

# CROSS POLLINATION

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



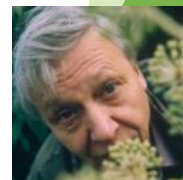
November  
2019

## November Garden 'To Do List'

- ❑ **BULBS** - Still time to plant spring flowering bulbs such as crocus, tulip, hyacinth & daffodil until before freeze up of soil. Water bulbs after planting.
- ❑ **GRASSES & PERENNIALS** - 4 Good reasons to leave the stems and seed heads on your perennials 1. Shelter for beneficial insects 2. Seed heads for birds 3. Winter interest 4. Insulation - stems collect snow & protect your plants!
- ❑ **PERENNIALS** - Divide or transplant overcrowded or underperforming perennials as the weather cools & water in the new divisions well.
- ❑ **MILKWEED** - collect seeds for winter sowing. Learn how [here](#).
- ❑ **TREES** - Continue watering trees and shrubs until the ground freezes, especially if planted this year. Wrap screening around fruit tree trunks to protect from small animals.
- ❑ **FEED the SOIL** - Empty your compost bin into gardens and cover bare soil with organic matter such as compost, leaves, straw, mulch or manure.
- ❑ **HOUSEPLANTS** - Place plants in sunnier windows and decrease watering as the days become shorter. Prune as needed. Increase humidity by misting plants a few times a week. Check for pests weekly.
- ❑ **GARDEN PONDS** - Remove any leaves in pond with a bamboo rake or net. Decaying leaves left in the pond over the winter will affect water quality and harm fish. Remove, clean and store pumps as needed.
- ❑ **LAWN** - A few leaves on lawn? Simply mow & mulch and leave in place. Lots of leaves covering the lawn? Rake or mow leaves (with grass catcher attached) and remove to garden beds or bags for use in spring.
- ❑ **TURN OFF** outside water connections & remove hoses. Hang garden hoses to drain before storage.
- ❑ **WEED WATCH** - Continue to hand pull, rake or cut off at ground level with a sharp spade or garden tool. Remove seed heads to reduce seed bank in your soil.
- ❑ **BIRDS** - Clean and disinfect bird feeders and bird baths to keep birds healthy.
- ❑ **CLEAN** fallen leaves in downspouts and gutters.



One of the best little trees for fall colour  
Rhus typhina 'Tiger Eyes' Sumac



"I think sometimes we need to take a step back and just remember we have no greater right to be here than any other animal."  
-Sir David Attenborough

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## Spotlight on Native Plants : *Ostrya virginiana* Hop Hornbeam

By Halton MG Janet Mackey

*Gardeners can support biodiversity and rich ecosystems by including native plants in their gardens. Once established, these plants require less care than imports as they are naturally suited to our environment*

Hop Hornbeam, a member of the Betuleacea (Birch) family, has attractive fall colour and interesting hop-like fruit that appears in summer. Since it is a relatively small (25-40'/7-12m height) and slow-growing tree, it is well-suited for smaller home landscapes but should be placed at least 15' from buildings (because of its rounded crown). For those of you looking for a tree that can thrive in tougher conditions (i.e., shade, dry sites, deer browsing), Hop Hornbeam is your tree! The only thing I discovered in my research is that it cannot tolerate salt-exposed sites (i.e., spray from a roadway).

Finally: Let's talk about its name. There are an incredible number of common names: Eastern Hop Hornbeam, American Hop Hornbeam, Ironwood (because it has a very dense, strong wood, but this name is commonly applied to other native trees), Leverwood (derived from the wood being used for tool handles)- being just some used regularly. In addition, the name can often be confused with other species: American Hornbeam & European Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana* & *Carpinus betulus*), To clearly identify it at nurseries, use the botanical name- *Ostrya virginiana*.

