

Cross Pollination

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



March
2019

March Garden To Do List

- ❑ **Houseplants** - Increase water and feeding as plants start actively growing.
- ❑ **Amaryllis** - After the flowers have faded, cut the flower stalk to within 1" of the top of the bulb. Give plants a maximum of sun and feeding to produce a large healthy bulb for next year. [More info here!](#)
- ❑ **Start** seeds indoors for broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower etc. (see David's article on page 6 for more details.)
- ❑ **Read** "[A Seed-Starters Glossary](#)" from the 'LaidBack Gardener'
- ❑ **Winter Sowing** - Start leaf lettuce seeds outside in cold frames or large recycled clear, covered containers.
- ❑ **Lawn** - rake leaves or debris only if walking on the lawn leaves NO footprints.
- ❑ **Dahlia, calla, canna etc.** - Check those stored bulbs one last time for rot or signs of disease. Spray lightly if bulbs are dry or shriveled.
- ❑ **Pruning** - Use clean, sharp tools. Cut back branches to just above another branch or a bud. Remove dead, damaged, diseased wood. Do NOT prune spring flowering shrubs such as forsythia & lilac until after flowering.
- ❑ **Apple, cherry, plum, pear trees** - Prune before flower buds swell. Remove any dead, diseased twigs and prune for open shape. Pear trees generally don't lend themselves to pruning, except for shaping.
- ❑ **Evergreens** - Prune for health, and to shape only if needed.
- ❑ **Arbovitae, junipers and chamaecyparis** - will not form new buds on old wood. So if you cut back to the brown, aged stems, it won't grow back. How [to prune here!](#)
- ❑ **Firs, Douglas firs, spruces** - learn how to prune and remove multiple leaders and encourage growth [here!](#)
- ❑ **Raspberries** - prune your summer-bearing raspberries now, cutting last year's fruiting canes down to about 10 cm. Leave the young canes to bear a crop this July.
- ❑ **Blueberries** - Early March, prune out dead, damaged, diseased wood to an open shape to increase air circulation. More info here about [blueberries](#).
- ❑ **Bird houses** - Clean and repair bird houses for spring nesters



Never
iron a
four leaf
clover...



...you
never want
to press
your luck!



HaltonMasterGardeners@gmail.com

HaltonMasterGardeners.com

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The Magic of Moss

Janet Mackey - Halton Region Master Gardener

Moss, for me, is transformative. If it's under my bare feet, it takes me back to being a child, finding a cool, soft place to rest. If I find it in the forest on a snowless New Year's hike, the welcome site tells me the world around us is alive and vibrant, no matter what we may think about winter. If I get really close to moss and see the structures, I imagine myself in that miniature tropical forest.



New Year's Day in the Dundas Valley

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Last year, when struggling to grow plants under a heavy canopy of maples, I decided to include moss in the mix of greenery with our naturalized landscape. I had considered a pond but knew that the shady location was going to present problems. My solution was to create a 'moss pond.' Many gardens use moss effectively; some of the most stunning are Japanese gardens that use moss as a groundcover. Gardeners that explore 'Fairy Gardens' also like to add moss to their creative miniature landscapes.



Kasugai Gardens, Kelowna, BC - moss as mulch



Moss in a 'Fairy Garden' naturally lends itself to these tiny landscapes because of its small, delicate structures

Do you consider moss a beautiful plant? Often Master Gardeners are asked about moss removal in lawns. Homeowners are encouraged to increase drainage, improve soil fertility etc. For me, this is an opportunity - just call ... and I'll help you remove it! Mosses belong to Bryophytes along with Liverworts & Hornworts. They comprise the largest in this group with over 10,000 species (Bryophyta). They are non-vascular so they must obtain their nutrients & water from the environment through the air. There are two main types of moss:

1. Acrocarps - Growth is more upright: resemble cushions and have capsules at the tips of their branches
2. Pluricarps - Growth creeps outward, mat-like; branching freely; when inspected closely, resemble ferns.



