Trowel Talk

February15 2023, Vol 14, no. 02

Interpreting your Garden

Judith Cox

According to the Botanical Artists of Canada, botanical art is "*art whose goal is to depict whole plants or parts of plants in a manner that is both aesthetically pleasing and scientifically accurate*."

Botanical art is beautiful and is often used as a reference when researching plants. The colours and structures are true to the plant and there is generally very little room for interpretation.

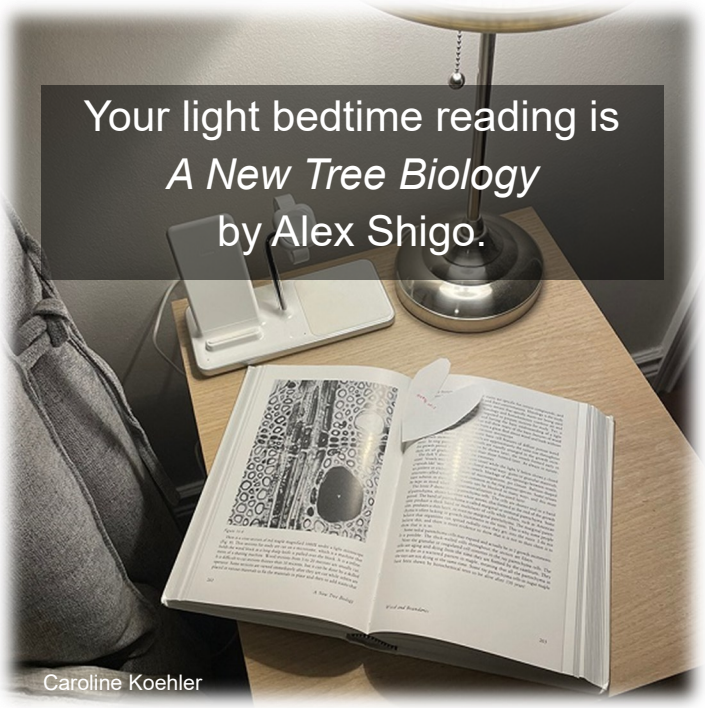
Botanical art cannot be interpretive art, but interpretive art can have botanical aspects. We as gardeners are always interpreting the art that is our garden.

During this time of year when the light levels are low and the garden is sleeping, many gardeners feel sadness, anxiety or general melancholy. Our gardens give us so much during the growing season-– colour, scent, joy, and even a sense of purpose. It is difficult to have to give that up as the world around us gets darker. It is at this time of year that I think interpretive art comes into its own. Creating some interpretive garden art can give you many of the same experiences that you get from being immersed in your garden.

Many years ago, I used to teach art to young children and, from time to time, to adults as well. When

Contents

You Know You're a Gardener When...



children are very young, they immediately understand how to do interpretive art while it takes a while to get through to adults.

As an art teacher, the first thing I had to get past was, "*I'm not an artist. I can't even draw a straight line.*" This phrase is similar to what Master Gardeners hear at advice clinics: "*I'm not a gardener. I have a black thumb*." These blanket statements are just not true. With patience and information, anyone can grow a plant. With the same patience and information, anyone can interpret their garden through art.

My interpretation of my orange lily
Judith Cox

The key aspect to interpretive garden art is '*how does this make you feel'?* For example, one summer I had a particularly glorious orange daylily. It was spectacular and I loved it. The colours of or-

Ask a Master Gardener

Compiled by Amanda Carrigan

Master Gardeners answer helpline questions.

When we had a thaw earlier this winter, I noticed some foliage from my spring bulbs coming up through the soil. Is it going to harm them to come up so early, before we really get the cold weather? Can I do anything about it?

With milder temperatures and more unpredictably variable winter weather, it's not surprising that some spring bloomers, especially bulbs, start to come up long before they should emerge. Most of the time, there's nothing to worry about. Any premature leaf tips will likely turn yellow or brown and die off during the winter, but the rest of the leaf will be fine. The bulb itself will not be affected, and the flowers will emerge as they should in the spring.

In future, you can slow or prevent early emergence by making sure the bulbs are planted deeply enough (three times the bulb's diameter is usual), and putting a good layer of mulch over them after the ground freezes. Both planting methods will keep your bulbs colder, so a temporary warm spell will be less likely to trigger growth. As well, any leaves that do emerge will be better protected from subsequent cold spells under the mulch.