### Growing Conditions & Features:

- **Soil:** Acidic, moist, well drained soil - but tolerant of dry soil, clay - **Does not** tolerate salt or salt-spray
- **Light:** Full Sun, Part Sun or Full Shade
- **Moisture:** dry to moist (not flooding)
- **Flower:** Male catkins & female flowers (which are not very showy) appear on same branch and appear in summer
- **Fruit:** drooping clusters of sac-like seed bearing fruit - (resembling hops) are greenish-white then fade to brown in fall



Hop Hornbeam has beautiful fall colour (Photo: USDA - K. Koch)



*The wood of Hop Hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) has been used by farmers to make the yoke for oxen as well as handles for tools.*



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### Spotlight on Natives- cont'd



Fruit of Hop Hornbeam (Photo: Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Ctr. C. Fannon)

- **Height:** 25-40' (7-12m)
- **Width:** 20-30' (6-10m)
- **Form:** Small tree with broadly, rounded crown
- **Hardiness:** zone 4
- **Notes:** Tolerant of deer, drought & juglone (Black Walnut)

#### Wildlife Value:

Buds and catkins of Hop Hornbeam are important winter food for songbirds, squirrels, pheasants and grouse. This can also include: Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Purple Finch, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Downy Woodpeckers.

**Companion Plants:** White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), Oaks (*Quercus*) spp. Dwarf Bush Honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*)

**Problems:** No serious pest/disease issues. Care should be taken when transplanting as it has a taproot. Ensure tree is not stressed when settling into its new site.

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Correction: In October's Cross Pollination, The 'Focus on Native Plants' article referred to the Chokeberry presented as *Aronia arbutifolia*. It should have been *Aronia melanocarpa*.

## Cold-Moist Stratification of Seeds

Patty King - Halton Master Gardener



Clear food containers make great planters

Growing plants from seed is such a satisfying experience. I am definitely hooked for a variety of reasons but mainly because I love growing native plants and purchasing native plants in my area is depressingly futile. So now I grow from seed-or try to!

Cold moist stratification gets the best results when germinating certain seeds. This method is used primarily with our native plant seeds. Plants grow according to the different seasons we enjoy in Canada and the cold winter season breaks the dormancy of most of our native plant seeds to induce germination in the spring.

In the wild, seeds will lay dormant until the proper conditions occur to cause germination. This period of dormancy protects the seed from germinating before a killing frost or a drought. There are two kinds of seed stratification, **warm** which occurs in fall and **cold** which occurs in winter. The majority of our native plants require cold and moist conditions to break their dormancy and germinate. This includes our largest trees to our smallest herbaceous plants. Some seeds require multiple seasons of warm and cold to break dormancy.

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### *Cold-moist Stratification Cont'd*

In the home garden we can replicate the breaking of dormancy in a number of ways. The easiest is to follow along with the seasons. When the seed is ripe you can plant it right away in the garden (direct sowing) and wait and hope that at some point next spring you will see some growth. Sometimes you do not have space to grow directly in the garden- that's when you can sow the seeds in a container and set it outside over the winter. I have had mixed results with my choice of container but I find that the clear clam shell food containers (washed and with a bit of bleach) can do a good job of keeping out water. Place the containers in a sheltered area against the house or a group of trees and shrubs in winter for a minimum period of eight weeks. If you have seeds, but missed the timing to winter sow, you can start the cold moist stratification process in the fridge, again for 2 to three months. There is a variety of soil media you can try like seed starting mix from the local nursery to vermiculite or perlite and [coir](#) which is being used more as a sustainable replacement for peat.



Examples of outdoor Winter Sowing - one way to cold-moist stratify seeds See: <https://extension.psu.edu/successful-winter-seed-sowing> or try the '[Baggie Method](#)' used to germinate Milkweed by Monarch Butterfly.net.

