

Cross Pollination

Newsletter of the Halton Master Gardeners



December – January Garden To Do List

- ❑ **Houseplants:** Indoor house conditions in December and January are challenging for many houseplants. Follow these best practices for healthier plants:
- ❑ **Watering** - use **room temperature** water. Keep a container filled and ready to use. Please don't 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. Avoid spraying succulents as it can cause [powdery mildew](#).
- ❑ **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 accurate 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 likely 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 holiday gifting!
- ❑ **Check out** our November [newsletter](#) for any garden jobs that you may have missed!

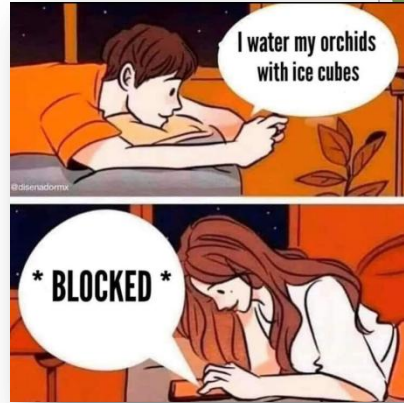


Image: Gardening Humour FB

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Have a wonderful & safe holiday season!
Please note there is **NO January newsletter**.
See you again in February!

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The Well Travelled Trug

By Halton Master Gardener Pam MacDonald

It's a bittersweet time of year. Bulbs have been planted, the garden shovel has traded places with the snow shovel. I reluctantly think about putting my tools away, including my favorite piece of gardening paraphernalia, my Sussex Trug. What, you may ask is a Sussex Trug? It is an indispensable gardening accessory for lugging your trowel, snippers, gloves and other bibs and bobs with you around the garden.



The one pictured here dates to the 1950s and has seen service in Britain, Nigeria, Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Brazil, the USA and Canada. It belonged to my mother-in-law and travelled the world with her until she gifted it to me.

Like my mother-in-law, the Sussex Trug hales from Herstmonceux (pronounced Hurst-man-zoo) Sussex, England.

The Sussex Trug was the reinvention, by Thomas Smith, of the ancient Anglo Saxon 'trog', a heavy solid wood container. Smith's design was a lightweight basket crafted from Sweet Chestnut (*Castaneda sativa*) for the handle and rim, and strips of Cricket Bat Willow (*Salix coerulea*) for the body. It caught the eye of Queen Victoria at The Great Exhibition at The Crystal Palace, Hyde Park London in 1851. She ordered 100 of them.

So grateful was Thomas Smith for this royal patronage that he delivered the order personally, pushing his handcart the 60 miles from Herstmonceux to Buckingham Palace.

While the currently living, 4 generations of our family, don't all agree on the role of the monarchy in the 21st century, we do all agree "Long Live the Trug".



Image

<http://www.merchantandmakers.com/the-history-of-sussex-trugs-interview-with-cuckmere-trug-company/>



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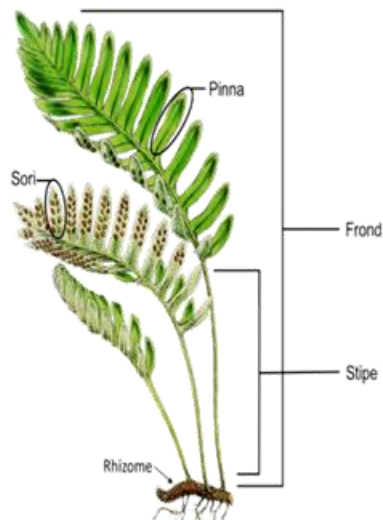
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Christmas Fern and Friends

By Halton Master Gardener Allyn Walsh

Here in Ontario we often see ferns when walking in woodlands- they can be a beautiful addition to the garden when sited properly. These ancient plants can be somewhat mysterious to the gardener and in this article we will examine their unique structure and highlight just a few of the ferns native to our region.



Ferns look different!