I have a hibiscus plant that I bring inside for the winter, and it's doing well – maybe too well. It's getting pretty big. How and when should I prune it?

Tropical hibiscus are best pruned in late winter or early spring, although you can prune later when they're in active growth. As to how you should prune it, think about the following points. Most of this applies to pruning any shrub. Cuts should be made at a 45° angle, with a clean sharp pruner, about 6 mm (1/4") above a node (point where new buds, leaves, or shoots emerge) or just above a branch collar (the slight swelling you see at the

ange, apricot and spots of darker oranges together made this lily very special. I wanted to paint it. I tried to get it the way that it looked but when I did that it kept ending up looking forced and uncomfortable. So instead, I mixed up every colour that was within that lily and let the watercolour run and blend together. I ended up with my interpretation of the orange lily and it has become one of my favourite pictures.

If you were to take one of your favourite garden pictures and pull out the colours, how would you interpret it? I like to play with watercolour, but acrylic paint is brighter and allows me to paint the colours of my flowers onto a bird house or structure. These structures can be useful additions to my garden when the world warms up.

Do you sew? Bringing out the colours of the garden and making a quilt patch or an outfit is a way to interpret your garden. Using the colours in cooking can bring out memories of your garden season. Art is a part of our lives in so many ways, if we let it come in.

One of the major problems with us trying to interpret our garden through any artistic medium is when we hold our art up to the strict guidelines of botanical art. We can be very hard on ourselves. Instead, you can show through your interpretation of your garden how you feel about its beauty. It is a joyous expression, not a scientific entry. Your joy may inspire others to look closer at the flowers in their own garden and in turn interpret their garden in their own way. One wonderful thing about interpretive art is that you are never wrong. Your art is how you feel about your garden.

Why not go through some pictures of your summer garden today and pull out the colours that you love? Try a few little sketches with coloured pencils or paint or fabric. The sky is the limit, and it is not limited to the colour blue.

base of a branch).

- Branches that should be cut back or removed include any that are damaged or diseased, or rubbing on another branch and damaging the bark.

- If the plant's branches are getting too dense or crowded, you will want to thin it. Cut back selected branches to where they join a stem.

- After removing damaged, weak, or crowded branches, look at the whole plant to decide where you need to cut back for shape and size.

Hibiscus bloom on new growth. Pinching or cutting back branches/shoots partway will remove current buds, but encourage new shoots. This results in a bushier plant, and more blooms later on. If the plant is blooming and you don't want to lose all the flowers, you can stagger your pruning. Do one or two branches at a time, and wait until they re-grow before cutting other branches back.

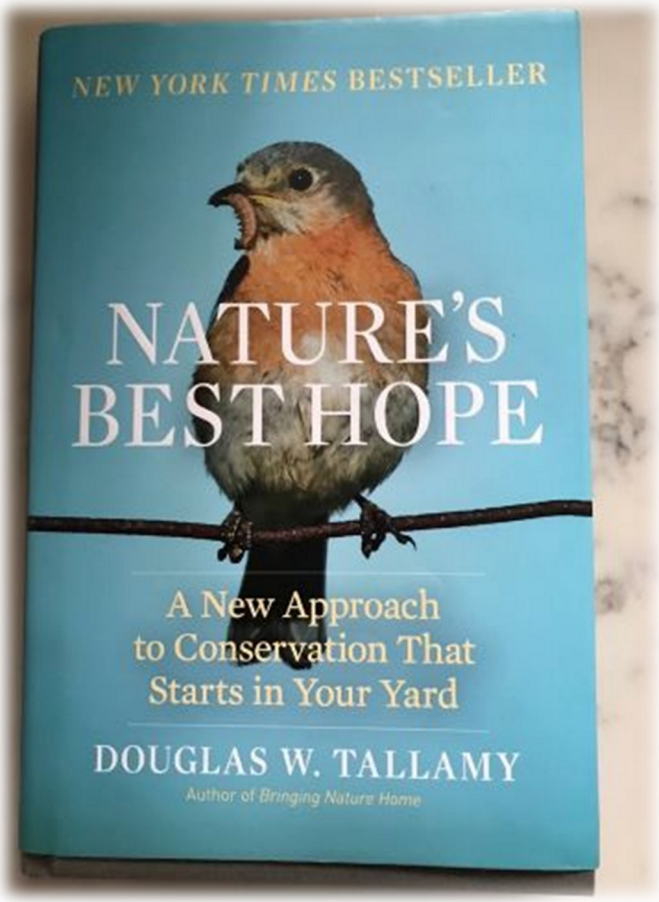
Pruned hibiscus
Agnieszka Keough

Gardening for Nature: Ecoregion Five

Julianne Labreche

"*In the past, we have asked one thing of our gardens: that they be pretty.*
Now they have to support life, sequester carbon, feed pollinators and manage water."
Douglas Tallamy

