

CROSS POLLINATION

Halton Master Gardeners Monthly Newsletter
JUNE 2025 | VOL. 18 ISSUE 5

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Halton Region
Master Gardeners



Image: [Bellwort, *Uvularia grandiflora*](#)

Bellwort, *Uvularia grandiflora*

By Isabel Belanger, Halton Master Gardener

Uvularia grandiflora or Merrybells is one of the first flowers of spring and one of my favourite plants. It produces numerous yellow flowers in early spring for about 2 weeks but is not ephemeral like many other early spring perennials. This is a plant that keeps on giving—beautiful yellow lightly scented spring flowers, interesting leaf shape with a fresh green colour all summer, and a flush of gold in fall—three seasons of interest.

The name comes from the human uvula (commonly known as 'that thing which hangs down at the back of your throat') and means 'little grape' in Latin.

Formerly in the *Liliaceae* (Lily) family, *Uvularia* has been reassigned to *Colchicaceae* (Autumn-crocus). There are 5 species native to Ontario; the two most common ones are [Uvularia grandifolia](#) and *U. sessile*. The specific epithets say it all—*grandifolia* has larger leaves and flowers, and *sessilifolia* leaves are [sessile](#).

Uvularia grandiflora is a clump-forming perennial reaching about 2' (60 cm) tall with a spread of 1-1 ½' (30-45 cm). A droopy yellow bell-shaped flower is produced at the end of each stem; flowers are about 3.8 cm (1 ½") long consisting of 6 tepals that flare at the ends, 6 stamens, and a pistil with a tripartite style. The yellow anthers of the stamens are large and elongated but are mostly hidden by the tepals. Flowers last about 2 weeks and have a slight smell.

Continued on next page

BELLWORT, *UVULARIA GRANDIFLORA* (CONT'D)

The whole plant has a somewhat droopy appearance but straightens up once the flowers are finished. The leaves are perfoliate (leaf forms right around the stem, to the point where the stem appears to grow right through the leaf).



Image: Isabel Belanger

Roots are rhizomatous and will sometimes produce offsets, but it does not spread readily. Seeds are a 3-celled obovoid shaped capsule with 3 rounded lobes and rounded tips; each cell of the capsule contains several seeds. The seeds require a double dormancy (warm-moist, cold-moist) to germinate.

Pollinators and Faunal Associations

The flowers provide an important source of nectar and pollen early in the season for Bumblebees, Mason Bees (*Osmia* spp.), Halictid Bees (*Halictus* and *Lasioglossum* spp.), and Andrenid Bees (*Andrena* spp.). *Andrena uvulariae* is a pollen specialist bee. Ants collect the seeds, taking them back to their nests to consume the nutrient rich [elaiosome](#), and then discard the seeds.

Growing Conditions

Uvularia are woodland perennials that love the shade of deciduous trees. Their preference is for moderately moist, hummus rich loamy soils with a layer of decaying leaves—i.e. woodland habitat in shade to part shade.

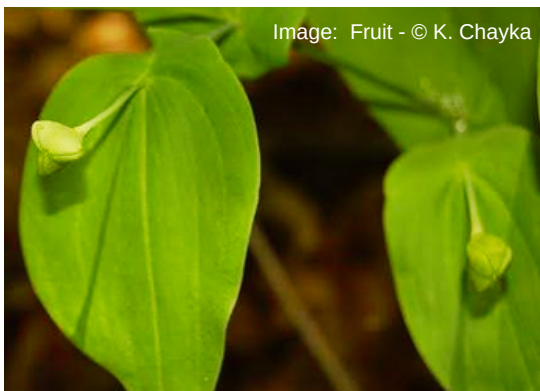


Image: Fruit - © K. Chayka

NAME OF PLANT - DETAILS AT A GLANCE

FULL SHADE

PART SHADE



MOIST

MEDIUM

Plant Type, Family: Perennial, *Colchicaceae***Height/Width:** (H) 60 cm (2') (W) 30-45 cm (1-1.5')**Features:** Three-season interest with early bell-shaped flowers and interesting green foliage turning golden in fall.**Faunal Value:** Nectar and pollen for early bees including specialist bee *Andrena uvulariae*. Ants collect the seeds to consume the nutrient rich elaiosome, and then discard the seeds.**Companion Plants:** Other woodland species such as: Hepatica, Wild Ginger, *Viola* spp., Mayapples, Tiarella, Ferns, Wild Geranium and Foamflower.**Landscape Uses:** Woodland and shade gardens.**Native Range:** Ontario to Quebec.**Supports:** Essential to [Andrena uvulariae](#), a mining bee who can only feed on Bellworts.[Vascan Range](#)

Image: Isabel Belanger

Read More!

