

# OVER THE GARDEN GATE

The Newsletter of the Valley Gardeners Club

May 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](mailto:sparrowsong@eastlink.ca).

## STARTING A VEG GARDEN.

Many of us are what I call "shadow gardeners", that is we are just a shadow of what we used to be in our youth. Often we have downsized and are living in apartments or smaller holdings. Our joints creak and our backs hurt and we begin to make excuses about why we aren't planning a garden. However, it is never too late to put in a few vegetables either starting a small raised bed, containers or a postage stamp plot of land. There are also those in our club or acquaintances who are just longing to start their first vegetable garden. We all love the taste of a freshly picked tomato, cucumber or bean. It easy no matter which avenue you choose. You can make vegetable gardening as easy or hard as your back will stand. If you haven't yet planted a vegetable garden yet, don't worry. Summer-planted gardens grow well because the soil is warm and the risk of frost is long past.

First choose a space. Most vegetables need at least 6-8 hours of direct sun. If they don't get enough light, they won't bear as much and they'll be more susceptible to attack from insects or diseases.

If you don't have a spot in full sun to plant a garden with vegetables, you can still grow many leafy vegetables such as lettuce and spinach. And if you're in a hot-summer climate, cool-season varieties such as peas may do better in part shade.

When thinking about how to plan a vegetable garden, remember: Plants do not survive without water; the closer your garden is to a source of water, the easier it will be for you.

There are three basic means of veg gardening: 1) on a plot of land, 2) in raised beds and 3) in containers. Here's how:

1. If you choose the plot of land route:

To remove sod for your garden plot, the most environmentally friendly method is to cover with 7 or 8 sheets of newsprint (no coloured pages which may contain heavy metals). Cover with mulch, water well and keep moist. Let nature and worms do the rest. The disadvantage of this is this it will take several weeks to months to break down the sod. But you will have a beautiful rich soil with lots of worms and biological benefits. Some people cover with black plastic which does break down the sod faster but heats to a high temperature and will kill many beneficial organisms. The black plastic will not break down and has to be removed and becomes plastic garbage in the land fill.

Of course you can remove sod manually by cutting it in strips and lifting it out. It is back breaking work and you are losing a lot of organic matter this way and it will have to be replaced, but it allows you to start gardening right away after digging in *lots* of amendments.

You can also roto till which will save the organic matter and allows things to be planted soon after tilling. However you may also be turning up weed seeds or inadvertently propagating some weeds like quack grass and others, which can send up new shoots from the small pieces of its chopped-up rhizome and you will also be chewing up earthworms and other beneficials. If you keep the soil moist and delay planting by a couple of weeks, you can pull, hoe, or otherwise dispatch the perennial weeds as they emerge.

Once the plot is cleared, it's best to test the soil before you begin planting a garden with vegetables. If you want to have a soil nutrient breakout, you can go to the Kentville Research Centre for soil testing. This will cost you \$28.60. You can also buy a little kit at stores to test just the pH if that is all you want.

Check drainage by soaking the soil with a hose, waiting a day, then digging up a handful of soil. Squeeze the soil hard. If water streams out, you'll probably want to add compost or organic matter to improve the drainage.

Next, open your hand. If the soil hasn't formed a ball, or if the ball falls apart at the slightest touch, the soil is probably too sandy. (Add organic matter to improve sandy soil.) If the ball holds together even if you poke it fairly hard, you have too much clay in your soil. (Organic matter improves clay soil, too.) But if the ball breaks into crumbs when you poke it -- like a chocolate cake -- rejoice! Your soil is ideal.

You have dug up your garden plot, enriched it with organic material, and fertilized it. You have raked out the stones. Now you are ready to plant. Make a garden plan that has rows run from east to west if this is practical; that tall plants will be on the northern and eastern sides of the plot; and that you have planned to grow early crops (lettuce, peas, spinach) as well as hot-weather vegetables (tomatoes, eggplant, peppers). Don't forget a few flowers to attract pollinators. Even better if they are edible flowers!

### 2. Raised beds:

If your soil doesn't drain well, your best bet will probably be to install raised beds. Also helps for folks with bending and kneeling problems.

Build raised beds on existing lawn by lining the bottom of frames with several layers of newspaper, then filling with soil. That way, you don't have to dig!

When planning raised beds, take into account the cost of filling them with good quality soil. That can be quite surprising. Make your beds no wider than 4 feet to be able to reach all parts easily from the side. They can be as long as you want, but there has to be cross supports every 4 feet to keep things from bulging.