A fundamental change in thinking is happening among many Canadian gardeners. Gardening styles are shifting beyond beauty and towards biodiversity. That's because helping to preserve biodiversity begins in our own backyards, according to Douglas Tallamy, the author of **Nature's Best Hope** and **Bringing Nature Home**



Nature's Best Hope, book cover
Timber Press; 2020
ISBN-10: 1604699000, ISBN-13: 978-1604699005
Julianne Labreche

Dr. Douglas Tallamy is a professor and chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware. Despite his American roots, he is well known in Canada too, simply because North America's natural spaces, have no political boundaries. His hope is that each of us will be able to make a difference in preserving and protecting the plants and animals that share this land, simply by making clear choices about the kinds of plants we choose to grow ourselves.

Tallamy envisions a National Homeland Park that connects garden spaces across the continent. One garden can make a difference, but a multitude of gardens that connect and create wildlife corridors will bring about profound change. Indeed, he states, this is nature's best hope in these modern-day times of climate change, habitat loss and intensive corporate farming.

He argues that approaches to preserving biodiversity are changing. His rationale goes beyond planting native versus non-native plants. His team's research has revealed something even more striking, namely, that only a small percentage of plant species within any ecoregion support most of our butterfly and moth larvae which, in turn, are critical for other wildlife, especially birds.

"*It's not simply natives versus non-natives,"* he says. "*It's the right natives versus everything else*."

These plants are called 'keystone' plants. He compares them to the architectural feature of a keystone found in the middle of a Roman arch. If that keystone is taken out, the arch collapses. It's the same idea in nature. If these keystone plants are removed, nature's food web will collapse. Keystone plants are essential because they feed most of the caterpillars that support nature's food web.

A Keystone Native Plant–Oak
Julianne Labreche

"*We found that just five percent of our native plant species are supporting 75% of the caterpillars out there, and 14% of our native plants are supporting 90% of the caterpillars*," he states.

In plain terms, it is as basic as this: If you enjoy chickadees– or any another wild bird species, for that matter– then plant a keystone plant to support them. Without these plants, they cannot rear their young, which need to be fed soft food, just like any babies, and therefore depend upon these fleshy insects to mature. Over time and without keystone plants, bird populations will shrink, just as many common bird species, including warblers, finches and swallows, are disappearing right now from across the continent.

Keystone plants are divided into two types, namely: host plants that feed the young caterpillars of approximately 90% of butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera), and secondly, plants that feed specialist bees. These are native bees that eat pollen only from specific plants. Keystone plants play an important role because they feed both specialist and generalist bees. Bees, of course, are important pollinators, both for many of the fruits and vegetables that we eat, as well as foods that support wildlife.

North America is divided into vast ecoregions, each with different keystone plants that support native wildlife. Our area falls into the Northern Forest ecoregion, Ecoregion Five, an enormous swath of land that sweeps from the northern prairie region across Ontario and Quebec, and into the Maritimes, including all of Newfoundland. Closer to home, in the Ottawa-Lanark areas, it is these keystone plants in this northern forest that homeowners are encouraged to plant.

Because these plants are suitable to our ecoregion, including its climate and soil, many are also well suited to privately owned land. Plant choices, of course, will depend on the size of your property, as well as light and soil conditions. Large rural properties have space to support some of these tall keystone trees and shrubs. Smaller, urban-size properties are usually better suited to shrubs and perennials. There might be space for a small to medium sized keystone tree too, planted further away from a house on a smaller lot.

It is these keystone plants within the Northern Forest, Ecoregion Five, that our Master Gardeners will describe in the next few issues of Trowel Talk. In our March issue, Adair Heuchan writes about native keystone trees that grow in Ecoregion Five. In April, Penka Matanska reviews shrubs in our ecoregion. In May, Claire McCaughey explores some important native perennials.