There are excellent books on growing seed like Ken Druse's *Making More Plants: The Science, Art, and Joy of Propagation* which will give you the detail you may be looking for. An American native plant company Prairie Moon Nursery lists their germination codes and instructions online. Just look up your plant and find the corresponding code. <https://www.prairiemoon.com/blog/resources-and-information/how-to-germinate-native-seeds>

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## Question of the Month



**Help! My house plants have fungus gnats. I have already re-potted and washed and put in new soil. I've tried an insecticidal soap spray as well as those sticky yellow traps. What can I do?**

Fungus gnats (*Bradysia coprophila*) are small flies that can infest the soil around houseplants. While the adults are harmless, the larvae can chew roots if they run out of organic matter in the growing media, doing a great deal of damage to houseplants and those in greenhouses. The basic management strategies are cultural, sanitation, and physical barriers. Reduce moisture in soil, clean up any plant debris to discourage larvae, and use things like sticky tape to both monitor the problem and capture adults.

There are some interesting methods that have been found useful in greenhouses. Recycled glass stones, sold as Growstones or Gnatnix are used on the top of soil as physical barriers. They reduce fungus gnat adult emergence and egg laying. Another trick is using dryer sheets. Bounce® original brand fabric softener dryer sheets can repel fungus gnat adults due to their volatile constituents. In fact, some greenhouse producers are inserting dryer sheets into the growing medium to repel fungus gnat adults.

There are pesticides and bio pesticides available. The Nematode *Steinernema feltiae* (SN) can be watered into your plants (follow directions carefully). You can use [potato discs](#) placed in your potting medium to monitor fungus gnat populations (these can be used to collect and dispose of larvae too).

More information on biological controls can be found at: [Natural Insect Control](#)

Halton MG Cathy Kavassalis



Distinguished by their long antennae and dark colour, fungus gnats are small, usually 3 to 5 mm in length.  
Photo from [omafra.gov.on.ca](http://omafra.gov.on.ca).



Yellow sticky traps are effective for control of fungus gnats.

So there's this fly, and a gnat lands on its back.  
The fly says, "Is that a gnat on my back?"  
The gnat says, "Gnat at all."  
The fly says, "That's the worst pun I've ever heard."  
The gnat goes, "What do you expect? I just made it up on the fly!"



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## Thugs and Invasives: *Caveat Emptor!*

By Halton MG Allyn Walsh

Sometimes charming plants commonly found in our garden landscapes can become big problems - for us, our neighbours, and our environment. In this series, we will highlight some plant offenders that can take over our gardens, woodlands and meadows if we are not careful, and why they can be problems along with ideas on how to control them.



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### Beautiful Bully: Chameleon Plant

*Houttuynia cordata* "Chameleon" is a lovely looking ground cover with red, pink and cream variegation in its cordate (heart) shaped leaves. It grows in full shade, full sun and anything in between. While it prefers moist soils, it can tolerate a certain amount of drought. So what's not to love? Well, after a year or two, this bully of a plant scrambles over anything in its way, smothering other more desirable plants. It spreads by rhizomes and once established it is extremely difficult to eradicate.

Native to south east Asia, this vine is an herbaceous perennial, growing to around 25 cm in height although it loves to climb over other taller perennials and shrubs. There is a distinctive aroma, most noticeable when attempting to prune or dig up the plant. Blooms appear in late spring and are green with noticeable white bracts. The leaves are ovate to cordate in shape and about 5-7 cm in size. Variegation is best in full sun. Apparently the leaves are eaten in Viet Nam and China, and some people find the odour attractive. Commonly used as a ground cover, it is also planted in rain gardens, bogs and ponds.

Because it takes some time to spread, many gardeners are unaware of its invasive characteristics. If one is determined to plant it, it is best sited where hardscaping will control its spread, or in buried deep pots.

What beautiful coloration on these leaves! And note how densely the ground is covered. What's not to like?



Continued....

