

CROSS POLLINATION

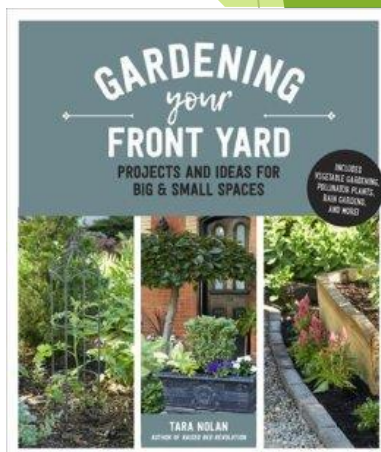
Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



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 & flowers for next year. [More info here!](#)
- ❑ **Start** seeds indoors for broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower etc.
- ❑ **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** - Read Dundas resident Tara Nolan's new book: **Gardening your Front Yard** and see if you can reduce your front lawn size by 1 sq meter this year!
- ❑ **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 require 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

March 2019



Available March 3rd



Image: Pinterest

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I wandered lonely as a cloud, That floats on high o'er vales and hills
When all at once I saw a crowd, A host of golden daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

-William Wordsworth



March
2020

Importance of Tropical Rainforests

by David Marshall - Halton Master Gardener

We all know how important the world's tropical rainforests are in the fight against climate change, by absorbing carbon dioxide and emitting oxygen, (although I am not sure how much the balance is tilted back when the trees die and decay, emitting carbon dioxide.) But although the rate is decreasing, the forests are still being clear cut at a rate far faster than they can regenerate. They are being cut for timber, mining, crops such as soya beans, sugar cane and corn, and to create grazing land for cattle, (themselves massive emitters of methane, a much more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.)

Fewer people, however, know just how important the rainforests are in the search for new medicinal products to cure a wide variety of illnesses. In recent years researchers, (and big pharma) have realized that we have only scratched the surface in discovering pharmaceutical plants which indigenous tribes have known about for thousands of years. They have used the roots, bark, sap, leaves, flowers, fruit, and seeds of forest plants to cure their ailments.

This knowledge resides with the tribe's shaman, or medicine man, and has been passed down through the generations, orally and by example, to chosen successors. As the tribes are exposed to civilization, they start to abandon their traditional ways. The shamans are not being replaced by the next generation and as they die, the old knowledge is being lost.



Photo: courtesy of: <https://www.cnn.com/2014/02/27/opinion/plotkin-amazon-shamans/index.html>

The tropical rainforests of South America, Africa and the Far East cover only 7% of the earth's surface, but they contain half of all the varieties of its flora, and it is estimated that only 1% to 5% of them have been investigated for their therapeutic value. Even so, 25% of the western world's medicines originate from rainforest plants.

There is some good news. A great effort is now being made to record the oral history of the shamans before they are no more. A report in The Guardian newspaper says that one tribe, the Matsigenka, are taking steps to safeguard the tribal knowledge for the future. They have started growing "agriforest" plots containing over 3000 plants in 100 different species used for their medicinal properties, and compiling their accumulated knowledge into a two volume 1000 page encyclopedia, the first ever record of indigenous knowledge of the shamans.

More good news is that the rate of destruction of the rain forest is slowing down considerably as public pressure pushes governments to enact legislation to control the cutting, and more efficient use is made of the areas which have already been clear cut.

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We have all heard of the superbugs which are appearing in hospitals and are becoming resistant to all known antibiotics, most of which are derived from a bacterium called actinomyces. Efforts to create effective new antibiotics in the laboratory have been largely unsuccessful, however the search for new antibiotics from the rain forest is showing some signs of success. It is a slow process though.

For every 10,000 components screened for medicinal properties, only 250 make it to clinical trials. Of these, ten will proceed to more rigorous trials, and one will become an approved drug.

In light of all this, doesn't it make sense to put a massive effort into documenting the knowledge of previous generation?

Dearest Winter



Dearest Winter,

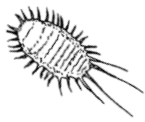
Oh, how I have loved your gifts of glistening diamonds,
those sparkling crystals draped upon the boughs of trees.
But today, I received carefully folded golden petals.
Flowers, yes flowers of gold in February, Dear Winter.
So now, I find myself yearning for Spring, longing for sunshine and blossoms.
Melt away, quickly Dear winter.
Let Spring come and fill the air with perfume and the music of birds and bees.
We can spend a few more weeks together, as friends, but it's over Winter.
My new love will soon arrive.

Hamamelis × intermedia 'Arnold Promise'

Poem & image - Halton Master Gardener Cathy Kavassalis

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I Got Troubles Oh Oh!... Houseplant problem solving

By Halton MG Allyn Walsh



March
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Part 2: I've got BUGS!

Last month, in Part [Cross Pollination February 2020](#) we looked at 4 principles for keeping houseplants healthy. Seeing diseased houseplants is always sad, but when this is due to bugs, it can also be yucky! This month, we will examine five of the most common houseplant infestations and their management.

