

CROSS POLLINATION

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



December
2019

December & January Garden To Do List

- ❑ **Houseplants:** Indoor house conditions in December and January are difficult for many houseplants. Follow these best practices for healthier plants:
- ❑ **Watering** - use **room temperature** water. Keep a container filled and ready to use. Never use ice cubes to water orchids-there is NO ice in the tropical rainforest! Plants with thick, rubbery leaves *usually* need *less* water. Plants with thin or delicate leaves *usually* need *more* water and humidity. Water only as needed-check by lifting the pot. If it feels "heavy", wait for another week or so. Avoid watering the "crowns" of plants, as this can lead to rotting (African violets/Primroses/Orchids)
- ❑ **Clean & tidy** - A water spray in the sink, shower or with a spray bottle keeps leaves healthy & free of dust and pests. Remove dead or dying leaves and stems as they appear.
- ❑ **Light** - Place plants in brighter south facing windows, use LED lighting or reflective white surfaces to increase lighting, if needed. Rotate pot ¼ turn weekly for even growth.
- ❑ **Fertilizer** - Most houseplants will not need any fertilizer as they are not actively growing. Orchids require very little fertilizer, but can be fed, "weakly, weekly", using a dilute organic fertilizer. Dilute by ¼ or more.
- ❑ **Pests** - Inspect plants weekly for sticky areas, dulling of leaves, fuzzy or scaly parts. Use a magnifying glass or phone app such as "[Magnifier Camera](#)" to identify pests-an ID helps to target treatment. Many insects can be kept in check with frequent misting of water to increase humidity. Flying insects such as white fly can be trapped with [yellow sticky strips](#). Treat [mealy bugs](#) (appear as white fluff) and [scale](#) (like small dome shaped shells) by dabbing them with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol. Spraying with insecticidal soap can also control these and other insects-follow instructions carefully. Repeated treatments will be needed to control pests.
- ❑ **Lawn** - If you still have leaves on your lawn, rake them into the garden (or bag/compost to store for spring mulching) when the weather permits. Avoid walking on lawn if soil is soft and leaves footprints.
- ❑ **Read** - Curl up with a favourite garden magazine or book-see the [excellent selections on our website](#), both for reading and for gifting!



Have a wonderful holiday season!

Please note there is **NO January newsletter**, so see you again in February!

Why doesn't mistletoe grow up dogwood trees?



It's afraid of the bark.



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Spotlight on Native Plants : *Ilex verticillata* - Winterberry

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*



Winterberry, with a backdrop of conifers makes for an attractive display in the winter garden.

Winterberry is a deciduous, native shrub that is an excellent choice for winter interest in the garden, attracting birds with its bright red berries that are clustered densely along the stem. This shrub is dioecious, meaning you must have both male and female flowers which are located on separate plants.

While a stunning plant in fall/winter, Winterberry does not stand out in spring/summer even when in bloom as its small white flowers are tucked in close to the leaf axil. Place it against a backdrop of evergreens, visible from a window or pathway, or alternatively use at the edge of a pond or in a raingarden. You will be rewarded during a long winter by both the colour and birds that it attracts.

Growing Conditions & Features:

- **Soil:** average, acidic (does poorly in alkaline soil)
- **Light:** full sun to part shade
- **Moisture:** medium to wet
- **Flower:** June/July - small white
- **Fruit:** showy, red
- **Tolerant:** erosion, compacted soil, clay & wet conditions, Japanese Beetles
- **Intolerant:** salt



Nativars: commonly available at nurseries, are cultivars derived from native plants, usually through asexual propagation rather than seed; meaning they are clones of one plant which reduces diversity and concerns biologists like Doug Tallamy since it may also influence the wildlife value of these plants. One consistent trait manipulation that has had an impact on wildlife is if leaf colour is altered (i.e., from green to dark red). Gardeners should research individual plant species and nativars as the impact on wildlife value with alterations from the true species can vary greatly.

Read more [HERE](#).