Pluricarp

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Magic of Moss cont'd

Just like ferns, mosses grow from spores. When a moss spore germinates it first develops thread-like branches called protonema, rather than true roots. The protonema push into the ground (or a surface such as a rock) to anchor the plant, which then begins to develop tiny leaves. Thousands of these plants will bunch together to make a single patch of moss.



As an important part of the forest ecosystem, moss:

- conserves water,
 - filters pollution and acid from rain,
 - sequesters carbon,
 - provides seed beds for larger plants,
 - captures and recycles nutrients that are washed by rain from the forest canopy,
 - binds the soil to keep it from eroding,
- AND finally**, moss is a *bio-indicator* for pollution (in contaminated areas, it changes shape, density or disappears).

Mosses grows incredibly slowly, between 0.25 to 2.5 inches in length annually. If moss is stripped from a rock or log it can take **20 years to recover**. For all of these reasons, **it's important to source moss responsibly.**

Suggestions to locate moss for your garden:

- shady, damp areas of your garden
- shoulders of roads - be careful of traffic of course, I've noticed patches in early spring on the driest of sites!
- nurseries - plant tables at your local nursery may have moss in shady areas & appreciate its removal - ask first!
- neighbours - my neighbor had a patch between her house & the one next door, another, in a shady spot of their garden - let everyone know you're looking for moss!
- building sites - this land will be disturbed anyways so you may as well ask if you can remove it first
- retailers such as [Moss Acres](#) which ships to Canada

Collecting Moss

Acrocarps are best removed after a rainfall. First remove any debris, weeds, grass, leaves, stones etc. Using a barbecue spatula or paint scraper, remove the moss along with some of the soil underneath it. Aim for pieces the size of your hand.

Pleurocarps can be collected by scooping, scraping or raking. Scooping is done in the same way as with Acrocarps. Scraping is done by hand, gently tearing and pulling,



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Magic of Moss cont'd

while scraping as it loosens. Make sure to get some of the soil with the moss. I have read that raking is best done when the moss is dry but have not tried this method. You will only get small fragments, without any soil, however with some TLC (watering, pressing moss into the surface) in the new site they should begin to grow.

[Moss milkshakes](#) are said to be another option, but I haven't tried this either. Check out [Mountain Moss](#) or [Interior Design Info](#).

Placing Your Moss

Prepare your site. Choose a shaded area, ideally with slightly acidic soil (5.0-6.0). Do not plan to place your moss in a play area. While moss will withstand foot traffic it would easily tear apart with high activity. Prepare the area, creating a smooth, moist surface, removing any debris. Scratch the surface lightly. Place your moss in patches, to grow outwards into each other (like a patchwork quilt). Gently step on the moss, and then moisten it using a fine spray. (Repeat this process frequently, sometimes twice a day).

Frequent watering will allow the moss to become established more quickly, gradually decreasing watering as it takes hold. This process can take months! Moss can withstand drought once established, but not before. Watering/misting may need to take place more frequently during hot weather. Placing a water feature close by can be helpful by increasing the humidity in the area. In addition, you may need to inspect the area frequently as birds seemed to enjoy upending moss, looking for insects. I also worked to keep the area clear of any debris that might mat on the surface (leaves), which would prevent the moss' ability to gather nutrients.

Ideas for Using Moss in the Garden



Container or Fairy Garden
[Moss & Stone Gardens](#)



Moss between pavers
Matthew Cunningham LLC:



Featured area in a shady spot
[Instructables: How to Create a Moss Garden:](#)

Continued ...



*A rolling stone gathers no moss
but it gains a certain polish.*

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Magic of Moss cont'd

Interesting Facts About Moss:

- Moss is extremely absorbent and can absorb 20 times its weight and has anti-bacterial properties (sphagnum moss).
- Moss was used as bandages throughout history, including WWI. See [full article](#).
- Dried moss was used as an insulation in homes and to keep feet dry in boots.
- Peat moss was used as far back as Roman times as fuel to heat homes
- Moss can attract fireflies - eggs laid in the moss develop into the nymph stage



Notes:

1. Irish and Scotch Moss sold in nurseries are **NOT** *Bryophyta*, but actually herbaceous evergreen perennials in the carnation family (Caryophyllaceae) that resemble moss.
2. Fairy Garden Moss often sold as Moss Sheets, Clumps & Reindeer Moss, are **NOT** live mosses. These cannot be used with living plants; they will suffocate the soil (killing other plants) and become mouldy.