During times when we sometimes feel hopeless in preserving the vast beauty of our wilderness, including dwindling species of native plants and animals, there is something to be said for focusing our attention on our own backyards and growing more keystone plants with the hope of making a difference.

Gardening for Birds: Planting for Woodpeckers

Julianne Labreche

Male downy woodpecker
Joanne Lacroix

Hairy woodpecker
Julianne Labreche

Pileated woodpecker
Joanne Lacroix

Three species of woodpeckers visit my well-wooded, older suburb in Ottawa. Usually, they are most noticeable during mating season with their loud drumming sounds to attract a mate.

The smallest is the downy woodpecker, about 16.5 cm long, which often forages in the old apple tree. The hairy woodpecker, about the size of a robin, also visits from time to time. This larger bird uses its longish bill to chisel out dead wood, looking for insects. The male of both these species of woodpeckers has a distinctive red patch at the back of its head.

The pileated woodpecker, with a flaming-red crest, is about the size of a crow. This bird does not visit my garden often, but sometimes can be heard drumming loudly from a nearby telephone pole.

Generally, woodpeckers feel most at home in well-established neighbourhoods with mature trees where they can build cavity nests and find food. Leaving a snag, or dead tree, wherever safe on your property, can provide additional nesting and feeding opportunities for woodpeckers, as well as many other kinds of birds and wildlife.

Woodpeckers are visitors to my backyard feeder too, consuming suet, sunflower seeds, peanuts and mealworms. In the wild, they like fruits and nuts, although insects are the main part of their diet. To attract woodpeckers to your garden, the following native plants are useful:

Oaks (*Quercus* spp.) – Native oaks are large, deciduous trees that provide abundant food for wildlife-– acorns, as well as many species of insects that dwell among their leaves and branches. These trees also provide opportunities for nesting sites. Oaks prefer full sun and will grow in different soil

conditions, including sand, clay and coarse loam, but prefer well-drained soil. Oaks are one of the most beneficial trees for wildlife because of the biodiversity of life that they support.

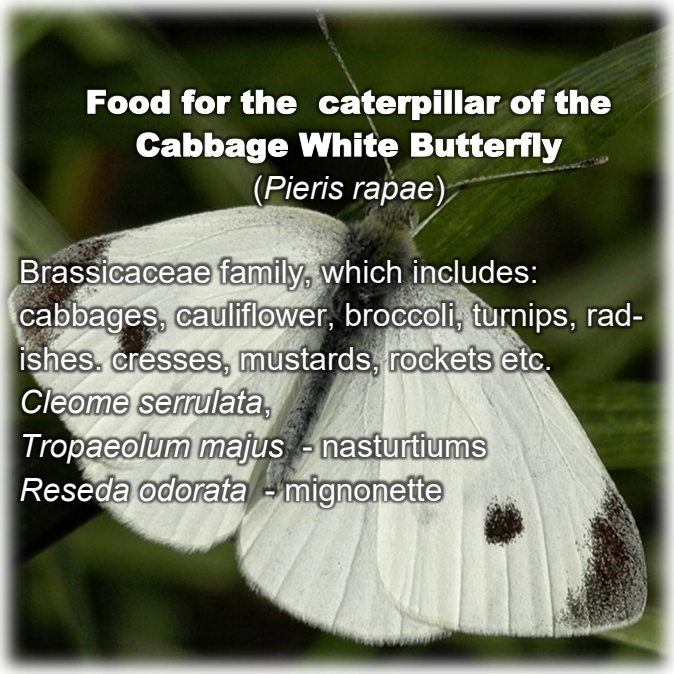
Winter crab apple fruit
Julianne Labreche

Virginia Creeper
Julianne Labreche

Crabapple (*Malus* spp.) – Crabapple trees provide beautiful bursts of pink flowers in spring and abundant food for birds in the winter and early spring months. If you are selecting a crabapple for your garden, be sure that it is one that hangs onto its fruit in winter. As well as woodpeckers, many other birds, such as warblers, jays and cardinals, will consume its dried, shriveled fruit.

Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) – This deciduous native vine is fast-growing, and so occasionally may need to be pruned back. Its spring flowers attract insect pollinators and its blue fruit in the fall provides food for woodpeckers and other birds. Its fall foliage is lovely, turning a vibrant red. It grows in full sun, partial shade and shade and prefers medium, moist, well-drained soil.

