

OVER THE GARDEN GATE

The Newsletter of the Valley Gardeners Club

April 2017

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Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Valley Gardener's Club. There are purposely no pictures in the newsletters to allow for less expensive black and white printing. Always looking for submissions, critiques or suggestions. Send to: Editor: Donna Crawford, sparrowsong@eastlink.ca.

SEEDS

This is a little late for starting seeds indoors as you will already have started your onions and parsley. But we forge ahead as there is still time for some perennials and late plants such as tomatoes and melons. So here is a thumbnail sketch to indoor seed starting.

Starting seeds indoors (for beginners).

Although most seeds are relatively easy to germinate if they are given the appropriate conditions, there are some seeds that are difficult to germinate. The main groups of seeds that are more difficult include:

- Seeds that require a dormant period before germination;
- Seeds that have an impermeable seed coat;
- Seeds that contain a chemical inhibitor to germination;
- Seeds that require very specific conditions such as a fire, period of warmth followed by cold (e.g. *Cornus canadensis*), or total darkness (e.g. pansies and delphiniums) for germination to occur.

Information on the germination requirements of a particular seed may be found on seed packets, in catalogues, or in books.

Now that we have that warning out of the way, time to start.

Seeding

-You can use any kind of a pot or tray to start seeds, from milk cartons turned on their side and the top cut off, old mushroom trays, peat pots, store bought starter cells with their own plastic cover, pots made from newspaper or much else. No matter what you use, pots should be scrupulously clean to prevent risk of disease.

-Most seeds can be started in a sterile soilless or soil based seed starter compost. You can make your own and sterilize it in a variety of ways, but for the beginner it is ever so much easier to purchase the small amount of commercial bagged mixture.

-A small wooden presser comes in handy. A simple small circle of plywood to fit your container with an attached handle will do the job.

- Fill the container overflowing with barely moistened seed soil, even off with a piece of wood even with the rim, press ever so slightly with fingertips and smooth off with your wooden presser. You should have a perfectly level, smooth surface.
- Sprinkle seeds evenly over the surface of the soil. Not too close together.
- Fine seeds must not be covered or they will not germinate. To assure they are all touching the soil press down very lightly with a dry presser so the seeds do not stick to it.
- If the seeds are a little larger you may cover with a smattering of soil using a sifter. Water the newly planted seeds by immersing in a tray of tepid water almost to their rims until the surface becomes moist.. Then remove and allow to drain.
- A copper based fungicide added to the water is no longer recommended for the home gardener to avoid dreaded damping off. I use one of either a sprinkle of cinnamon on top of soil or pulverized sphagnum moss. Cinnamon is easier. And you only have to apply it once.
- Also, chamomile tea applied as a spray is a very effective method of controlling this disease. Make the hot tea just as you would for drinking (1 tsp. of dried flowers per cup of water). Put the cooled, strained tea into a clean spray bottle. Spray the seedlings and soil every day as necessary. Don't keep the tea longer than 7 days as it turns rancid.
- Seeds require warmth to germinate and the best is with a bottom heating pad. If you have a fridge that gets warm on the top, that will work, too. Cover with a plastic cover or bag to prevent soil from drying out. The seed bed must never dry out, but also be careful not to over water.
- As soon as germination occurs place in maximum light, but not direct sunlight, to prevent spindly seedlings. A grow light is a great help, but I can't afford it so a bright counter top has to do.
- It is worth bearing in mind that very fine seeds have a lower germination and survival rate compared to larger seeds and therefore should not be kept for long periods.

Pricking out

- Before plants get overcrowded they must be transplanted as individual plants into other containers.
- Use a good quality potting mix with nutrients for pricking out. The plants now need nourishment to grow.
- Prepare your individual pots or trays as you would for seeding.
- A small popsicle stick with a V notched in one end or a table fork is helpful for lifting your seedlings without damaging the stems or roots. Only lift a few at a time to prevent the roots from drying out.
- Never hold them by the stems, only by the leaves.

-Make a hole in your potting mixture with something like a wooden pencil. It has to be deep enough for the roots to stay straight down. Gently ease the seedlings apart. With your stick move the soil around the tiny plant . The top leaves should be just above the soil level. Do not press down on the soil as you may injure the stem or roots. These are babies so treat them with care.

-If planting in trays space evenly apart, or plant one to a small pot.

- Again sprinkle the soil with cinnamon or your favourite anti-dampinig off mix.

- Water using a fine mister spray, being careful not to damage the babies.

- You may again cover the trays or pots with plastic to keep in moisture until true leaves are formed and the plant can survive on its own.

-Again place in a bright position shaded from direct sunlight.

-Harden off by slowly moving outdoors before planting in the garden.

