invasive species in some places. It tends to grow better in shady areas. Some people do like it, or at least learn to live with it in the lawn, since it stays green without effort, produces flowers, and tolerates being walked on.

If that's not an option for you, here are a couple of things you can try to get rid of it, or at least keep it controlled:

Manual removal of creeping Charlie takes some time and effort. The most efficient way I've found to deal with it is to take advantage of its vining, shallow-rooted structure. Go over the problem area with a dethatching rake or a hard rake (not a leaf-raking type, but one with a row of short, flat, stiff metal tines). This should catch some creeping Charlie, and loosen more. Then you will have to remove remaining strands and bits of it by hand. Use a weeding knife or other pointed blade to loosen it where it is rooted in the soil. You probably won't get it all the first time. Keep monitoring and removing any regrowth regularly. If the removal results in bare patches in the lawn, you will want to sprinkle grass seed there afterwards.

The iron chelate-based herbicides which are labeled as 'broad-leaf specific' are supposed to be able to kill creeping Charlie, but only after multiple applications. Since creeping Charlie is capable of rooting at every node, and the iron chelate isn't systemic, you would have to spray every bit of the creeping Charlie. If you have a large lawn or a lot of creeping Charlie, that could require quite a bit of

seeds are sacred tobacco. However, there's no date. I don't know how old the seeds are, so I don't know if they are viable.



At least this package of seeds includes the common name, so we have an idea of what they are. However, no date means we don't know if these seeds are still viable. Also, the lack of a scientific name complicates identification and may make it hard to figure out how to start these seeds.

Rebecca Last

Knowing the common name is helpful, but not enough. There are two species of plant known as "sacred tobacco" – *Nicotiana rustica* and *Nicotiana tabacum*. The first has high nicotine content and yellow flowers, while the second has pink flowers and is used to make cigarettes. More importantly, *N. rustica* seeds need light to germinate, while *N. tabacum* seeds do not. Knowing the scientific name of seeds helps to clarify mysteries such as this and ensure better success when starting seeds.

Now, what about cultivars? Every year, I grow a dozen or more varieties of heritage tomato. I need the labels to tell me more than *Solanum lycopersicum* and the date the seeds were collected. My garden is so small I have to grow my tomato plants close together. Tomatoes don't cross pollinate much, but at such close quarters mine won't breed true, so I do not save their seeds. I buy my tomato seeds from local vendors. I put the year on the

herbicide.

Of course, the extreme (and more expensive) solution is to just get the affected area of lawn removed and re-sodded. Then keep watch to make sure creeping Charlie doesn't creep back in. 🌱

seed package at the time of purchase. Then I re-search each variety. Here is an example of one label I created.



The cultivar name is 'Kangaroo Paw'. The tomato is yellow. It's a determinate variety, so I can grow it in a pot and it will mature in 75 to 90 days. Therefore, it requires a long growing season. In fact, I was picking these fruits into early October. The rest of the information on the label is optional, but I find the social history of heritage varieties fascinating. I have more success with some breeders' products than with others.

The "date to maturity" information is important because it helps me understand what I can harvest and when from my garden. Knowing the germination period and protocols can be very helpful too. I once obtained seeds for the lovely native plant *Actaea racemosa*. These are expensive to buy, so I was keen to see if I could get plants from seed. I planned to start these seeds at the same time I was seeding my tomatoes and annual flowers. Then I read the following instructions:

"Indoors, surface sow onto moist, well-drained seed compost, do not cover seed but press gently into the soil. Ideal temp. 22°C for 6 weeks then cold stratify. Move to 4°C for 6-8 weeks then return to warmth,

10°C, for germination.”

So, I was about three months late getting these started for the current growing season.

Knowing the germination period and days to maturity can help you to create a planting table like this one, which I created a few years ago. The ‘Species column’ includes the cultivar name, while the ‘Year column’ tells me the age of the seeds. If I only had room for a few radishes, I would prioritize sowing

the oldest seeds, Cherry Belle, which were two years old at this time. All my root veggies were direct sown outside, either at the end of April or at the start of May. Plant schemes are especially helpful at mid- and end- season when we’re trying to fit in a second crop.