- [Laidback Gardener](#)
- [Pacific Bulb Society](#)
- [Illinois Wildflowers](#)
- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)



JUNE GARDEN 'TO DO' LIST

By Claudette Sims, Halton Master Gardener

- ☐ **Perennials** – Stake and support tall plants (e.g., peonies, sunflowers, delphiniums). You can give certain perennials a "[Chelsea chop](#)" (e.g., [ironweed](#), [asters](#), goldenrods, monarda, phlox) to keep them shorter and sturdier and encourage more stems and blooms.
- ☐ **Veggies & Annuals** – Stake or cage vegetables like **tomatoes** and beans as needed. Avoid blossom end rot by watering tomatoes regularly. Mound **potatoes** to maximize production and protect tubers from sun exposure. Direct sow warm season veggies such as **corn**, **beans**, **cukes** and **squash**, and flowering annuals such as **nasturtiums**, **marigolds** and **cosmos**. Grow **herbs** near the kitchen for easy access. Plant invasive **mints** and **oregano** in containers to contain spread.
- ☐ **Weeds & Invasives** – Do weekly rounds of your garden to remove weeds and invasive plants. Use this [ID guide](#) for weedy lawn and garden plants. *Note that some native plants are included in many "weed" guides.* Use a line trimmer to keep weeds under control on bricked areas or driveways-they are also handy for trimming the edge of a garden bed!




Reuse an old garden umbrella for climbing vines or vegetables! Image: [Riana Noyes FB](#)

“ Read this great article about Halton MG Margaret Larson who loves monarchs, then plant [milkweed](#) to really help them! ”



CLICK HERE 

- ☐ **Spring bulbs** – Pinch off tops to prevent spent flowers from going to seed. When leaves turn yellow they can be removed and bulbs can also be lifted, divided and replanted if too crowded. Divide **fall crocus** bulbs in June or July once the leaves have died down.
- ☐ **Pests** – Whenever possible, resist the urge to reach for a pesticide so that predatory insects have a chance to feed on insect pests. **Japanese beetles** appear in June. Hand pick, knock into a bucket of soapy water, or use a hand vacuum to suck them up! **Aphids** can be squished or knocked off plants using a strong spray from your garden hose. Make this totally non-toxic [mosquito trap](#) that will attract female mosquitoes and reduce overall numbers. Reduce **earwig** numbers with [traps](#) to leave in the garden where earwigs are present, e.g., paper rolled up and secured with masking tape. Each day, tap the paper straw against a bucket of soapy water to empty the trap, then return to the garden. Replace the traps and repeat. **Squash bug** control—all you need is duct tape and this [cool video](#)! Inspect boxwood pests like **Box Tree Moth** (BTM) on a weekly basis. Watch this BTM [training video](#) to learn more.
- ☐ **Lawn** – Follow [good cultural practices](#) to have a healthy lawn. Mow high, water less frequently but deeply, and feed with compost.
- ☐ **Water** newly planted trees and plants regularly; water lawn and existing trees less frequently but deeply. Potted plants will need more frequent watering. Use soaker hoses for [water wise gardening](#). 

Beauty and the Beasts - Invasive Plants

Periwinkle (*Vinca Minor*)

Kirsten McCarthy, Halton Master Gardener

I have an area in my backyard, under my Linden tree, that is bare soil. There are very small patches of grass around the trunk and a bunch of weeds, but for the most part, it is devoid of any beautiful or beneficial vegetation. I overseeded it a couple of times two years ago with grass, but it didn't survive. I call it my "problem area", or "the dead zone".