You are now on your way to raising your own garden plants. Certainly a packet of seeds is less expensive than buying transplants and you get the benefit of choosing your own varieties. Enjoy!

CLUB NOTES

PLANT SALE:

Our one and only fund-raiser is coming up on May 13. The plant sale funds not only our speakers and philanthropic activities but the general costs of running the club. Please walk your garden and take note of things which need to be divided and shared. Mark them to dig up a couple of weeks before the sale. You can pot them or use the paper wrap method illustrated on our website at

http://www.valleygardeners.ca/events/saletogo_3.htm .

The doors of the fire hall will open at 8 am to bring your donations. All plants should be at the fire hall before 9 am. Doors open to customers at 10 am.

Only good quality plants should be donated. No goutweed! Or other invasive things. We want a reputation for having the best quality and assortment around. Don't bring huge clumps. Divide and wrap or pot. Label everything with name (common or botanical or both) sun or shade, height and colour if you know it.

You may bring annual transplants of flowers or vegs, herbs, perennials, shrubs, trees, alpines or rock garden plants. There will be a white elephant table for quality gardening items or books.

Larry Marsters is coordinating the sale. Contact him if you would like to help on the day. He is counting on you all to make this a successful sale. We need to make over \$2,000 if possible. This was do-able in the past so should be now, despite the competition.

REFRESHMENTS:

The refreshment committee position is vacant. Thank you to Robin Whidden who has been bringing water, juice and sweets and to those of you who pitched in to help. Robin cannot continue; it is not her position. She intended to do it until

someone stepped into the position. Now we need someone or a couple of people, or a group to take on the position if you want food and drink during the social time. Please contact me or any member of the executive if you are willing to take this on.

GARDENING NOTES

Spring care of rhododendrons:

In general, do not prune spring-flowering shrubs such as azaleas and rhododendrons. If you need to reduce height, prune after flowering in the spring. If you have some winter damage or browned leaves on your plant don't worry too much. Rhododendrons have the ability to start new buds from under the bark on what look like bare branches, so as long as the wood is alive, the plant will recover. Usually, don't prune away dead wood on your rhodies until mid-June to early July because by then, you can tell what is dead rather than winter damaged. You can then scratch the bark on dead-looking branches with your fingernail. If there is green wood underneath, the branch is still alive. It's amazing how a really ratty looking plant will fill out in a relatively short amount of time. If they really bother you, remove the severely damaged leaves, but don't be in a hurry to do any cutting of branches.

On young and old plants, simply snap off spent flower stalks by bending them over until they break away from their stems. Be careful not to damage growth buds at the base of each flower stalk.

Mulch plants every spring with 2 to 5 inches of pine bark chips or pine needles to protect shallow roots, retain soil moisture, and keep the soil damp. Do not use regular bark or compost mulch as Rhodies need an acid soil of a pH of 4.5 to 5.5 or 6.0. A lack of water reduces flower-bud formation. (Keep mulch a few inches away from the trunk.)

Fertilize azaleas and rhododendrons sparingly and only when flower buds swell in the early spring, even if they are fall bloomers. Heavy applications of fertilizer will burn the plants. They won't grow in heavy clay, pure sand, or alkaline soil.

Saving Seeds

Generally, it's best to store seeds in airtight containers (baby food jars and film canisters are great) in a cool, dry place where the temperature doesn't fluctuate very much — the refrigerator or a shelf in the basement are options. Be sure to label and date the jars to prevent future mysteries! If these are seeds you've collected, make sure they are completely dry or they may mold in storage.

Maximum storage life:

beans - 3 years

beets - 2 years

carrots - 3 years

corn - 2 years although
germination is not great

after 1st year.

cucumbers - 5 years

lettuce - 3 years

peas - 3 years

peppers - 2 years

pumpkins - 4 years

radishes - 5 years

spinach - 5 years

tomato - 4 years

watermelon - 4 years

ON THE WEB

- Edible and useful plants in Nova Scotia for plant identification:
<https://www.usefulnovascotiaplants.com/>
- Butterflies of Nova Scotia: <http://novascotiabutterflies.ca/ss.cgi?s=blsw>