Our more familiar garden perennials and annuals are classified as Angiosperms - they all have flowers and seeds, even if some are rather inconspicuous. Ferns on the other hand are Pterophyta - also vascular plants but ones that produce spores rather than seeds.

We are all familiar with the graceful fronds - the whole fern "leaves" that arises directly from the root. Each frond consists of a stalk (or stipe) and a blade which carries the leaflets (also known as pinna). Fiddleheads are the emerging fern plant in spring, so called because of their resemblance to the end of a fiddle. Ferns have neither flowers nor seeds - rather they reproduce by means of minute spores which are contained in sporangia, found in a cluster called a sorus (plural sori).

Whew! Got all that?

Some ferns carry their sori on the underside of the fern frond leaflets (pinna), while others have separate fertile leaflets, and some have a separate fertile frond. The location of the sori is an important identifying feature of ferns, and if you are interested in knowing more about the structure of ferns in general, an excellent website with great photos can be found here at [Ontario Ferns](http://OntarioFerns.com)

Polystichum acrostichoides - Christmas Fern

This common native fern received its common name because it remains green throughout most of the year, and the fronds were often used as decorations during the winter holiday season.

The upright fertile fronds can be up to a metre long and will drop later in the season while the sterile fronds are shorter and remain green through winter. The fertile pinnae (leaflets) are carried at the top of the fertile fronds and are much smaller than the regular pinnae. This fern is common in our region because of the limestone bedrock and neutral pH. These ferns like shade and moist well drained soil.



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Christmas Fern and Friends - Cont'd

By Halton Master Gardener Allyn Walsh



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Osmundastrum cinnamomeum - Cinnamon fern

The common name of this swamp loving fern comes from the prominent central cinnamon coloured fertile frond. These ferns are easily confused with ostrich fern (see below) but the lighter colour of the fertile frond of the cinnamon fern serves to distinguish the two. In addition, cinnamon fern has a tuft of hair at the junction of the main stem and leaflet and a white velvety covering on the lower stems and fiddleheads.

This fern is also more tolerant of full sun conditions, although very demanding of moist environments. Because it tends to be clump forming, it is a reasonable selection for a consistently moist (even boggy) spot in the garden.



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Matteuccia struthiopteris - Ostrich fern

Ostrich ferns are recognizable by the way the fronds all grow from a single black knob. They grow in forests where the soil is rich and moist although these ferns can tolerate some sun in cooler areas. These ferns have a lovely vase shape and in ideal conditions they may grow to almost 2 metres in height and spread widely via its rhizomes. The fertile fronds of this fern are black and last throughout the winter. It is the fiddleheads of Ostrich ferns which are commercially grown and sold for eating

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Please note - Beware of foraging for ferns & other wild plants, both to avoid damaging the ecosystem and/or removing endangered plants as well as because so many are poisonous. The fiddleheads of most ferns contain carcinogens!

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Christmas Fern and Friends - Cont'd



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Athyrium filix-femina - Lady fern

Growing less than a metre tall, this fern was hugely popular in the Victorian era and there are many cultivars. It is distinguished by its comma shaped sori on the underside of the pinnules (leaflets) and the scales on the stem. It is found in forests but will tolerate some early morning or late afternoon sun. Because of its relatively small size and well behaved spread, it is a popular garden fern.



The typical comma shaped sori of lady fern

[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

The graceful fronds of lady fern

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Adiantum pedatum

Northern maidenhair fern

Maidenhair fern has a unique shape and is one of the smallest of our native ferns, growing to less than half a metre in height. The stems are dark purple, and the frond divides into two blades each with 2-9 pinnae (leaflets) arranged in a horseshoe shape. Each pinna has many very small subleaflets (pinnules) giving a dainty appearance - the sori are found along the margins of these subleaflets. There are many varieties of *Adiantum*, but here we are looking at northern maidenhair fern. It prefers part to full shade, and moist soil - it will not tolerate drying out. It does well in the rich soil of deciduous woods where it spreads slowly.