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Spotlight on Natives- cont'd



- **Height:** 3 - 12 ft. (1 - 4 m) - see NOTES
- **Width:** 3- 12 ft. (1 - 4 m)
- **Form:** upright, rounded
- **Growth:** Slow, thicket forming in wild
- **Hardiness:** Zone 3
- **Notes:** The species is a larger shrub however there are several natives that are smaller in stature: *Berry Poppins (Mr. Poppins)*, *Red Sprite*, *Little Goblin*, *Berry Nice*
- **Wildlife Value:** Living Bird Feeder!
- **Companion Plants:** Conifers
- **Landscape Use:** Mass, Foundation, Hedge, Rain garden, Pond/Stream Edge
- **Problems:** leaf spots and powdery mildew late in the season but usually just cosmetic damage; suckering



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Christmas Cactus

Schlumbergera truncata, commonly called Christmas cactus or Holiday Cactus is a popular winter-flowering houseplant native to Brazil. It is available in a wide variety of colours including red, purple, oranges, pinks and cream.

Schlumbergera truncata grows best in light shade, though full sunlight is beneficial in midwinter. It is tolerant of dry, slightly under-watered conditions and is best kept somewhat potbound. Potting media must be well-drained with good aeration.

Follow @haltonmgs on Instagram

Hariette Henry - Halton Master Gardener



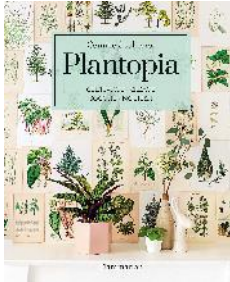
Read more about Christmas Cactus in an article titled, *The Holiday Cactus Conundrum* by Emma Murphy from Peterborough Master Gardeners

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A Selection of Gifts and/or Great Reads for Gardeners Published in 2019

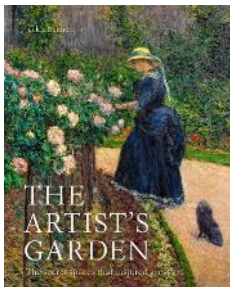
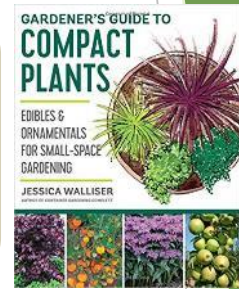


Plantopia: Cultivate / Create / Soothe / Nourish - C. Soulayrol, Photos F. Baron-Morin - You may have noticed that houseplants are a big trend, especially as many live in smaller spaces. This book offers growing tips for over twenty varieties; inspiration for home decoration; crafting, and DIY health and beauty projects using nature.

[Read MORE](#) at Gardenista

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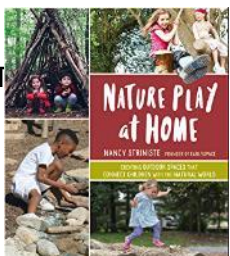
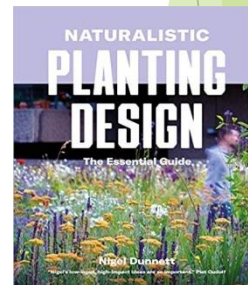
Gardener's Guide to Compact Plants: Edibles and Ornamentals for Small-Space Gardening, J. Walliser. Following the *smaller space* theme, this book contains all you need to create a lush setting on a restricted scale that's laden with flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Whether you have patio pots, a postage-stamp-sized yard, or a community plot, you'll find ideas you can put to good use in this colorful and informative guide. [Read MORE](#) at Gardener's Path.



The Artist's Garden: The Secret Spaces that Inspired Great Art - J. Bennett. This is a book of two readerships, for lovers of gardening and lovers of art will both find much of interest in it. I read as a gardener and found the horticultural content appealing, the insights into art and the artists remarkable and was fascinated by the level of cross-over, or should I say "common ground" there was between the two disciplines.