Further Information:

<http://www.mossandstonegardens.com/blog/moss-trending/>

<https://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-Create-a-Moss-Garden/>

<https://www.finegardening.com/article/moss-makes-a-lush-carpet>

<http://content.yardmap.org/learn/benefits-ecology-moss-lawn/>



Fairy Garden Moss: sheet at top; a true moss, below



It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.

Great Expectations
Charles Dickens

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From Seeds to Garden Transplants Part 2 of 5 Part Series



David's Pond Garden

By David Marshall MG

Last month I wrote about preparing your grow light set up for starting seeds indoors, and this month we will discuss planting your seeds and caring for them up to the planting in the garden time.

First, you'll need your supplies. They can be found at seed houses like William Dam, nurseries, hardware stores, and even dollar stores.

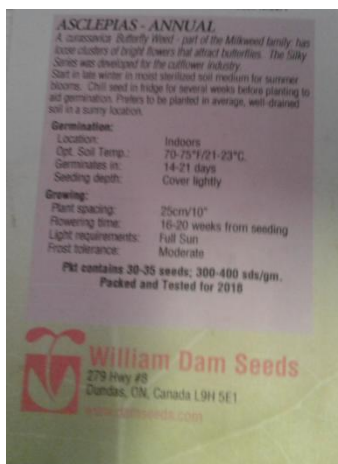
- a bag of soilless seeding and potting mix (a mixture of peat moss, vermiculite and perlite)
- seed flats (10 inch by 20 inch, as many as you need for your light set up)
- cell packs (3" x 5", 12 per flat)
- transparent cover for seed flats (to retain moisture until the seeds germinate)
- a spray bottle for misting the young seedlings.
- a timer set to 16 hours.
- a transplant tool to move the seedlings for 'growing on', four to a pack. I use a tongue depressor sharpened to ¼ inch wide at one end, or you can use a popsicle stick or a teaspoon handle.
- a balanced soluble general purpose fertilizer.
- flower or vegetable seeds of your choice.
- cell packs for transplanting (4 cells to a pack, enough to fill your 10" x 20" flat)



Starter seed flat with moisture retention lid



Seed packets - vegetable & flowers



Back of a seed packet showing details of the plant, germination and growing instructions as well as the number of seeds contained within.

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Starting seeds - part 2 cont'd

Many vegetable seeds are sown directly in the garden, but the following are best started indoors. **Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, cucumbers, squash, zucchini, leeks, tomatoes, peppers, and beans (optional for an earlier crop) and onions if grown from seed.**

Seeds can vary in size from like dust to as big as coconuts and can take from two days to two years to germinate (but usually only two to three weeks) and seed packs can contain any thing from five to five hundred, so study the back of the pack before you buy.

If you are starting out with just a two-flat set up you will end up with about a hundred finished plants so you can probably grow as many vegetable plants as you wish. If you're growing flowers, however, decide how many of each variety you actually want and buy your seeds accordingly.

Some seeds need light to germinate, some need darkness, but most don't care. Be guided by the instructions on the seed packet and observe the seed coverage stated. Do not cover fine seeds too deeply because they often do not have sufficient vigour to push up through heavy cover.

Let's get started

Soilless mixes are hard to wet initially. So, put some in a large container, add water and stir it around until it is evenly moist but not over wet. Let it stand for a couple of hours until the water is absorbed and stir again, adding more water if necessary.

Fill the cell packs to the rim and press the mix down about 3/8 inch with the bottom of a cell pack.

Sprinkle the seed evenly onto the surface. A good way is to put the seed onto a folded piece of paper and hold it over the cell pack, tapping the paper gently and moving it around so that the seeds fall off individually. If the seed is very fine, mix it with a bit of sugar.

Cover the seed to the specified depth and press the mix down gently. If the seeds don't need to be covered with soil (again, refer to package instructions), just press the seed into the mix. Water the pack gently and place under the lights with the transparent cover.



Wet the soilless mix such that it forms a bit of a ball when you squeeze it but still crumbles when you let go.