### 3. Containers:

The third option, if you have no space, is to grow in containers. It is amazing how many vegetables grow well in containers. The down side is that you really have to keep on top of the watering - never let them dry out.

Large plants need lots of space, and most roots need room to grow. At least a five gallon pot is the standard. Avoid small containers as they often can't store enough water to get through hot days. Plastic pots retain moisture better and won't dry out as fast as unglazed terra-cotta ones and are lighter to move. To keep plants adequately cool and moist during hot summer days, double-pot: place a small pot inside a larger one and fill the space between them with sphagnum moss or crumpled newspaper. When watering the plant, also soak the filler between the pots. Add about 1 inch of coarse gravel in the bottom of containers to improve drainage.

Either purchase a good soil mixture which says it is for containers or make your own with the following:

1 bucket (2-½ gallons) peat moss

1 bucket (2-½ gallons) vermiculite or perlite

A half bucket (1-¼ gallons) screened compost or composted cow manure

2 cups fine sand

2 cups pelleted time-release fertilizer

½ cup lime (to counter the acid of peat and keep the pH level near neutral).

Feed container plants at least twice a month with liquid fertilizer, following the instructions on the label. Fish emulsion of worm castings added occasionally increase trace elements. Water daily - never let pots dry out.

Do try to have a few fresh vegetables and herbs, no matter where you live. It is extremely rewarding to cook with something you have grown.

### GARDENING FINDS

There are some exciting new vegetable varieties this year and some older varieties you may not have tried. Here is a small sampling of those which appealed to me:

**Prism Kale:** Compact growth. Harvest early and often! Compact kale equally at home in a container or the garden. The tender, green, tightly ruffled, almost stemless leaves have a distinctive nutty flavour. This hybrid can be harvested when the leaves are as small as 4" in height and will re-leaf quickly, or can be left to produce full sized leaves. Matures in 55 days. From Veseys.

**Candyland Red Tomatoes.** A tiny currant tomato, the fruit ripens earlier than other currants and the long exterior fruit clusters result in easy picking. More compact than older currant types and won't take over your garden. Matures in 55-60 days. From Veseys.

**Perseus Cucumber** Similar in shape to regular cucumbers but much smaller, shorter and thinner. Dark green fruit with very smooth no-peel skin are very sweet, tender, bitter free (burpless) and seedless. Average size 6 x 1 in/16 x 3 cm - harvest smaller pickle size fruit for maximum sweet taste. Better tasting than regular cucumbers. Plants are gynocious and prefer warm weather. Sow in mid June, harvest in July. Adapted for open field summer production. 50 days. From Stokes.

**Tom Thumb Lettuce** Cute little heirloom buttercrunch just big enough for one person. Only 3-4 " across crunch dark green with creamy centre. Tolerates high temperatures and resists bolting. 60 days. From Aimers seeds.

Tiara Cabbage Small, early and extra tender. A dense head with a short internal core. 45 days from transplant. From Veseys.

**Honeynut Butternut Squash** One of the first small-fruited butternut types. Very sweet little 8" cuties. Exceptional yields but a large vine, better trellised or for a bigger garden. 85 days. From Stokes.

**Gherking Cucumber** Parthenocarpic, plants produce fruit without insect pollination. Early, large yields of bitter-free fruit even if left on the vine. Best results when trellised. Perfect for pickling or fresh eating. 50 days. From Stokes.

**Divergent Melon:** Tough little melon stands up well to disease and drought. The flesh is bright orange, firm, and very sweet, with a small seed cavity and thin rind. The round fruits have light netting on the skin and average 2.5 lbs each. Organic from West Coast Seeds.

### CLUB NOTES

It was reported at the April Meeting that some new members had asked for a mentoring program. The following is a list of members who have volunteered to assist new (or old) gardeners:

**Barry Yoell** 902-542-9240 [b.e.yoell@xcountry.tv](mailto:b.e.yoell@xcountry.tv) Interests: most stuff.

**Shirley Marston** 902-542-9323 [shirlmarston@hotmail.com](mailto:shirlmarston@hotmail.com) Interests: Perennials, roses, shrubs.

**Rosaleen McDonald** 902-542-2474 [rosacork@eastlink.ca](mailto:rosacork@eastlink.ca) Interests: Seeding, alpines, herbs, perennials.