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **May 6, 2017** - 9:30am - NSAGC District Meeting (Windsor Legion Hall, 35 Empire Lane near Sobeys). Register at our club meetings before April 22. \$17 includes roast beef lunch.
- **May 6, 2017** - Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens Sale 9am-12 noon. A variety of native perennials grown by volunteers from seed collected at the gardens. Also Baldwin's Nursery, Fernwood Plant Nursery & Beneath the Boughs Woodland Nursery.
- **May 8, 2017** - Valley Gardener's club meeting. Speaker is Dominique Padula, owner of Moon Fire Farm in Hants County. "Uniquely Heirloom" - a reflection on growing heirloom and unusual fruits and vegetables. Dominique and his partner Kim with their son Sebastian are vendors at the Seaport Market and through CSA's. Dominique is also a chef and produces Padula Pasta Sauce, Spicy Pickled Beans, Sweet Pickles, Jams, Jellies and more.
- **May 13, 2017 - Valley Gardener's Plant Sale.** New Minas Fire Hall. 10 am. **This is the club's one big fund raiser and relies on members donating lots of quality plants to the sale.** Transplants, perennials, shrubs & trees or houseplants needed. Larry Marsters is Chair (amarsters@ns.sympatico.ca for info).
- **May 13, 2017** - Mount Denson Garden Club plant sale, 9-12, St. Mary's Catholic Church, Main St., Hantsport, N. S.
- **May 21, 2017** - Rare and Unusual Plant Sale, Annapolis Royal Farm Market site. 1-4 pm.
- **June 2&3, 2017** - NSAGC Convention, Inverary Inn, Baddeck. To register see <http://www.nsagc.com/convention.htm>. Information was in the last Scotia Gardener as well.
- **June 17th, 2017** - Halifax Garden Festival taking place at Victoria Park in Halifax (across from the public gardens) from 9-5 pm.
- **June 24, 2017** - Daylily Daze, 9:00 - 3:00 at the First Baptist Church Hall, 1839 Hammonds Plains Rd.

LEAVES

STARS AND DANDELIONS - Misuzu Kaneko (April 11, 1903–March 10, 1930)

Deep in the blue sky,
like pebbles at the bottom of the sea,
lie the stars unseen in daylight
until night comes.

You can't see them, but they are there.
Unseen things are still there.

The withered, seedless dandelions
hidden in the cracks of the roof tile
wait silently for spring,
their strong roots unseen.

You can't see them, but they are there.
Unseen things are still there.

CHUCKLE OF THE DAY

Anyone who remembers their first encounter with Latin names will relate to this from Beverley Nichols *Down the Garden Path*.

"The first thing I said to him after explaining that I wanted to buy a wood, was that I liked 'that big bush with red berries over there'. '*Crataegus pyracantha crenulata yunnanensis*' crooned Mr Honey.

I took a deep breath and was about to reply when Mr. Honey waved his arm to the right and murmured: '*Ribes sanguineum splendans*.'

This, I felt, was enchanting. One had the sense of being a young disciple walking by the side of his master. Overhead there was a clear enamelled sky, all around were flowers and bushes, exquisitely displayed. And through the still air, as we walked, came the dulcet tones of Mr. Honey, speaking Latin. '*Cornus mascula alba variegata*', he observed diffidently.

I racked my brain for a suitable reply. But all I could think of was '*Et tu, Brute?*' which is the worst of a classical education."

CLASSIFIEDS

Wayne Ward of Canning Day Lilies in Pereau is selling all his daylilies. He probably has about 300 left and is available by chance or by appointment. A big note of thanks to him for donating day lilies to our sale in May.

FROM THE GARDEN RECIPE BOX

CABBAGE SOUP

The last of the winter vegetables is upon us. This uses cabbage, onions and carrots and hopefully you still have some canned tomatoes and chili sauce left. If not, store stuff works too. Good for vegetarians. Add some sauteed sausage meat if you like meat in your soups. The aroma is divine.

2 tbsp	Margarine or butter
1 ½ cups	Chopped onion
2/3 cup	Chopped celery
2 cans	Tomatoes (14 oz.), broken up
6 cups	Cabbage, coarsely grated
1 1/2 cups	Carrots, thinly sliced
1/4 cup	Chili Sauce
2 tsp	White sugar
2 tsp	Salt
½ tsp	Pepper
8 cups	Water
2 Tbsp	Vegetable or beef bouillon powder
1/4 tsp	Dried oregano
1/4 tsp	Dried basil

Melt margarine in Dutch oven. Add onion and celery and saute until soft. Add remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil, stirring often. Cover and simmer until vegetables are tender.

KNOW YOUR CLUB EXECUTIVE AND CHAIRS

The following people work hard at keeping our club up and running. Feel free to express your opinions to any of them. Some, like the Show, Plant Sale and Communications Committee are looking for volunteers as well. There are only names, no contact info. Should you wish to contact one of the named people please drop me a line or call and I will provide the info.

Executive: President: Philip Longmire. Vice President: Vacant. Secretary: Cinda Kaulkman. Treasurer: Gerri Robertson. Program Chair: Robin Whidden. Communications Chair: Donna Crawford.

Show Chair: Allison Magee.

Refreshments: Vacant

Plant Sale: Larry Marsters

Publicity: Lucie Giroux

Membership: Elizabeth Yoell.