There’s lots more to know about documenting your seeds, but this will get you started on the fascinating journey of collecting, saving, and starting your own seeds. Have fun! 🌱

2017 Seeds to Start						
	Species	Year	In or Out	March	Apr	May
Root						
	Beet -Cylindra (x2)	2017	out			X
	Beet - Detroit Dark Red	2017	out			X
	Carrot - Atomic Red	2017	out			X
	Carrot - Dragon	2016	out			X
	Carrot - Purple Haze	2017	out			X
	Carrot - Touchon	2017	out			X
	Parsnip - Harris	2017	out			X
	Radish - Cherry Belle	2015	out			X
	Radish - French Breakfast (x2)	2016	out			X
	Radish - Purple Plum	2016	out			X
	Radish - White Icicle	2016	out			X

Botanical Art and Gardening

Heather Clemenson

Botanical art is a fascinating subject, especially for those who enjoy gardening and studying plants. I began drawing botanical specimens with coloured pencils only a few years ago after taking a City of Ottawa course at the Nepean Arts Centre.

Botanical art has a long history. Early botanical drawings have been found among Egyptian artifacts. In Greece, a considerable history of botanical drawing can be traced back to around 50 and 70 AD. However, as a discipline, the golden years of botani-

cal art really began in the 18th century when printing opened the doors to botanical illustration. This era was also a period of geographic exploration, plant collecting and plant breeding. Prior to the invention of photography, botanical illustration was the only way to accurately capture every detail of a botanical specimen.

When Carl Linnaeus (1707 –1778), the father of taxonomy, classified plants using Latinized names, the recording of plant specimens became more or-

ganized. This was the real birth of botanical art. The botanical illustrations were often used by apothecaries, herbalists, and horticulturists, as well as gardeners. The accurate depiction of the plant from roots to stems to leaves to flowers to seeds, was usually shown in a single illustration.

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, it was almost impossible to bring live plant specimens back to Europe from Asia, Australia or the Americas. The long sea voyage and the exposure to salt water killed most plants. For many plants, it was only possible to transport seeds, roots, cuttings, or pressed specimens. An accurate drawing of the mature plant was often the only way that a plant collector could understand what they were growing. Plant specimens could be brought back safely from long-distance explorations by the mid-19th century with the invention of the Wardian case, a sealed glass container that protected plant specimens during long sea voyages.

There are many notable botanical artists from the 18th and 19th centuries. Some became famous for their recording of plant specimens collected on voyages of exploration to different parts of the world. Others, such as Francis (Franz) Bauer (1758-1840), drew specimens in notable gardens. Franz Bauer was a botanical artist for 50 years at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew (southwest London, England). He had the title of “Botanick Painter to His Majesty” and illustrated many new plants that were brought back from around the world and grown at Kew. He particularly specialized in painting orchids and his medium of choice was primarily watercolour.

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has collected botanical illustrations art since its foundation in 1804 and holds annual competitions of botanical art. The RHS defines botanical illustration as “... a genre of art that endeavours faithfully to depict and represent the form, colour and detail of a plant, identifiable to species or cultivar level.” (“**RHS Botanical Illustration: The Gold Medal Winners**”, Charlotte Brooks, ACC Art Books, 2019). Botanical art is not floral painting. It is the accurate drawing



Cypripedium calceolus, Lady's slipper orchid. Watercolour from British Orchids (1792-1817). By Franz Bauer

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cypripedium_calceolus_\(Bauer\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cypripedium_calceolus_(Bauer).jpg) public domain, US public domain tag - {{PD-Art, PD-old-100}}

of a botanical specimen, without props or vases or other ornamental decoration.

As a gardener, I have always been interested in the colour, shape and form of plants as I position them in my garden. Having discovered the discipline of creating botanical art, I realize that I now look at all details of each plant more thoroughly than I did before. It has given me a finer appreciation of the complexity of plants. The necessity in botanical art to be accurate in the depiction of the plant specimen makes one look very closely at fine details that perhaps one would miss in a more superficial appreciation. Many questions arise. Are the leaves opposite or alternate on the stem? Are the leaf edges smooth or serrated? What is the precise shape of the leaf and how are the veins of the leaf arranged? What is the precise structure of the flower? How many petals or sepals? What is the arrangement of the petals and the sexual parts of the flower?

