

# Cross Pollination

## Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



April  
2018

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### 2018 Perennial Plant of the Year

Looking for an easy to grow plant to attract butterflies to your garden? The Perennial Plant Association has called Allium 'Millenium' a butterfly magnet, and it's also a favourite of bees. Growing 14-22 inches tall with rosy purple flowers, this ornamental onion has few pest or disease issues and grows well in full sun with well drained soil. Once established, it will be drought tolerant and is also deer resistant. Pair this mid to late summer bloomer with shorter goldenrods (*Solidago* sp.) for a pollinator buffet! With many alliums there is a concern regarding spread from seeds. This cultivar exhibits reduced seed production, so there is less concern for unwanted seedlings.



*Allium 'Millenium'*

Click here for more info on [Native Plants for Pollinators](#).

### March / April Garden To Do List

- **Insect Friendly Clean up**- Wait until daytime temperatures are in the 10's C as many beneficial insects are sleeping in the leaf litter. If you're cleaning up perennial beds, consider just shortening stalks, instead of removing them completely. This will help protect any native bees who may have used them for shelter. For detailed info on insect friendly spring clean up read [Spring Clean up done RIGHT](#) from Savvy Gardening.
- **Seeds** –Start hardy annuals and vegetables indoors for mid to late May planting. Seed peas, spinach, lettuce, beets, sweetpeas, marigold, pansy and calendula directly in the garden as soon as the ground can be worked.
- **Prune** shrubs that don't flower in spring. Keep a sharp eye out for cocoons and chrysalises when pruning.
- **Apply** dormant oil sprays and/or lime sulphur when temperatures permit for fruit trees and euonymus – follow the label instructions.
- **Bulbs** -Sprinkle blood meal around emerging tulips to deter deer and squirrel grazing.
- **Divide** or transplant perennials as growth resumes.
- **Birds**- Keep bird feeders clean and topped up. Put out yarn holders for bird nesting material.
- **Read**-I just finished [The Hidden Life of Trees](#) by Peter Wohlleben. It's written in short, easy to read chapters-loved reading about the *Wood Wide Web*! –[CS]
- **Watch**- Too wet or cold to garden? Watch [Call of the Forest-the Forgotten Wisdom of Trees](#) on TVO

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### SOIL BASICS<sup>1</sup>

Soil is not dirt! It is the dynamic "ecosystem" on which all plant and animal life depends. Formed from parent materials (bedrock and rock debris) broken down over eons, soil is a combination of these weathered rock fragments and newly formed clay minerals mixed with the decaying remains of plants and animals (organic matter). Air, water, soil animals and micro-organisms are the other components. Soil furnishes mechanical support, water, oxygen and nutrients for growing plants.

Soil is a critical natural resource that can be improved with thoughtful stewardship. A sustainable gardening ethic requires us to:

- Recycle nutrients so that last season's yard and garden waste becomes next season's plant food.
- Regularly incorporate organic matter to improve the soil's physical condition (tilth) and to leave the soil, at season's end, in better condition than we found it.
- Prevent soil erosion and nutrient run-off.

### ORGANIC MATTER

Soil organic matter consists of dead and decaying plants and animals and has many benefits:

#### Improving Soil Structure

- Loosens tight soils by causing tiny clay particles to form larger aggregates.
- Lignin in humus helps sand particles stick together (granulation).
- Greatly increases capacity to hold water; humus is spongy with tremendous surface area; can hold 90% of its weight in water.
- Soil amended with organic matter warms up and dries earlier in spring and is easier to till.
- Increases pore space in soil which improves soil drainage and penetration of plant roots.

#### Increasing Soil Fertility

- Holds and slowly releases plant nutrients.
- Produces and releases important enzymes and vitamins taken up by plants.
- Increases earthworm and microbial populations.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from "Reference Manual for Ontario Master Gardeners"



"Our most important job as vegetable gardeners is to feed and sustain soil life, often called the soil food web, beginning with the microbes. If we do this, our plants will thrive, we'll grow nutritious, healthy food, and our soil conditions will get better each year. This is what is meant by the adage "Feed the soil not the plants."

— Jane Shellenberger, *Organic Gardener's Companion: Growing Vegetables in the West*

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## What's Growing On?



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### Royal Botanical Gardens Speaker Series

In March, Halton Master Gardeners helped sponsor perennial expert Roy Diblik. His talk about planting in communities was both entertaining and informative. He had many suggestions for low maintenance gardens, including planting in blocks. For Roy's perennial plant list suggestions, click [here](#).