Many gardeners share in my struggle to find a suitable plant for problem areas in their own gardens. What plant grows in dense shade, spreads to cover the bare ground, and is fast growing? Doing a quick google search will reveal that Periwinkle, *Vinca minor* fits the criteria to a tee and is poised as a "hardy, fast-growing ground cover that can tolerate full-shade and forms a dense lush carpet".

Don't be fooled by the pretty flowers. This invasive plant "poses a threat to native biodiversity."



Image: [Conservation Halton](#)

This description doesn't make it sound bad at all, but in fact, periwinkle is also highly invasive. The [Conservation Halton](#) website describes Periwinkle as "an invasive groundcover plant that poses a threat to native biodiversity. It thrives in a number of habitats but the thickest growth is produced in moist and shady environments."



Periwinkle's extensive root system makes it a challenge to remove and control.

Image: [Credit Valley Conservation-Removing Periwinkle](#)



Periwinkle invading a forest near Owen Sound.

Image: Heather Doyle

[Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation](#)

Unfortunately, this plant has also escaped gardens and spread throughout Ontario's forest understories, choking out native ephemeral species. Although Periwinkle prefers shaded, moist conditions along streambeds, it is also tolerant of dry, poor soils, so it has become a popular choice for garden areas with these conditions. Periwinkle hails from the Mediterranean, and was introduced in North America as an ornamental and medicinal herb.

Identification

Periwinkle has slender trailing stems that can grow 1-2 metres long but do not grow more than 20-70 centimetres above ground. Its shiny, dark leaves taper at both ends and grow opposite each other on the stem. The violet-purple flowers appear in early spring, have five petals and are about 2.5-7 centimetres wide.

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INVASIVE PLANTS - PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Removal

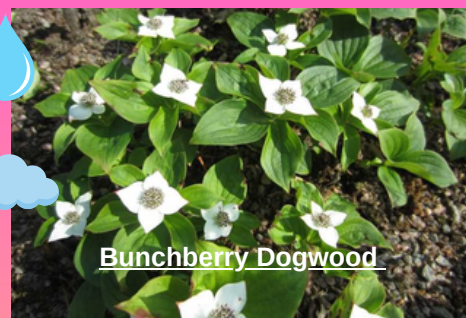
Remove periwinkle after a rain, when the soil is soft. Use a shovel or garden fork to loosen the soil and remove the entire plant. While digging, check that no roots are left behind as even a small piece can grow into a new plant. Once removed, put periwinkle in a garbage bag and leave it out in the sun for a few days to kill it. Do not compost. As with many invasives, complete removal can be a multi-year process. Monitor the area regularly and immediately remove any new periwinkle shoots. Early spring is often a perfect time to watch for it as it greens up earlier than other garden plants.

Alternatives

A beautiful and beneficial alternative to Periwinkle is [Wild Ginger](#) (*Asarum canadense*). Wild Ginger is an evergreen perennial groundcover that can form large, lush mats through its stems and extensive rhizomes. It's ideal for moist shady conditions, but will tolerate drier areas once established. The leaves can be heart or kidney shaped, and are a lovely deep green with a delicious scent of lemon-ginger! The unusually shaped flowers with long spurs are brownish-purple in colour and are hidden under the leaves. Wild Ginger relies on ants to spread the plant! The flowers produce seeds with fleshy attachments (elaiosomes) that ants take back to their nests. Ants consume the elaiosomes and discard the seeds which will germinate under favourable conditions. The handsome foliage and high shade tolerance make it a great choice for a woodland, shade, or rain garden. Plant it as an edging or border plant and it will easily naturalize as a deciduous ground cover in your garden to fix a "problem area".

More Alternatives

- For dry shade: In Our Nature nursery has a great list of [21 plants!](#)
- For damp shade: [Bunchberry](#), [Dwarf Raspberry](#), [Wild Strawberry](#) and most ferns.
- For dry sun: Pearly Everlasting, [Field Pussytoes](#).



Bunchberry Dogwood



Pearly Everlasting



Spotted Geranium

Images: Missouri Botanical Gardens

Learn More!