It is certainly enjoyable to embark on a piece of artwork, especially of a living subject. To capture something that is alive and to give its depiction on paper some depth is not always easy with a plant that changes almost daily. While photographs can help with colour and form, drawing from a live specimen is far more interesting than drawing from a photograph. Nuances of light and shade are often flattened and the three-dimensional aspect of the plant can be lost in a photograph.

During the winter of 2022, I had a beautiful amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) that I watched daily as it emerged from the bulb. I worked out colours as the flower was emerging and did a sketch every two or three days. Eventually, I chose one of the sketches as my subject and then chose another of the flower in full bloom. It was a constant struggle to both sketch the flower and to identify shade patterns and colour before the flower changed shape yet again. Certainly, I did take photographs to help place petals in the right context but the colours and shading had already been selected from observing the plant. I acquired an appreciation on how the amaryllis grew over time and how its flowers emerged.



Amaryllis
Heather Clemenson

Not all the botanical art has to be serious. It is fun to draw subjects that appeal just given the shape and the quirkiness of their structure. For me to draw a parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) as a piece of art would not be very appealing. However, when I dug up two parsnips that were intertwined, they became a source of interest and fun for a drawing. This root vegetable was easier to draw as it did not change daily!

The choice of medium for botanical art is varied. Some artists work in graphite while others prefer coloured pencil, watercolour or other media including oils or acrylics. Looking at botanical artwork over the years and exhibitions of botanical art, the most preferred medium appears to be watercolour. The use of coloured pencils has grown over recent years and they have become a popular medium.

Whether you are a beginner like me or a seasoned artist, looking in detail at a plant specimen and drawing it is a very satisfying endeavour and the choice of subjects these days is enormous, both from native plants and introduced plants. While botanical art exhibits and competitions have very strict rules and regulations governing the presentation of the work, for those of us who simply like to draw plants accurately it is a source of great pleasure.

There are a great number of reference books on botanical art techniques. I have found two that are particularly useful. The first is by Sarah Simblet, **Botany for the Artist** (DK Publishing, 2020). The second is, **Botanical Art Techniques** edited by Carol Woodin and Robin A. Jess (Timber Press, 2020). There are also many courses offered online and in-person. Of particular note is the Ottawa Society of Botanical Artists website which provides details of the local society and illustrates some exceptional artwork (<https://ottawasocietyofbotanicalartists.ca>).

Botanical art has opened up new insights and perspectives of the plant world to me. As a keen gardener I now spend time looking in more detail at the plants in my garden and truly marvel at the intricacies and variations in nature. 🌱



Parsnip
Heather Clemenson



Food of the caterpillar of the Silvery Blue

(*Glaucopsyche lygdamus*)

Milkvetch—*Astragalus* spp.,

Sweetvetch- *Hedysarum* spp.

Trefoils—*Lotus* spp.,

Lupins—*Lupinus* spp.,

Medick, alfalfa—*Medicago* spp.,

Sweetclover—*Melilotus* spp.,

Locoweed—*Oxytropis* spp.,

Peavines—*Lathyrus* spp.,

False lupins—*Thermopsis*

Vetches—*Vicia* spp.,

Silvery Blue (*Glaucopsyche lygdamus*) taken near Rideau River, Ottawa, Ontario
D. Gordon E. Robertson - Own work, [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glaucopsyche_lygdamus#/media/File:Silvery_Blue-underside.jpg), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glaucopsyche_lygdamus#/media/File:Silvery_Blue-underside.jpg

Book review:

A Garden for the Rusty-Patched Bumblebee: Creating Habitat for Native Pollinators: Ontario and Great lakes Edition, by Lorraine Johnson and Sheila Colla, illustrations by Ann Sanderson

Julianne Labreche

Douglas & McIntyre, 2022

ISBN: 9781771623230

Paperback / softback, 256 pages



Pollinator sun garden

Lorraine Johnson

The last official sighting of the rusty-patched bumblebee (*Bombus affinis*) in Canada was in 2009. As it turns out, it was one of this book's authors, Sheila Colla, who spotted the bee. She was on her way out of Pinery Provincial Park when she noticed it, recognizing it immediately by its distinctive rusty patch.