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### Thugs & Invasives Cont'd

Once recognized as a problem, the only organic approach is to carefully dig the plant and its rhizomes out of the soil. Since the plant is likely covering a lot of ground, it is important to sort through the soil that is removed to hunt down any rhizomes and destroy them. Covering the plants with a tarp or clear plastic to solarize them is also helpful in reducing the extent of the plant. However the internet is rife with stories about the inability to eradicate this beautiful bully even after years of trying -- and that includes with chemical herbicides. Of course, the best approach is to avoid planting it completely, the second best is to ensure it is contained by hardscaping, but once given in to its thuggish ways, the best we can hope for is to battle it regularly to lessen its ongoing spread. A beautiful bully indeed!



This mature peony is almost completely covered by out of control *Houttuynia cordata*!

### Read more about *Houttuynia cordata*:

[Removal of "Fish Mint" \*Houttuynia cordata\*](#) (Toronto Master Gardeners)  
[Houttuynia cordata 'Chameleon'](#) (Missouri Botanical Garden)



Stay tuned for next month's Thugs and Invaders article!

If you have plants you think should be featured here, contact: [HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com](mailto:HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com)



Note: This rare "Chameleon" tree is NOT considered invasive!

What do you call it when a chameleon can't change his colors?

A Reptile Dysfunction....





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### “What’s Growing On” featuring Halton Master Gardeners

#### Halton Master Gardener Monthly Meeting

- Wednesday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 7:15 pm - 9:30 pm
- [Royal Botanical Gardens](#)
- Halton MG Liza Drozdov will speak on “Growing Marijuana”
- Reminder to bring your own mug for refreshments.

Would you like to have a Halton Master Gardener do a presentation or workshop for your group?



Click on the [Request](#) tab of our website

[HaltonMasterGardeners.com](http://HaltonMasterGardeners.com).

Here are some samples of presentations:

- Rain Gardens: Add biodiversity AND have a positive impact on local water quality
- Starting Vegetable Seeds Indoors
- Herbs: Savoury, Sensual or Deadly Poison
- Attack of the Invasive Plants! Identify, Counter Attack and Eliminate
- Use the CONTACT FORM near the bottom of the page to request a speaker.



Do you have a gardening question?

Email: [HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com](mailto:HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com)



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## "What's Growing On" in our Community



### ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

#### Back to Nature walks at RBG Sundays in November, 2-3:30 p.m.

- 1st Sunday of every month: Hendrie Valley; meet at Cherry Hill Gate parking lot
- 2nd: Princess Point; meet at the Princess Point parking lot
- 3rd: Cootes North Shore; meet at the Nature Interpretive Centre
- 4th: Cootes South Shore; meet at the Aviary parking lot on Oak Knoll Drive, Hamilton
- 5th: Rock Chapel; meet at the Rock Chapel trailhead parking lot
- More info [here](#)



#### Invasive Plant Removal

- Saturdays, November 2, 9, 16
- Nature Interpretive Center at [RBG Arboretum](#)

The RBG is looking for volunteers to remove invasive species in the Nature sanctuaries! Sign up for one day, or multiple sessions at [this link](#) and help restore habitats.

#### Climate Action in Burlington

Did you know that City Council has declared a climate emergency?



- Wednesday, Nov. 12
  - 6:30 to 8:30 pm
  - Burlington Public Library (Central)
- Learn how the city is taking action on stormwater management, forestry and energy use. Find out more about the Climate Action Plan.
- Register for this free event at [attend.bpl.on.ca/event/3288329](https://attend.bpl.on.ca/event/3288329)



Hamilton Naturalists' Club  
Protecting Nature Since 1919

#### Larks Monday Ladies Birding

- Mondays in November, 9 to 11 a.m.
- Meets at various locations around the Hamilton area. New birders are welcome.
- Contact Elaine Serena for locations and meet up points  
[serene238@gmail.com](mailto:serene238@gmail.com)

#### Full Moon Evening Hike

Tue, November 12, 6:30pm - 8:00pm  
Summit Muskeg Preserve, Hamilton - Brantford Rail Trail, Hamilton, ON L0R, Canada ([map](#))  
May be cancelled if cloudy or windchill so check the [Hamilton Naturalists Calendar](#) before leaving.



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