Different varieties germinate and grow at different rates so you cannot plant everything at once. Work back from your local first frost free date and add the longest time shown on the seed packet -- they are always a bit optimistic!



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Starting seeds - part 2 cont'd

Mist the seeds if the surface dries out. Once the seedlings grow a bit, you may have to water from the bottom to avoid flattening them. Place the packs in about half an inch of tepid water until it absorbs and feels heavy - 5 to 10 minutes.

The soilless mix has an initial charge of fertilizer but about two weeks after germination start fertilizing with a general purpose soluble fertilizer at one quarter of the recommended strength weekly.

When the seedlings are about an inch tall and can be handled, they are ready to be transplanted four to a cell pack. Use your transplanting tool to gently loosen a group of seedlings, make a hole in the new cell pack and lifting a seedling by a leaf - never the stem -- drop it into the hole and firm the mix around it.

As the seedlings get larger, increase to half strength fertilizer weekly. Now you need to care for them patiently it is time to move them out and prepare them for planting in the garden. We'll deal with that next month!

Call me if you have any questions. It is easier to do than to describe. David Marshall, 905- 827 -2564



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Ontario Rock Garden Society Germination Guide



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"What's Growing On" featuring Halton Master Gardener



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Garden Hack! Nifty Ideas to Make Your Gardening Easier & More Fun

Have you ever wondered how to keep squirrels from eating your newly planted bulbs? Or how to store that crazy assortment of pots? How about growing potatoes so you can harvest as they grow? Learn this and more in this fun gardening presentation!

- February 21st at 7:15 p.m.
- Kirkendall Garden Club at [Melrose United Church](#), 86 Homewood Avenue, Hamilton
OR

- Friday, May 17, 2019 at 2 PM - 3 PM
- [Red Hill Library](#) 695 Queenston Rd, Hamilton
- Presenter: Claudette Sims

Build it and They Will Come-Creating a Butterfly Haven in Your Garden

Attracting butterflies is all about having the plants they need and no, that isn't only flowers. Find out which plants are best and how to choose them for your garden.

- Wednesday, June 12, 2019 at 1 PM - 2 PM
- [Red Hill Library](#) 695 Queenston Rd, Hamilton
- Presenter: Claudette Sims

Halton Master Gardeners Meetings

Interested in joining? You are welcome to attend one of our meetings on the 1st Wednesday of the month. Just let us know beforehand at haltonmastergardeners@gmail.com

- Wednesday, March 6th at 7:15 p.m.
- [Royal Botanical Gardens - Plains Road](#)
- Check our [Halton MG Facebook](#) page for details about upcoming meetings and events!

Did you know ?



Did you know you can request a presentation for your Garden Club or group? Fill in the form on the [Request](#) tab of our website and we'll do our best to support you!

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“What’s Growing On” in Our Community



ROYAL
BOTANICAL
GARDENS



Pollinator Friendly Gardening

7 to 8:30 p.m.; [RBG Centre](#)

Annie White shares her strategies for choosing the best types of plants for pollinators, plus how to use and manage them effectively to create the best pollinator sanctuaries possible.

\$18 (Members \$6)

Halton Master Gardeners are proud to be co-sponsoring this talk and will be on hand to answer your gardening questions.

Here are some tips from Annie’s website
PollinatorGardens.org



Winter Exhibit: Spiders Alive!

•Ongoing until April 14

•10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

•[RBG Centre](#)

We’ve invited spiders and their arthropod friends to crawl on over for a visit this winter. Explore amazing adaptations and behaviours in our interactive exhibit, and join us for daily programs for all ages.

Lichen walk

Join Carolyn Zanchetta, Hamilton Naturalist Club Stewardship & Education Coordinator on a gentle walk around Hamilton Cemetery. Contact Carolyn at treepleasehamilton@gmail.com to register and for more information. Cancelled in inclement weather.

Sunday, March 17-1:00 - 1:30pm



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Canada Blooms

March 8-17, 2019

Energicare Centre Toronto

Master Gardeners from across Ontario will be on hand to answer your garden questions!

HaltonMasterGardeners@gmail.com

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