- [Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation](#)
- [Conservation Halton Periwinkle Factsheet](#)
- [Credit Valley Conservation-Removing Periwinkle](#)
- [Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan](#)



Image: Leaves and flower of [Asarum canadense](#)

STRAWBERRIES IN HANGING BASKETS

Janet Padiak, Halton Master Gardeners

Strawberries are one of the greatest delights for the gardener. Straight from the plant, they are fragrant and luscious. But strawberries are prone to damage from pests – insects, slugs, and foraging wildlife – so what is an organic gardener to do?

One strategy is to grow the berries in hanging baskets. Benefits are:

- The height of the basket keeps them out of reach of typical pests such as aphids, spider mites and crawling slugs.
- Hanging plants are less accessible to mice, squirrels (usually) and raccoons; the result is that there is minimal loss of ripening berries to these opportunistic foragers.
- There is free air circulation around the plants and this reduces potential for fungal diseases such as anthracnose and botrytis grey mold.
- It is easy to position the baskets in full sun (6-8+ hours per day) to get the best crop.
- Harvesting berries is simple – just reach out your hand to pick.

These baskets get heavy when saturated and full of berries so they need to be substantial. Wire baskets hung with metal chains are best; they can be 30 cm(12") to 40 cm(16") in diameter and about 20 cm(8") at their maximum depth. The basket liners should be porous so that excess moisture will drain – strawberries hate wet feet. Coco fiber or burlap works well. Be sure to hang the plants from a bracket or hook that is well-anchored.

The containers can use any good quality commercial container soil. Choose day-neutral strawberries which continue to bloom and fruit well into September rather than June-bearing strawberries which cease flowering by July.

For 30 cm baskets, plan for 4 plants (around the edges) and for 40 cm baskets, plan for 6-8 plants (5 around the edges and the rest in the middle).



One of gardening's best kept secrets is how easy it is to grow strawberries from seed. Seeds sown in early March ('Delizz' is one such variety) will begin to fruit by late June. These plants generally survive the winter and can be used the next year, or new plants can be grown from seed.

While strawberries like free draining soil, baskets should not dry out. You can gently lift from the bottom of the basket and tell by the weight whether the basket needs watering. You can also use the "finger check": insert your finger into the soil 3 cm/1" deep. If your finger is dry at the tip, the planter needs water.

You will find that, during summer's heat, the baskets will need daily watering if there is no significant rain. When the weather is cooler, every second day is probably sufficient. To keep the plant producing big berries all summer, begin fertilizing every 2 weeks in July using a balanced fertilizer such as that formulated for tomatoes. The plants will produce runners that will hang beautifully over the edge of the baskets.

Leave these runners as they will produce berries, but when the runners produce three and four tiers clip the bottom runners off to direct the energy into fruit formation. When there are multiple baskets with tiers of strawberries hanging off the sides, nothing looks more beautiful.



Further Information



- [Pest management in day-neutral strawberries](#)
- [The Secret to Growing Great Strawberries in Planters and Hanging Baskets](#)
- [Burlap Basket Liners](#)





By Hariette Henry, Halton Master Gardener

A witches' broom (or witch's broom) is a deformity mostly found in woody plants, typically trees and conifers. It can be described as a mass of short shoots, emerging from a central point often toward the end of a branch. The resulting compact growth is noticeably different from the rest of the plant. From a distance they can often be mistaken for a bird's nest. There may be only one broom in a tree, or there may be many scattered throughout the tree. In some cases, the brooms are quite large in size and easily spotted. In others, they are small and well-hidden.



*The telltale intense growth of a witches' broom in a pine tree.
Image: Keith LeFevre*



[Witches' brooms](#) on a Birch tree

In normal tree growth, the leading shoot will produce an auxin (a hormone) which will slow the growth of the secondary and tertiary shoots to prevent them from overtaking it. Unusual growth occurs when the presence and concentration level of auxin is interfered with by an outside factor. The intense growth seen in these affected trees may be triggered in several ways, including pest, fungus, or mistletoe infestation, or death of terminal buds by environmental conditions. Phytoplasmas (bacteria that infect the phloem tissues) transferred by insect vectors are also blamed for the odd growth in some plants.

What is a Witches' Broom? Can they be damaging or even fatal to my woody plants? How should I manage them?