Our thanks to newsletter subscriber Cindy T. for sending this reminder: *"Just a quick note with regards to Mr. Diblik's lecture. Mowing down the stems of plants in March is a bad idea if gardeners want to promote bee populations. 90% of the 720 species of bees in Canada are solitary and do not live in communal hives. Many bee species use flower stems as nests (see pg.23 of Heather Holm's book titled Bees An Identification and Native Plant Forage Guide). Mowing flower stems before the insects can emerge in spring destroys the next bee generation."*

### Variety Flavour and Fun with Niki Jabbour

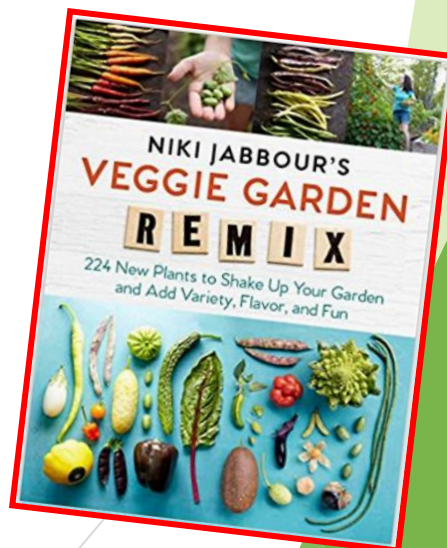
Halton Master Gardeners are very excited to be sponsoring a 2<sup>nd</sup> speaker: Niki Jabbour on **Friday, May 4<sup>th</sup> 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.** Register now at [RBC Programs](#)

*"Expanding beyond standard garden crops like tomatoes, spinach, and string beans can be intimidating for some vegetable gardeners. Join bestselling author, Niki Jabbour, to shake up your garden and discover unexpected flavours and textures in husk cherries, amaranth greens and yard-long beans (to name a few)."*

HMGs will be in attendance to answer any garden questions before and after the talk. And make sure you get a free raffle ticket for Niki's book **Veggie Garden Remix**!



Congratulations to Gail who was the happy winner of Roy's "Know Maintenance Perennial Gardening" book (with Halton Coordinator Kate Sault)



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### What's Growing On? (continued)

Halton MGs are excited to be presenting ***"How to be a Great Gardener!"*** talks at Hamilton Public Libraries!

Here are the dates and locations:

- Thurs. April 5<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. Central library
- Wed. April 18<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. Turner Park
- Fri. April 20<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. Dundas library
- Tues. May 8<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. Saltfleet library
- Tues. May 9<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. Redhill library
- Monday, May 14<sup>th</sup> 7 p.m. Sherwood library
- Tues. May 22<sup>nd</sup> at 2 p.m. Concession library



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Sign up at [www.hpl.ca](http://www.hpl.ca)

### Oakvillegreen Conservation Association Workshops

**April 7th, 1-3 p.m.** Master Gardener Cathy Kavassalis will dive into creating pollinator patches - areas specifically designed to support pollinators. Learn how to prepare a site before planting, and what to consider when choosing species.

Register at [info@oakvillegreen.org](mailto:info@oakvillegreen.org)

### Oakville Lifestyle Home Show

HMGs will be at the [Oakville Lifestyle Home Show](#) April 6-8 answering garden questions. Stop by and say hello! from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the RBG Centre



*Roberta, Lynn and Janet at  
Oakville Home Show 2017*

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What's Growing On? (continued)

### Oakville Public Library

Join Halton MGs Lorne and David for a  
**Gardening Q & A** at  
**Oakville Public Library** central branch  
on April 15<sup>th</sup>

- Time:** 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM
- Register online: Course Code 235419.
- Cost:** Free! What a bargain!



Lorne will answer your  
gardening questions!

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*Cathy and Kate at Plant Faire 2017*

### RBG Plant Faire

We are happy to be taking  
part in Plant Faire again this  
year at the RBG on April 21<sup>st</sup>  
from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the  
RBG Centre



**@HaltonMGs**



Looking for reliable gardening information? Want to keep in  
touch with latest buzz in the gardening world? Follow  
@HaltonMGs and get the latest and best gardening  
information, events and solid horticultural information.

Donna P. (Halton Twitter Queen)

**Thank you Howard!** Our wonderful newsletter editor has regrettably had to leave  
our group to open an exciting new business. We wish him the best of luck and thank  
him for breathing new life into our newsletter!