[Read MORE](#) at An Irish Gardener

Naturalistic Planting Design: The Essential Guide - N. Dunnett. Well-known for his naturalistic planting designs, Nigel Dunnett uses his own photographs to outline the main themes of contemporary naturalism, the rules for planting design methodology, a planting design toolkit, thoughts on where design may lead in the future (rain gardens, city greening, roof gardens) along with a set of detailed cultivation and maintenance guidelines. [Read MORE](#) at The Reckless Gardener



Nature Play at Home: Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World - N. Strinste. With our *connected world* isn't it wonderful to have a garden to escape to! Unstructured play in natural areas has been shown to be beneficial to one's well-being, particularly with reference to children. Why not create this space in your own yard for family and friends to enjoy? With images from around the world, the author explains how to bring the beauty, adventure, and sustainability of nature play to backyards and other settings. [Read MORE](#) at the Delaware Nature Society

[See other favourite print resources of Halton MG HERE](#)

List created by Halton MG Janet Mackey

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Question of the Month



I've decided to practice 'compassion with the foraging squirrels - they're just trying to survive like me, I guess.



***I planted some crocuses and this morning when I looked out, they were already dug into!
How can I protect my bulbs?***



Thank you for your question- one we all contend with! There are a few things you can try that will help to **deter squirrels**:

- try planting the bulbs a little deeper than usual
- place a square of wire mesh over the bulbs and then cover with soil
- cover soil with chicken manure (if you can find it) or blood meal (may have to be replaced after heavy rain)
- try planting bulbs, that squirrels don't like e.g. daffodils, grape hyacinths, snowdrops) around and among your crocus bulbs
- Plant native spring wildflower or ephemerals instead (i.e., geranium maculatum - see photo below)
- invert some flower pots, clay saucers or add river rock over the planted area (remove in spring)
- If all else fails plant extra so that some bulbs survive!

Donna Parker - Halton MG



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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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The Dreaded Pirate (Herb) Robert

In the film “The Princess Bride”, there is a good looking villain - the Dreaded Pirate Robert. *Geranium robertianum*, commonly known as Herb Robert or less frequently Stinky Bob or Death-come-quickly, also has an attractive appearance - small pinky mauve five-petalled flowers and delicate fern-like foliage. While occasionally listed as native to North America, in fact it is an arrival from Europe, Asia, or North Africa. Unfortunately, this plant, with its pungent odour, is so adaptable to both full shade and dry sunny conditions that it is capable of taking over forest understory and squeezing out native herbaceous plants. Many gardeners have found it “volunteering” in their gardens, as it spreads by seeds which not only are ejected when the seed capsule dries, but are also able to attach to passing animals including people. *Geranium robertianum* exudes an allelopathic chemical which suppresses other plants from growing near it which also diminishes food sources for animal life. Despite its nick name of Death-come-quickly, it is not poisonous: one of the many legends attached to it suggests that when it is brought into a home, a death will soon follow. There is no scientific evidence for this, or any other of its described uses in folk remedies.



Above, Herb Robert has invaded a shade garden, obliterating the *Aquilegia* species that once grew here. Below, note the pretty flower and foliage.



Continued....

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Thugs & Invasives Cont'd

Stinky Bob is a low growing plant, 6-12 inches high usually, with a basal rosette of leaves, a multibranched stem covered with reddish hairs, and carrying its white or pink flowers in pairs. In our region it's an annual or biennial blooming in the spring through to September.

Fortunately, *Geranium robertianum* control is relatively easy: the shallow fibrous root system makes it easy to grasp the plant near its base and pull, although this does release the odour that many people find nauseating. Not such a dreadful pirate after all, if not quite the hero of the Princess Bride.

Read more:

[Weed Information Canada](#)

Some excellent photos of Herb Robert in this site

[Herb Robert - epic cure-all or villain?](#)

Interesting description of its use in folk remedies

[Ontario Wildflowers](#)

This site is one of the few to describe *Geranium robertianum* as native to Ontario. There is general agreement that it has naturalized here and is considered Class 3, moderately invasive.