In Southern Ontario, spruce and fir trees are among the most frequently affected by witches' brooms. Other susceptible species include birch, lilac, oak and pine.

Sometimes witches' brooms aren't caused by disease but are instead the product of a natural genetic mutation in the growing bud tissue of plants. Cuttings from these "sports" can be propagated and retain their unique appearance; this has resulted in the development of several commercially successful dwarf cultivars of species like pine.

Typically, a witches' broom lasts for many years, often for the life of the host plant. You'll often see huge witches' brooms on conifers that can be decades old. You can simply let them grow as a curiosity if you want or, if they aren't to your liking, prune them off at the point of origin (they may grow back in future years) or remove the branch that bears them.



Montgomery Dwarf Blue Spruce is one of the best dwarf spruce clones grown from a witches' broom. Image: University of Arkansas featured "Plant of the Week"

Further Information:

- [What is a Witches' Broom? American Conifer Society, June 7, 2023](#)
- [Pests in the Garden and Landscape. UCIPM, Resource 2021](#)
- [Witch's Brooms, American Conifer Society, Winter 2017](#)
- [Witches' Brooms, What they look like and why they form, Annabel Kemp Nov. 2024](#)



Garden Inspiration!

Our HMG Seedlings & Winter Sowing Results



Lynn Courtney,
A variety of Zinnia Seedlings



New England Aster,
Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

Carolyn Van Slightenhorst
Winter Sowing

Isabel Belanger
Winter Sowing

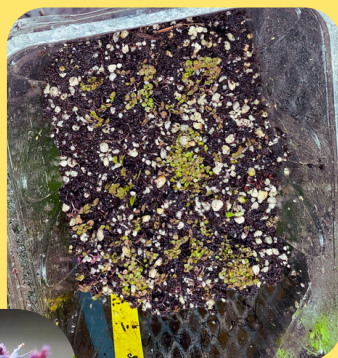


Bowman's root,
Gillenia trifoliata, syn.
Porteranthus trifolius



Wild Lupine,
Lupinus perennis

Allyn Walsh, Winter Sowing



Anise Hyssop,
Agastache foeniculum



Pale Purple
Coneflower,
Echinacea pallida

What's Growing On?



HALTON REGION MASTER GARDENERS

Come Grow with Us

Monarch Awards and Garden Journeys

These FREE summer events are happening in the City of Hamilton including:

Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough, Glanbrook, Stoney Creek & Waterdown!



Monarch Awards

Creating Communities of Biodiversity

Does Your Garden Support Nature?



Applications Open
June 1st - 30th for Hamilton Gardeners



The Monarch Awards are back! We are recognizing Hamilton gardeners who are transforming their front yard, residential spaces into thriving habitats for pollinators, birds, and wildlife.

First launched in 2016 in Hamilton by Bev Wagar, the awards celebrated ecological gardening. Now, almost a decade later, the program takes flight again, led by **Halton Region Master Gardeners** who are revitalizing the initiative with a fresh, inclusive approach.

Whether your garden is big or small, wild or neat, what matters is how it supports nature. Let's recognize the everyday gardeners helping to restore our urban ecosystems, one native plant at a time.

🏆 Is your garden more than just beautiful?

🌱 Does it welcome pollinators, support native plants, and help build a healthier city?

🌿 The Monarch Awards are celebrating gardens that give back to nature.

🦋 Whether you have: A front yard biodiversity haven; a pollinator garden; a natural prairie butterfly paradise; or a wildlife sanctuary - we want to see it!

Let's show our city how green — and wildly alive our gardens can be.

Media Contacts: Janet Mackey, Pam MacDonald
Co-Chairs of the Halton Region Monarch Awards

Questions? Contact: monarchawards.hmg@gmail.com



Garden Journeys

Aug. 8-10 & 15-17



Applications Open Now!
Accepted until June 30, 2025



There is a growing interest in helping local ecosystems by wise stewardship of resources and promoting biodiversity. We all have lots to learn about how to create gardens that can make a difference, not only through their beauty but also by supporting our native flora and fauna.