Above - the typical horseshoe arrangement of maidenhair fern

Oval insert - sori along the sub-leaflet margins [Photos from Backyard Nature](#)

Learn more about native ferns!

[Ontario Ferns](#)

[American Fern Society](#)

[Peterson Field Guide to Ferns](#) - North Eastern and Central North America 2005.



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Master Gardener Claudette Sims: Champion of Change!

By Halton Master Gardener Bev Wagar

We have amazing Master Gardeners! In this article, MG Bev Wagar highlights the many accomplishment of MG Claudette Sims, who was president of Master Gardeners of Ontario from 2014 to 2020.



Claudette subbing in for Ed Lawrence on Ontario Today CBC Radio live: “It was an exciting but terrifying experience!”

Halton Master Gardener Claudette Sims is good at getting things done—especially new, difficult, and overdue things. Fuelled by an environmental conscience that has been fired up long before she discovered gardening, she’s a stalwart champion of change. This energy and a fearless “jump in” attitude have led Claudette to some remarkable achievements.

As an elementary school teacher she launched many innovative recycling projects to raise environmental awareness. Drawing the outline of a 26-metre-long blue whale on the school playground and getting her grade five class to stand on it for a publicity photo was one of the big ones. The vermicomposting project was a wiggly lot of little ones, which tragically ended up stuck to the school’s hardwood floors after the heating system went berserk one weekend. Claudette quips “You learn a lot through your mistakes”.

Upon retirement from her teaching and consulting career with the Hamilton Wentworth School Board, Claudette took her love of plants, birds, and insects to a higher level. With no formal training or education in horticulture, she jumped in with the Halton Master Gardeners. After one course at Guelph, she realized she was “learning way more just being a MG and giving advice.” Always a teacher, Claudette infuses her thorough, well-researched advice with patience and kindness. In recent years Claudette’s appreciation of native plants and ecological gardening, inspired (like many of us) by Doug Tallamy, has changed how the Halton group does its work.

Most recently, Claudette has developed a keen interest in the traditional wisdom of Indigenous peoples after reading Robin W. Kimmerer’s [Braiding Sweetgrass](#). “They consider plants ‘people’ & trees are called ‘standing people’. They see a reciprocity between plants and ‘human’ people. We have a responsibility to care for the plants and in turn the plants will care for us. I also love that they consider plants our elders-plants did evolve way before us, so makes total sense to me.”

Cable 14 Hamilton
10 hrs · 🌐

Airing on Cable 14, Hamilton Life talks succulents with Master Gardener Claudette Sims, Bump, Baby & Toddler Marketplace shows some cool ideas, a local research study proving successful with seniors GERAS Centre, talking local theatre options with Lyla Miklos and local students making a difference while creating art with garbage.



Claudette was a regular on Cable 14’s “Hamilton Life”.



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Master Gardener Claudette Sims: Champion of Change! Cont'd

By Halton Master Gardener Bev Wagar

Claudette created Halton MGs first website and Facebook page & more recently has taken the lead on the [MGOI FB forum](#) which is growing in popularity. She is also behind the group's award winning online chats with [CBC Radio Hamilton](#) and Ontario Today. "I'm super proud of our Halton group" she says. "It's evolved... new members have brought such interesting skill sets and ideas. I love our focus on sustainable gardening and our leadership in education about ecologically productive native plants, science-based gardening information, the dangers of invasive plants and, most recently, fighting the spread of the invasive jumping worms."

Her leadership work soon moved from the local, to the zone, to the provincial level. Claudette's six-year term as president of Master Gardeners of Ontario (which ended in 2020) contributed to many organizational updates. One of her priorities was to make it more volunteer friendly by eliminating bureaucracy in volunteer hours reporting. She demurs from the word "turnaround"—change was already underway when she became VP in 2012—but admits that "there were a lot of challenges at the beginning. We were totally restructuring the organization, from geographical representation to 'functional' roles." Claudette adds: "Happily, that has proven to be a success!"