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

If you have plants you think should be featured here, contact: HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com



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"What's Growing On" featuring Halton Master Gardeners

Halton Master Gardener Monthly Meeting

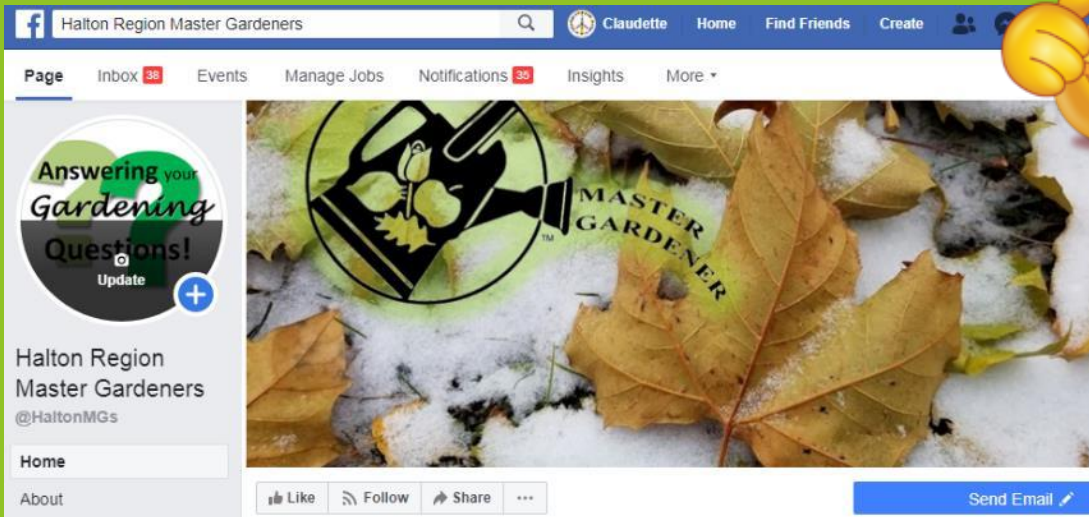
- Wednesday, December 4th at 7:15 pm - 9:30 pm [Royal Botanical Gardens](#)
- Program- Winter Sowing of perennials + a surprise!
- Reminder to bring your own mug for refreshments.

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Check our Halton Facebook page for featured winter posts!

- 12 Days of Christmas Gifts for Plant Lovers starting on December 1st
- Creating Winter Interest in the Garden Wednesdays, starting December 4th
- Garden Therapy starting weekends in December (replaces No Mow Lawn Weekend)



Do you have a gardening question?

Email: HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com

December, being the last month of the year, cannot help but make us think of what is to come. - Fennel Hudson
Photo: Art Ward



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"What's Growing On" in our Community



ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Winter Walks at [Hendrie Park](#)
Saturdays and Sundays, until
December 22

11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

•Take a guided walk with one of Santa's
Helpers to discover how the forest has
changed to survive the coming winter.



Winter Lights at the [Rock Garden](#)

Fridays to Sundays, Dec 6 to Jan 5
+ Dec 23, 30, Jan 2

Enjoy a leisurely winter stroll through
the historic Rock Garden at night.
Descending into the lower level of the
garden (including the Escarpment Train
Exhibit) includes a ~500m walk along
sloped, lit pathways.

[Event Tickets Required](#)

Burlington's Lakeside Festival of Lights

- November 29, 2019 to January 8
- 4:30 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.

Stroll through the magical lighting
displays set up at Spencer Smith
Park



Hamilton Naturalists' Club
Protecting Nature Since 1919

Larks Monday Ladies Birding

- Mondays in December, 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

Full Moon Evening Hike

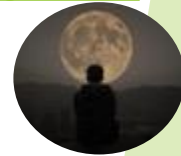
- Thurs, December 12th
- 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

•[Vinemount Meadows Sanctuary](#),
Dofasco 2000 Trail, Hamilton
Meet at the parking area south of the
railroad crossing on 10th Road, Stoney
Creek.

Listen for nocturnal species such as
owls, coyotes.

May be cancelled if cloudy, windchill or
low numbers, so check the [Hamilton
Naturalists Calendar](#) before leaving.

Please RSVP by emailing the Field
Events Director, Rob Porter --
rob@inpictures.ca.



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