We can learn from gardeners who have been on the journey to make nature-friendly gardens. One way is by visiting their gardens and talking with them about their process. In 2023, Halton Master Gardeners initiated an open garden event for the public in the City of Hamilton. Over 10 days in August, members of the public were invited to visit close to 50 gardens, free of charge, with gardeners usually present to discuss the joys and the challenges of their journey. After this success, the decision was made to continue the event biennially.

If you or someone you know has been on the path to creating a sustainable, eco-friendly garden in the greater City of Hamilton, consider participating as a host gardener.

Information on applying to be a host gardener is available on the Halton Master Gardeners website. When available, the addresses and open times will be posted there too.

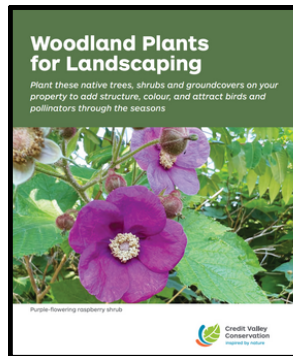
[Garden Journeys](#)

What's Growing On?

By Trish Moraghan, Halton Master Gardener



[Learn more here](#)



[Learn more here](#)



Sedges



Native Ground Covers



Drought Tolerant Plants

Hamilton and Burlington Rose Society Show



Saturday and Sunday
June 14th and 15th

10 AM to 5PM

[Learn more here](#)

Simply Local - Halton's Farms

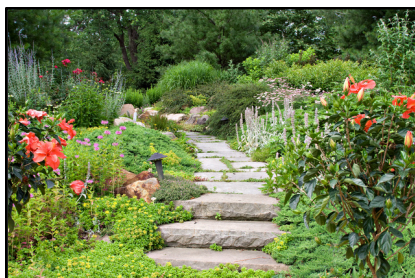


Buy local and support farmers

See Interactive Map and more details
[here](#)



Oakville
Sunday, June 22nd
10 AM to 4:30 PM

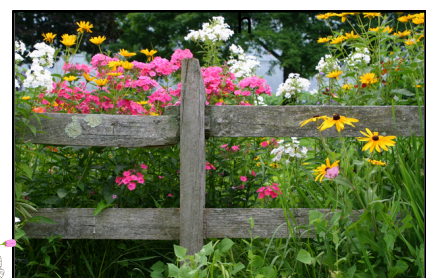


[Learn more here](#)

Garden Tours



Guelph
Sunday, June 8th
1 to 5:30 PM



[Learn more here](#)

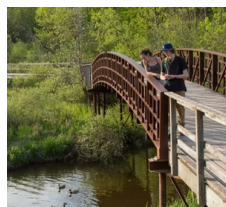
What's Growing On?



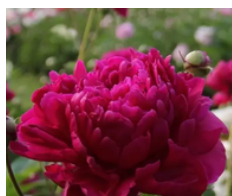
Royal Botanical Gardens



[Yoga](#)



[Trails](#)



[Bloom Watch](#)



[Hendrie Park](#)



HALTON REGION MASTER GARDENERS

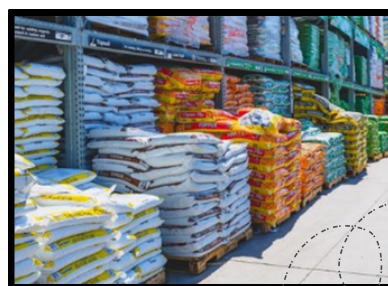
Container Gardening with Native Plants



[Learn more here](#)



Choosing the Right Soil for Your Garden



[Learn more here](#)



Check our [calendar](#) for events

About Our Newsletter

Cross Pollination is published monthly from February to December and is written and prepared by our dedicated volunteers. Halton Master Gardeners are experienced gardeners who have studied horticulture extensively and continue to upgrade their skills through technical training. We strive to provide science-based, sustainable gardening information to the general public. The information in our newsletter has been verified by our volunteers to the best of our abilities, but given the scope of horticulture and science some concepts may not reflect current knowledge. The content displayed in our newsletter is the intellectual property of Halton Region Master Gardeners and their authors. It can be shared in its entirety, but specific content should not be reused, republished or reprinted without the author's consent.

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