Sheila Colla is a conservation scientist and associate professor in the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University. She has spent years learning about threats to wild bumblebees. Her quest for the rusty-patched bumblebee began in earnest in 2005 when she began to spend summers in search of it. Although her sighting four years later was a stroke of luck, the story does not end well. In 2012, the rusty-patched bumblebee officially became the first native bee to be designated as endan-

gered in Canada. This species of native bee has never been seen again in this country.

These days, other wild bee species face challenges too. **A Garden for the Rusty-Patched Bumblebee** is an important book for anyone who cares about wild bees, however it is of particular interest to those who garden. It is a shout-out to protect wild bees and other insects that are critical as pollinators by creating gardens abundant with native plants to provide them with habitat needed for their survival as a species.

There are so many native plants in Canada, many well suited to our gardens. Some native plants grow well in sunny spaces, while others prefer shade. No matter if it is balcony garden, a community or school garden or a residential garden, the authors make the pitch that if you build it, then pollinators will come. That also means rethinking our relationship to insects and how to welcome them to our gardens.

"This book calls on all of us to garden from an entirely different starting point. We are advocating for gardens that actively participate in the natural processes that make all life on earth possible— to see our role as stewards of biodiversity," the authors write in their introduction. This book is a deep dive into gardening differently, detailing ways to incorporate native plants that welcome insects which co-evolved with them. Sustainable gardening is all about working in harmony with nature, creating opportunities for biodiversity.

As they write: *"Yes, we love butterflies! But caterpillars eating our garden plants? Probably not so*

much. We're starting to value bees – but wasps, ants, aphids, beetles, plant bugs and flies? It's much harder for us to rally around them and to encourage them to visit– and make use of – the gardens we plant and work to protect.”



Woodland native garden

Lorraine Johnson

Lorraine Johnson is the co-author of **A Garden for the Rusty-Patched Bumblebee**. She is well respected in the gardening and publishing world, with more than ten books to her credit about native plants, urban food growing and sustainable gardening. Her ground-breaking book, **The Ontario Naturalized Garden**, published in 1995, was one of the first books that I ever read about native plants. It opened the door to a new world in which exotic ornamentals took second place to plants considered common, and sometimes even seen as weeds. Back then, it was illegal to grow milkweed in Ontario. These days, we know that milkweed is the host plant for the monarch butterfly caterpillar. More gardeners are planting it. Over twenty years later, Lorraine Johnson continues to advocate strongly for reforms to grass and weeds bylaws.

Together, these two authors' skills are well matched. This makes their book a worthwhile addition to any gardener's library. Johnson is a garden expert, with sound, practical knowledge on how to grow native plants in urban gardens. Colla is a pollinator expert, able to share her vast expertise on conservation measures and threats to wild bumblebees. Their collaboration is their strength. Together,

er, their partnership makes this book a useful resource for any gardener, no matter whether the focus is food or flowers.

Because much of the book is an encyclopedia of sorts about native plants and their pollinators, the focus is on Ontario and the area around the Great Lakes region. Beyond the background and 'how-to-information', it is a good reference book, especially when expanding or creating a garden bed and wondering which new plants to add.

There is a useful section of the book on turning lawns into gardens. The authors argue that lawns are 'basically pollinator deserts', that provide little nectar and pollen for bees because they tend to be mowed before they are allowed to flower. Other areas of unused space are under trees, an ideal place for a shady native garden. Even small efforts can have a big impact these days, they argue. Many places in southern Ontario, for instance, have already lost the majority of their natural habitat. The wild habitat that remains has been significantly degraded.

Here in Ottawa, with building projects rampant and in-fill construction projects underway, we are losing more green space. Gardeners can and do make a difference in creating environmental change, depending upon what they choose to plant.