Incredibly, Claudette finds time for interests outside of gardening. She looks forward to the return of rehearsals with her ukulele group (the "Almost Awesome Trio") as well as in-person line dancing sessions. Until then, line dancing happens with a friend every Thursday in their kitchens. "Modern or Latin music please, not country!" Dancing to 'Despacito' is her current favourite. ☺

When asked about her gardening bucket list, Claudette dreams of touching the giant west-coast Redwoods or the [Madagascar baobab](#) trees. She adds, "I've also always wanted to visit the old growth pine forest in Temagami, which is a more realistic goal." Nearer to home, she continues to overhaul her large property which abuts a ravine off the Red Hill Creek in Hamilton's Greenhill neighbourhood. Almost all the invasives are gone now, and Claudette continues to remove exotic plants to make room for native species.



Gardening presentation at the Burlington Library with friend and MG Janet Mackey.



Playing with "Almost Awesome Trio" friends Kay & Nancy at a local charitable organization



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Master Gardener Claudette Sims: Champion of Change! Cont'd

By Halton Master Gardener Bev Wagar

Thinking back on her gardening journey she has this to say to beginner gardeners: "Start with the soil--healthy soil equals healthy plants. Don't ignore the old nugget of wisdom about right plant / right place. Reject and remove invasive plants. Find places for the native species."

And, perhaps most importantly, "Let your garden heal and comfort you."



Adding native plants to her garden helped Claudette receive a [Monarch Award](#)



Halton Master Gardeners have won several awards for their innovative online garden chats with CBC radio which run from May to September. Here's Ed Lawrence presenting their first award at the International Master Gardener Conference.



Hugging one of the "standing people" in Alaska



Helping remove invasive plants at MG Cathy Kavassalis's cottage along with MG Janet Mackey "I'm so lucky to count such talented and kind MGs as my friends."



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Question of the Month Fumigating Wildflower Seeds

by Halton MG Claudette Sims

“Can you recommend a way of fumigating wildflower seeds to eliminate insect eggs or fungal issues?”

This question puzzled me. I did find references to fumigating seed for pests of agricultural crops, but wasn't sure how it applied to wildflower seed. I turned to Brenda van Ryswyk of Halton Conservation for advice. Here's what Brenda said:

“The risk of insect eggs on the seeds is minimal. You can reduce the risk by cleaning away all the chaff or leaf/other debris if possible as insect eggs are more likely on the leaves of the plant. Even if there are eggs that manage to survive on the collected seed the chance they are a very bad species of insect is very low as well. I would argue we WANT more insects in our garden as growing native plants provides food for insects and those insects then provide food for the birds (and whole food web). But that said we do not want to try to spread unknown insects around....

The main thing to keep in mind is to collect seed as locally as you can to where it is being planted. Don't transport seed over long distances (i.e. keep seed collected in Halton Region to grow somewhere in Halton Region). That way if you do happen to have any insects in your seed you are keeping that insect where it is already naturally occurring.

Once sorted and cleaned I store my seed in the freezer. This will keep any insects that may have hitched a ride in with the seed in hibernation. The only real concern I usually have with insects on collected seed is the adult insects that EAT seeds. If not put in the freezer they can eat their way through my collected seed. (It's only happened once, with a batch of Solidago- they were already in the seed eating when I collected it, and keeping it at room temp for a long time let them eat their way through a lot of the seed).

As for fungus, dry seed as soon as possible. Keep seed dry and well ventilated (store in paper, not plastic) or with a silica pack that will absorb moisture. Once well dried, store in an airtight glass container in the freezer with silica. Fungus and mold are pretty much everywhere and their spores can spread far on the wind. So keep things dry and have air flow when drying to prevent loss from fungus/mold. And again, share seed in the general area/region/part of the world they were collected, that will keep any hitchhikers local as well.