Tip: *If you are looking for a guide to local native plants that will provide habitat and food for wild birds, a useful reference for any gardener is the Birds Canada website at: https://birdgardens.ca/. Just type in your postal code or address and a list of bird-friendly plants will appear. However, keep in mind that what you plant should be based on any plant's soil, light and space requirements.*



Cabbage white—Pieris rapae
Ryan Hodnett, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cabbage_White_%28Pieris_rapae%29_-_Kitchener,_Ontario.jpg, , CC4 license-

Native Plant:
Sanguinaria canadensis

Candace Dressler

Sanguinaria canadensis
Candace Dressler

Sanguinaria canadensis
Candace Dressler

Common Names:
Bloodroot, puccoon-root, red puccoon, Canada puccoon, bloodwort, pauson, redroot, and tetterwort
Family Name: Papaveraceae (poppy)
Height: 30 cm
Spread: indefinite, can become large dense patches.
Type of Plant: Native perennial rhizomatous

CDA Hardiness Zone: 2-8

Identifying characteristics
Leaves: Grey green colour with 7 serrate lobes heart or round basal leaf. The leaves will last until mid-summer.
Flowers: April to early May. There are 8-12 thin bright white petals with bright yellow stamens. Flowers are diurnal, meaning that flowers only open during the day.
Stems/roots: Red-orange rhizomes just below the surface. Traditionally used medicinally and for natural red dye.
Seed: Small round black – orange seeds with white elaiosome (a dollop of fat and protein that is attached to the seed).

Other characteristics:
Petals drop as soon as the plant is pollinated. Attracts butterflies.

Propagation and Control:
Primarily by seed, but also by rhizome. Propagate with small divisions in fall. Ants consume the elaiosome and disperse the seeds. The seeds need stratification to germinate and are only viable for a short period.

Seasonal colour: Very early spring colour.
Culture: woodland soil
Landscape Use: shady woodland
Native country: Eastern Canada and USA

It is early April and the snow cover is melting in my back yard. As soon as the ground is dry enough, I go out and I can see the bloodroot buds starting to emerge from the soil. The flowers appear first and then leaves seem to support them one leaf for each flower. As the flowers die back, the leaves get larger and are a very attractive ground cover until they disappear completely in mid-summer. The flowers close at night.

Although it does not produce nectar, its pollen is vital to early emerging pollinators.

It gets its genus name from the Latin ‘sanguinarius’, meaning of or pertaining to blood, and its specific epithet ‘Canadensis’ as it is a native flower found in Canada. The reference to blood comes from the reddish coloured sap that oozes out of the plant when it is damaged, especially the root. The plant historically was used for dye and also for medicinal purposes. The red juice is a strong alkaloid and can be toxic when taken internally or topically. It is sold by many different herbal companies. I wouldn’t take it without medical supervision.

There is a naturally occurring multiplex variety that is a bit smaller but its vibrant blooms last longer in the garden. There is also a rare pink cultivar ‘Armstrong’s Pink’.

Sanguinaria canadensis - multiplex
Candace Dressler

Seedy Saturday!

Saturday, March 11, 2023

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Carp Agricultural Hall, 3790 Carp Road, Carp, ON

Admission: $2 cash

Kids free

Proceeds from door prize ticket sales to be donated to Kanata, Stittsville and West Carleton Food Banks

Find us:

On the Web

Lanark County Master Gardeners

Blog | Helpline | Calendar | Facebook

Ottawa-Carleton Master Gardeners

Website | Helpline | Calendar | Facebook

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/

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.

Trowel Talk team:

Amanda Carrigan, Judith Cox, Andrea Knight, Julianne Labreche, Gail Labrosse, Ann McQuillan, Kelly Noel, Dale Odorizzi, Josie Pazdzior, Rob Stuart, Candace Dressler, Stephanie Sleeth, Gillian Boyd, Heather Clemenson, Mary Crawford, Lee Ann Smith, Agnieszka Keough, Rebecca Last, Mary Reid

Letters to editor: newsletter@mgottawa.ca

Banner Seed heads of Amsonia tabernaemontana, S.R.Bicket: .

Clinics

Ask a Master Gardener, face to face, gardening questions.

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

Talks and Events

Seedy Saturday West
Saturday, March 11, 10:00 am—2::00 pm
Agricultural Hall, 3790 Carp Road, Carp, ON