**Ericka Crowell** [secrowl@eastlink.ca](mailto:secrowl@eastlink.ca) Interests: Any.

**Alison Scott Butler** 902-670-8612 [ascottbutler@gmail.com](mailto:ascottbutler@gmail.com) Interests: Vegetables, herbs, small plants, local.

**Larry Marsters** 902-681-5129 Interests: Any.

**Donna Crawford** 902-365-2168 [sparrowsong@eastlink.ca](mailto:sparrowsong@eastlink.ca) Interests: Club activities (program, Show, Plant Sale, etc), perennials, herbs, vegetables.

### ON THE WEB

- Edible and useful plants in Nova Scotia for plant identification: <https://www.usefulnovascotiaplants.com/>
- Beyond Hostas - Pictures of a sunny backyard garden: <http://www.finegardening.com/beyond-hostas>

### UPCOMING EVENTS

- **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 12, 2017** - Valley Gardeners meeting. An educational tour of Jamie Ellison's garden at 10 Klondyke St. in Kentville. Jamie tells us how to start a rock garden. Starts sharp at **6:30 pm**. Note the change of time. We will proceed to Kingstec at about 7:30 for our business meeting and to hear about this summer's events. You can park on Justice Way and walk down old the

rail trail at the end of it toward Miners Marsh to get to Jamie's or you can drive down Leverett Ave. from Main Street just past the Cornwallis Inn, where Linday's Funeral Home used to be. Jamie's is on the first turn. You can park on the street or on Maple or Chestnut. Please do not park in front of Jamie's as you will block traffic and prevent us from seeing the garden, which butts right up to the street.

- **June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017** - Halifax Garden Festival taking place at Victoria Park in Halifax (across from the public gardens) from 9-5 pm. Free!
- **June 24, 2017** - Daylily Daze, 9:00 - 3:00 at the First Baptist Church Hall, 1839 Hammonds Plains Rd.
- **18 July 2017** - Wilmot Flower Show Kingston Lions Hall
- **August 12, 2017** - Valley Gardeners Flower and Vegetable Show celebrating Canada 150. Kingstec. Entries from 8 am to 10 am. Open to the public from 1-4 pm. Free will offering tea. Contact [sparrowsong@eastlink.ca](mailto:sparrowsong@eastlink.ca) for copy of the Show Schedule. Entries from the general public or members welcome. More to follow...

## LEAVES

A collection of approximately 275 botanical books from Leslie Marcus of Granville Ferry has been donated to the Vaughan Memorial Library at Acadia University. This collection is noteworthy not only for its intellectual content but also for the physical beauty and excellent condition of the books. The collection's content ranges from the highly specific (e.g. weighty treatises on individual genera) to the general (photographic books on important gardens and landscapes). Mr. Marcus is a serious collector who has also made a significant gift of Canadian paintings to the Beaverbrook Art Gallery.

Community borrowers are welcome at the Vaughan and there is no charge for borrowing. (Submitted by Roni Fenwick)

## DID YOU KNOW?

That 96% of all seed eating birds feed caterpillars and insects to their young. For example - The Carolina chickadee (similar to our black capped chickadee) brings somewhere between 390 and 570 caterpillars to their nest each day and feed for 16 to 18 days before the young fledge and for 30 days after. It takes between 6,240 and 10,260 caterpillars to raise a single nest of chickadees. Chickadees are tiny birds, so how many more insects and caterpillars are required to sustain a population of yellow bellied woodpeckers, orioles, cardinals, bluebirds, warblers and

all the other birds that we love to see at our feeders? So before you reach for insecticides or fungicides, give the birds a chance to do the job. We will all be rewarded with the sight and song of birds on our beautiful planet.

Information gleaned from "Giving ecological purpose to your landscape" by Douglas W. Tallamy in "The Rock Garden Quarterly" Spring 2017 (submitted by Rosaleen McDonald)

### CLASSIFIEDS

For sale: Older manual push lawnmower. Needs sharpening. Contact [sparrowsong@eastlink.ca](mailto:sparrowsong@eastlink.ca).

### FROM THE GARDEN RECIPE BOX

#### Maple Vinaigrette Dressing

The following is a particularly nice dressing for the microgreens, arugula and other spring greens appearing now at Farmers Markets or your gardens.

1/2 tsp dry mustard

1/4 tsp dried basil

2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar

1/4 cup maple syrup

1 1/2 tsp lemon juice

1 very small clove garlic, minced

1/2 cup olive oil

1/2 tsp salt

1/8 tsp freshly ground pepper

Whisk all ingredients together.

Serve on your favourite salad greens.

### 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.