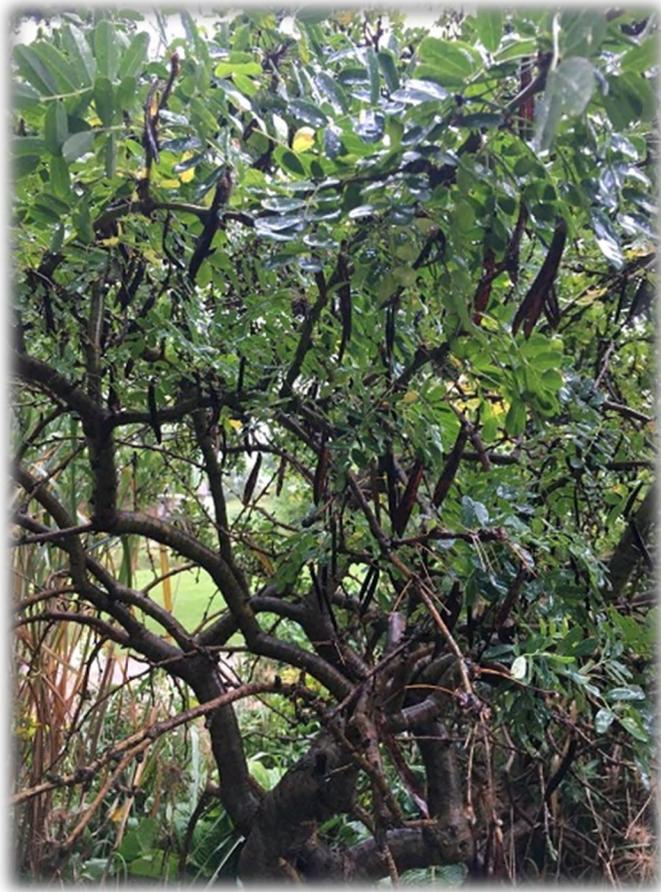
Several years ago, I removed the turfgrass in my front yard and replaced it with a pollinator garden. It didn't take long for the pollinators to discover it and soon the garden was abuzz with pollinators of different shapes and sizes. There are many wild bees and my garden is part of a research project being carried out by the University of Ottawa. Like Sheila Colla and Lorraine Johnson, I sometimes search for the rusty-patched bumblebee. If I ever find one, it will be time to pass along the good news. Our gardens can have purpose beyond beauty. Maybe someday, this little bee will have a comeback. 🌱

In every gardener there is a child who believes in The Seed Fairy —Robert Breault,



Gardeners Beware: Siberian Pea Shrub—*Caragana arborescens*

Gail Labrosse



Siberian Pea Shrub
John and Agnes Burroughs

I attended a four room “cottage” school in Calgary. It was surrounded by four acres of prairie grass, neatly mowed for our recess soccer games. We didn’t worry about balls rolling onto the streets; the tall *Caragana* hedge surrounding the school yard stopped all run-away balls. This hedge was a living fence.

Caragana arborescens, also known as Siberian pea shrub, was introduced to North America during the drought of the 1930s for erosion control reducing the effects of drifting soil. It grew quickly, even in poor soil, reproducing by seed and by roots. In Alberta, it occupied native poplar stands and escaped from the prairies of Alberta to move all the way to Quebec.

Caragana is a woody shrub growing to a height of four metres. A member of the Pea family with compound leaves of four to six leaflets. The fragrant spring flowers are yellow and develop into pods that are narrow, 2 to 5 cm long, each containing 3-6 seeds. At maturity these pods turn brown, pop open, and spew seeds away from the parent shrub. *Caragana* is inclined to grow densely in open woodlands or forest edges. When this happens, the shade created slows the growth of native tree seedlings. It is a tree killer.

Siberian pea shrub is considered an invasive plant in our prairie and forest edges but in other habitats it is less bothersome. For example, in an urban landscape, the tree form of this plant is often used.

Try this native alternative:

Common ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) is a hardy, native shrub or tree. It grows in full sun to part shade, in various soil types. It has white-pink spring flower clusters. The leaf colour depends on the cultivar, which ranges from green to yellow to purple. ♻️

Main source: <https://treecanada.ca/resources/tree-killers/siberian-peashrub/>

Good Photos: <https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/trees-and-plants/siberian-pea-shrub/>

Tip: As the outdoor gardening season draws to a close, it is time to give some thought to our gardening tools. Clean off dirt, rub any rust off with wire wool, sharpen blades and lightly oil any metal and wooden bits before putting away and storing for the winter. Notice any tools that need replacing and add to your Christmas list.

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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 <https://mgottawa.ca/>

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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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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. If you wish to attend please contact the host organization to confirm venue. Zoom or other virtual meeting software is still in use by some societies.