What Could It Be?

If you have been following the basic principles outlined in the last article in this series, and are regularly inspecting your houseplants, you will spot signs of an infestation early. This includes not only visible pests, but also the damage inflicted on the plant, such as misshapen and miscoloured leaves and buds. Ideally, with good horticultural practices you won't have this happen, but even with care, pests can take hold. Common ones include aphids, scale, mealy bugs, spider mites, and gnat fungus. The first action should always be to move (quarantine) an infested plant away from your other plants (which will then have to be very carefully monitored for incipient infection). The next step is to diagnose exactly what the infestation is.



A mealy bug clings to the stem
Photo from Lisa Steinkopf The Houseplant Guru



The webs of spider mite are the most obvious sign – but the critters are there
Image from Savvy Gardening, by Jessica Walliser

Look for honeydew (insect excretion), sticky shiny spots which may go on to host unattractive sooty mould. Honeydew is produced by aphids, soft scale and mealy bugs. Aphids are tiny oval insects often found on the underside of leaves and they molt, leaving behind their empty shells. Soft scale can be seen as shield-like organisms, adhering to leaves and stems as they suck nutrients out of the plant. Mealy bugs are small and white and show up as white fuzzy areas which can be mistaken for mildew. Check for tiny webs on stems, leaves and buds, indicative of spider mites (an arachnid, like spiders). If you can hold the plant up to the light, you may well see the tiny spider mites moving around. If tiny flies appear when you water your plant, you almost certainly are dealing with fungus gnats -more information about those here:

[Cross Pollination November 2019](#)

There are some excellent websites with photographs to help you make a diagnosis:

[House Plant Guru](#) and [Homestead Brooklyn](#)

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I've Got BUGS!...continued

What Do I Do?

A difficult decision will now need to be made: is the plant salvageable or not? If the plant is heavily infested, leaves and stem badly blighted and miscoloured, or not responding to initial treatments, you may prefer to give up on it, particularly if you do not want to use pesticides or poisons. In this case, dispose of the plant and the contents of its pot carefully - most household composts do not get hot enough to kill these pests. In most cases, however, you can bring the plant back to health with some simple treatments. Washing the plants using a gentle stream of water will lower the numbers of pests, and with repetition may entirely take care of the problem. This needs to be done in a sink or shower so the critters are washed away. Some pests adhere tightly and will need to be wiped off the stems and leaves by hand. Some experts recommend using rubbing alcohol and cotton swabs to remove them, but it is wise to test the effect on an unobtrusive leaf before applying this treatment to the entire plant. Similarly, horticultural soap can be applied but should be tested on an area of the plant prior to spraying. Such a spray needs to be used regularly to have results. Most infected plants will require careful observation and repeated treatments before they can be declared "cured" and allowed to rejoin other plants. A discussion on further chemical and biological controls is beyond the scope of this article but they do exist and there are many commercial sites eager to provide information.



Steps in dealing with infested houseplants

1. Quarantine the infested plant to prevent spread.
2. Diagnose the type of infestation.
3. Decide if the plant is salvageable or not.
4. If not, place plant and soil in the green bin (not home composter) or garbage and wash pot with 10% bleach solution.
5. If salvageable, consider the treatments in Table 1 below.

Table 1



	Aphids	Mealy bugs	Soft scale	Spider mites	Fungus gnats
Quarantine	+	+	+	+	+
Water wash	+		+	+	
Hand wipe		+	+		
Insecticidal soap	+	+		+	
Replace soil					+
Adjust soil, air humidity				High	Low
Prune out infestation			+	+	

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Spotlight on Native Plants: Native Groundcovers for Full Sun

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*

Low-Growing groundcovers are in much demand by gardeners to fill empty spaces, suppress unwanted weeds & to protect the soil from the effects of erosion or drought. Until recently, plants chosen as groundcovers were often from other regions in the world.

Plants such as *Pachysandra terminalis* (Japanese Pachysandra), *Ajuga* (Bugleweed), *Thymus praecox* (Creeping Thyme), *Gallium odoratum* (Sweet Woodruff) are all found in great abundance in garden centres and home landscapes. Some are touted as an alternative to turf grass. While these plants fill in quickly, are low-maintenance and attractive, gardeners are beginning to avoid them because of their tendency to become invasive in their own garden as well as nearby natural areas. Who hasn't seen Vinca or English Ivy creeping down a ravine? These plants also do not support ecosystems needed by our local fauna. Planting native groundcovers of varying heights will attract more beneficial insects to your landscape. Why not choose from a variety of native plants listed below.

The photos of the plants for full-sun, speak for themselves. Texture, leaf shape and of course beautiful flowers. *Phlox subulata* will happily grow in full sun, in some tough situations. Often gardeners place it next to rocks, softening edges. The dense needle-like foliage grows 15 cm and the flowers are especially bright in the midday sun.

Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*) is a fast growing perennial that spreads using 'above-ground runners', acting as a living mulch protecting the soil. Why not scoop some into your containers for that 'spill' effect! In order to produce fruit, you will need to ensure you plant both male and female plants. The best way to ensure this is by planting multiple seedlings. If you're lucky enough to get fruit, you'll be attracting birds, pollinators and other wildlife.



Moss Phlox (*Phlox subulata*):

Photo: <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/phlox/subulata/>

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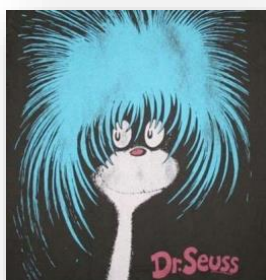


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Prairie Smoke (*Geum triflorum*) is perfect for a hot, dry garden area and is deer resistant, but fortunately, highly attractive to our threatened Bumblebees. The early emerging pink flowers and later tufts, are said to remind one of a Dr. Seuss character.



Prairie Smoke (*Geum triflorum*)

Photo: <https://freshroots.ca/product/prairie-smoke/>

For a more substantial groundcover in a sunny location, you may want to consider Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*). Actually a broadleaf evergreen shrub, Bearberry will grow best in well-drained, sandy soil (full-sun). While slow to get started, (give it a year), you will be rewarded with small tubular pinkish-white flowers, red berries and evergreen foliage that changes to a dark red in the cold weather.

Do yourself and your garden a favour - try one of these fabulous groundcovers this year. Make sure though, that you have the botanical name with you as you head out shopping!



Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)

Photo: <https://mapio.net/pic/p-55712505/>



Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

Photo Courtesy of

<http://www.vanberkumnursery.com/plant/arctostaphylos-uva-ursi/>

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Question of the Month



Question... I have an overgrown Wisteria, which has now toppled the trellis support. I would very much appreciate any helpful advice as to what I have to do to prune it but not kill this plant. (Chris HJ Master Gardeners of Ontario Facebook Group)



Oh, so sorry about this! While this is not the ideal time to prune (e.g. spring), there is nothing for it and wisteria is pretty forgiving. This will take a bit of time. Identify stems that you would like to preserve. Next I would cut back the tangle at the top and work down trying to isolate and uncoil the stems you want to save. It doesn't really help in this situation, but here is pruning guide for the future:

[How to Grow Wisteria Vine as a Tree](#)

Cathy Kavassalis, Halton Master Gardener

Growing Wisteria in Tree Form

Wisteria benefit from being trained in tree form as they are such vigorous growers that they are likely to tear down even very sturdy supports. Wisterias are usually pruned through summer to keep the wispy growths in check. Those grown as a standard will need more frequent light pruning to maintain their shape. Prune hard before the first fall frost-usually end of September. This will encourage flowering next spring.



Image: Pinterest



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“What’s Growing On” featuring Halton Master Gardeners

Halton Master Gardener Monthly Meeting

- Wednesday, March 4th at 7:00 pm - 9:30 pm
- Presentation on the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System**
- Interested in coming out to a meeting? Please email haltonmastergardeners@mail.com for further details.
- Please bring your own mug for refreshments

March
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RE-IMAGINING YOUR LANDSCAPE #GardensForOurFuture

- Dundas Public Library
- Tuesday March 3rd 7 - 8pm
- Learn about beneficial insects and how to attract them to your garden.
- Bring a photo or a drawing of your garden and we'll help you to transform it into a more interesting and biodiverse space.
- Learn from the experiences of Master Gardeners who've transformed their properties to be more sustainable, beautiful AND less work!
- Presented by Halton MGs Janet and Hariette



Janet's gorgeous front garden
in Dundas



Do you have a gardening
question?

Email:

HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com



What is the
largest
flower on
earth?



Rafflesia arnoldii, commonly called
the corpse lily is the largest flower on
Earth (1meter diameter)
Photo by Jeremy Holden

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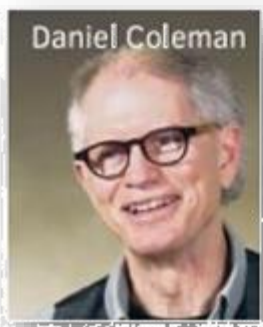


“What’s Growing On” in Our Community

Land & People Climate & Plants

An evening of insight for gardeners, activists, and other attentive humans

Hosted by Environment Hamilton & Crown Point Garden
Wednesday, March 18, 2020 at 7:30 PM - 9:30 PM



Daniel Coleman



Lorraine Johnson

- McMaster Innovation Park
- 175 Longwood Road South, Hamilton
- Cost:** Pay-What-You-May

More info at [Crown Point Garden Club](#)

How Big is Your Family?

Gardening and Climate Change

Gage Park Greenhouse

1000 Main Street East, Hamilton



- 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
- March 13, 2020 to March 22, 2020

Free admission. Donations to Hamilton Food Share are appreciated.

This is a great way to spend time with family during March Break. Bring the family, participate in our scavenger hunt and enjoy the first sights, sounds, and smells of spring!

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