Last thing- don't buy seed from overseas -importing new invasive species is a scary thing!

Brenda Van Ryswyk -Natural Heritage Ecologist ”

What I loved about Brenda's reply was her take on insects. Too often gardeners see ALL insects as “bad” when in fact most insects are beneficial. Insects are “the little things that run the world”. We actually want & need them in our gardens and most of them just eat other insects or are food for birds.



Learn more!

[Beneficial Insects](#)
[The Little Things that Run the World](#)

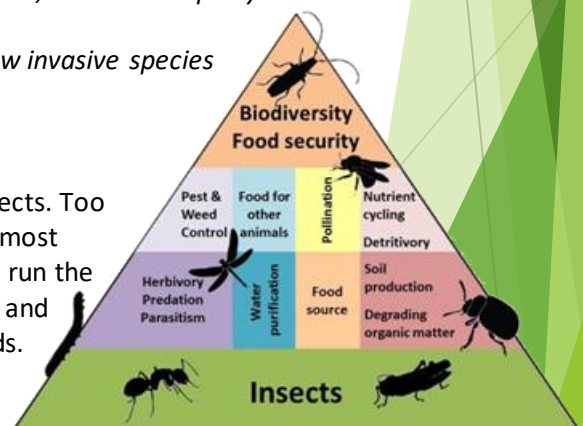


Image: <https://www.buglife.org.uk/campaigns/no-insectinction/>

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"What's Growing On"

Halton Master Gardener Meetings are still **being held virtually** using Zoom. We are hoping to restart in person meetings in the late spring, so stay tuned.

Fill in our [online contact form](#) if you're interested in coming to a meeting, joining our group or requesting a speaker for your club or interested group.

We are still answering your garden questions, so send us an email! It's what we do best! HaltonMasterGardeners@Gmail.com



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Hamilton Naturalists' Club
Protecting Nature Since 1919

WEBINAR

- **Become a Backyard "Batter": How to Spot and Support Ontario's Bats**
- **When:** Mon, December 6, 7:30pm – 9:00pm
- Zoom Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83351442796>
- Passcode: 199072
- More information [here](#)



Educational, Inspiring and FUN Videos!

- [The Little Things That Run The World - How to create a pollinator backyard](#) (Doug Tallamy)
- [Why Is The Very Hungry Caterpillar So Dang Hungry?](#)
- [Backyard Squirrel Maze 2.0- The Walnut Heist](#)
- [What we Have Forgotten](#) Sustainable Human



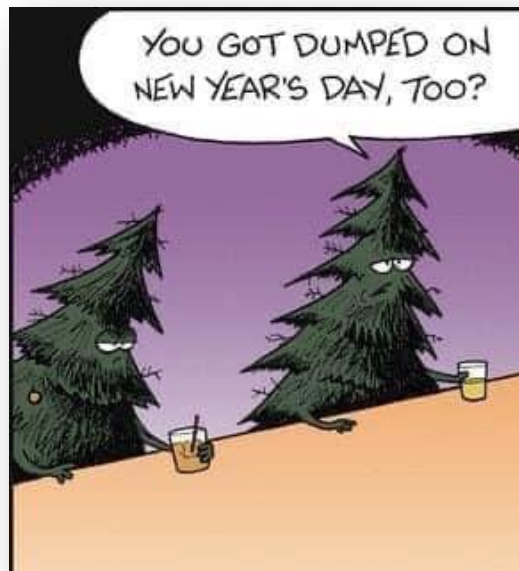
**Hard to believe it's the
end of another year!**

Thank you to our talented
Master Gardener volunteers
who put this newsletter
together for you each month:



- Isabel Belanger (editing)
- Hariette Henry & Allyn Walsh (writers)
- Janet Mackey (Webmaster/blog)
- Claudette Sims (writer/formatting/humour)
- Bev Wagar (writer, newsletter distribution)
- Our various guest writers too!

And to you our readers for your support!
Stay well and see you in February!



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