Cross Pollination

January 2012

It's that time again… Renew your membership with the friendly MG's of Halton and area. Member dues are $35 and can be paid by cash or by cheque made out to the Halton Region Master Gardeners.

Weather

By Marg Catley

The winter weather (or the lack of it) of 2012 is a topic much discussed amongst gardeners. What effect will the lack of snow cover have; will the freeze and thaw cycles harm tender perennials; will there be enough moisture for evergreens; will the temperature of the soil be cold enough for spring-flowering bulbs; what effect will these temperatures have on the number of over-wintering insects? So many questions, so many variables!

Canadians have accepted that there is no such thing as a "typical" winter. The Prairie winter is generally characterized by blizzards; Ontario may have heavy rain as much a part of winter as snow; and the Maritimes receive heavy snow storms.

Winter weather systems in Canada originate in the west and southwest and move east bringing with them cold arctic air. These weather systems are steered across the continent from the U.S. by a river of air high in the atmosphere called a jet stream. The greater the difference between warm air to the south and cold air to the north, the faster the jet stream flows and is, of course, most intense in winter. Other factors also contribute to our climate. These include the amount of sunshine, the altitude and the presence of large bodies of water. Very cold air that passes over the open waters of the Great Lakes will be warmed and has a moderating effect on the winter climate of southern Ontario.

Special weather statements are issued by Environment Canada for events that are unusual, cause inconvenience or concern such as reduced visibility as a result of fog or blowing snow. Here are some basic alerts:

WATCHES – are a "heads-up" that conditions are favourable for a storm. Because a storm's path is unpredictable, a watch is issued for a large area and frequently updated;

WARNINGS – alert people to severe weather that is occurring or imminent. Warnings cover much smaller areas than watches;

BLIZZARDS – are a combination of strong winds (40 km or more) and falling or loose snow that reduces visibility to less than one kilometre for at least four hours;

BLOWING SNOW – means visibility will be reduced to less than one kilometre but other blizzard conditions do not exist;

FLASH FREEZE – occurs when the temperature drops rapidly (within 2-3 hours) from above freezing to below and surfaces are wet;

FREEZING DRIZZLE - occurs when light rain or drizzle freezes on impact at temperatures below 0° but does not build up to any extent;

FREEZING RAIN - forms a coating of ice on roads, overhead wires and tree branches and can build up to a dangerous thickness;

SNOW SQUALLS – or lake effect snow occurs when cold air passes over relatively warm water and picks up moisture. As the air mass moves inland, this may result in heavy snow for a few hours in a localized area;

WINDCHILL – is the way your skin feels when low temperatures combine with effects of wind to blow away the thin layer of warmer air close to your skin;

WINTER STORM – involves more than one winter hazard and may include heavy snow, reduced visibility, strong winds and freezing rain;

ALBERTA CLIPPER - is a low pressure system moving 50-60 km per hour from the Prairies to south of the Great Lakes and can bring significant snowfall to southern Ontario; and

GULF LOW – is a system from the Gulf of Mexico that tends to move almost due north into southern Ontario, bringing lots of snow, freezing rain or rain.

News Flash

Burlington, ON, December 1, 2011 - Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) and Premier Publications and Shows announced today, a new partnership in presenting the 2012 Home & Garden Show, to be held from April 26th to 28th, 2012 at Royal Botanical Gardens as part of the annual opening of its outdoor gardens.

ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS
www.rbg.ca

WinterWood: Trees, Shrubs, and Berries
Date: Saturday, February 11, 2012
Time: 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.
Location: Humber Arboretum (at Centre for Urban Ecology)
205 Humber College Blvd, Toronto, Ontario

Free Admission

In association with Etobicoke Master Gardeners , and

Emerald Ash Borer Update

By Patty King

Some of you will remember Tom Bradley's presentation to the group on the emerald ash borer a few years ago. At the time he was predicting that the borer would reach the Burlington area in two years time- and they did. According to the magazine Ontario Nature there is some new information both good and bad about the spread of the beetle.

The ash borer, which arrived in the USA on crates from China, has destroyed most of its host trees in southwestern Ontario, specifically Essex County. It has spread eastward past Toronto and is now found in Sault Ste. Marie, the Ottawa area, Gatineau Quebec, and Montreal. This journey took nine years.

Easy to recognize by their shiny metallic green wings, the borer attacks ash trees by laying eggs on the bark of the tree and the larvae tunnel into and throughout the tree in an interesting serpentine manner.

The mature beetle leaves a D- shaped exit hole, which is often the first sign we have of their presence. At this point the tree is doomed.

Two new methods promise improved and quicker detection: the first is a prism shaped lure that traps borers on a sticky surface. The second, involves looking for borers beneath the bark of treetop branches where the pest usually attacks first. It is hoped these methods will allow them to be spotted before they infest the entire tree. Other methods in use now have been the prohibiton of moving infested wood (to little avail), burning infected trees, and the use of a protective agent called TreeAzin which is inoculated into the tree before the borer finds them.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is experimenting with predator wasps from Asia, while Canadian scientists are trying native wasps. Both predator and native wasps lay eggs on the beetle larvae, which its own larvae devour. There is also some interest in whether a fungus found on dead borers may be used against them.

In summary, there is hope that these new methods will show promise against the emerald ash borer. We have the technology we just need to find what works.

Toronto Tech Update, a commentary

By Marg Catley

Those who couldn't attend the Toronto Tech Update missed an excellent presentation. Although parking was a little tight due to a 'Welcome City of Toronto' project to create a green permeable parking lot at the TBG, all were well accommodated. Food was both excellent and plentiful and there were prizes galore. Darrel Bley gave a very informative talk on soil and how we are usually our own worse enemies and more often counter-productive when it comes to trying to improve the soil in our gardens. Liz Hood was another excellent speaker who spoke on how to identify trees in the winter. During the lunch break, we were given the option of getting a location map and proceeding outside to see if we could identify some of the trees or staying indoors and attending a slide presentation on tree identification. The latter also included a hands-on display of deciduous and evergreen branches and seeds. Sonia Day wrapped things up with her take on "the Good, the Bad and the Ugly" - plants she likes or can do without in her garden. All speakers then gathered to answer questions that had been submitted. It was interesting to hear the different takes and philosophies each speaker had on different (sometimes controversial) subjects. All in all, this was one of the better technical updates I've attended.

The only down side (in my opinion) was the length of time spent on drawing the numbers for all of the prizes.

p.s. As a non-MG observer, Barry found it very educational.

For those of us who did not make it to the Toronto Technical Update on the 14th here are some photos of Master Gardeners in action, oh, and the speakers too.

Sonia Day

Questions for Panel

Darryl Bley

Joyce and Marg

Marg, Dee and Doris

Dee and Doris