CROSS POLLINATION

Halton Master Gardeners Monthly Newsletter
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Halton Region Master Gardeners

Image: Pixabay

Common Snowberry *(Symphoricarpos albus)*

By Tinamarie Jones, Halton Master Gardeners

As other shrubs have grown in popularity, the Common Snowberry has sadly become less common in our gardens. A favourite in many older gardens, it is frequently overlooked by today's gardener. However, this perennial deciduous shrub has much to recommend it. In addition to its visual appeal and striking winter fruit, it thrives in clay and poor soil, is drought resistant, regenerates quickly after fire, and provides excellent erosion control. Gardeners looking for a reliable, low-maintenance shrub with year-round appeal should consider giving the Common Snowberry a try.

A member of the honeysuckle family, the Common Snowberry is native to North America, with an extensive range that includes the US and Canada. Native to North America, the Common Snowberry is considered invasive in the UK. Aside from Common Snowberry or just Snowberry, this shrub is also known by the following common names: Waxberry, Ice Apple, White Coralberry, and White Snowberry. The genus name *Symphoricarpos* comes from the Greek symphorein which means 'bearing together', with karpos meaning 'fruits'. This name illustrates how the flowers and fruits of the Common Snowberry appear in clusters. The specific epithet '*alba*' refers to the white colour of the fruit itself.

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COMMON SNOWBERRY (SYMPHORICARPOS ALBUS) (CONT'D)

In appearance, the Common Snowberry is an erect shrub, tending towards a charming rounded or globe-like growth habit, with stiff main branches as well as numerous smaller shoots throughout. It can grow 1-2 metres (3-6 feet) tall. The overall width of the shrub will vary, as it has the ability to spread underground via rhizomes as well as by shoots, suckers and seeds, and can easily form a thicket if not pruned occasionally.

The branches and shoots are long and hollow, bearing opposite leaves which are around 5 cm or 2 inches long. There are 2 leaves per node. These small leaves are simple and typically ovoid or elliptical in shape; however, the leaf shape is not consistent – some leaves will be smooth edged, and others will be lobed, sometimes deeply, or have a wavy edge. The leaf colour is a matte green. In fall the leaves turn yellow and provide unremarkable fall interest.

Snowberry has small light pink flowers.
Image: *Portland Nursery*

The flower itself is very small, approximately .5 cm or ¼ of an inch long. As the genus name indicates, the Common Snowberry flowers on an inflorescence which is a raceme of up to 16 flowers. The tiny flowers are bright pink in colour, round, and bell-shaped, with a 5-toothed calyx. The flower has pointed lobes at the tip, and the inside of the flower has white hairs. Common Snowberries flower typically between June and July, although the weather in some regions can lengthen the blooming period from May to August.

Image: *Garden City Cymru*

The fruit of the Common Snowberry is a fleshy white berry-like drupe. The waxy fruit is approximately 1 cm or 3/8 inch in size and contains two seeds. The fruits of the Common Snowberry remain on the shrub throughout the winter and provide exceptional visual interest in the winter garden. Although the fruits are toxic to humans, many birds including robins, grouse, thrushes, grosbeaks and waxwings enjoy them.

In terms of reproduction, the Common Snowberry reproduces best vegetatively. The shrub sprouts and suckers easily and these can be transplanted. In addition, the shrub is rhizomatous and these rhizomes can be easily turned into additional shrubs. Unfortunately, the Common Snowberry does not reproduce well from seed. Therefore, if a gardener wishes to grow more of this shrub, replanting a sucker or transplanting a piece of rhizome are the recommended routes. These options have a much greater likelihood of success than attempting to germinate seeds. In addition, the rhizomatous structure of the shrub allows it to bounce back quickly in the event of a fire. In areas with Common Snowberries, they are often one of the first plants to re-establish after a blaze, as the rhizomes simply send up fresh shoots.

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COMMON SNOWBERRY (SYMPHORICARPOS ALBUS) (CONT'D)

The Common Snowberry is not particular as to habitat. It grows well in a wide variety of soils and is known for doing particularly well in clay soil and in rocky or gravelly soil. Although it enjoys moist soil and can often be found on riverbanks and flood plains, it does not like to have wet feet. Ideal soil conditions are well drained soil that is slightly acid to alkaline (pH 6-8.5). It can tolerate any degree of light except for full shade. For best flower and fruit production, full sunlight is essential. The Common Snowberry is also drought and pollution resistant. It is largely pest resistant; however, some diseases like anthracnose, powdery mildew, rust and leaf spot can sometimes affect the shrub.

Snowberry is the larval host for the Snowberry Clearwing moth. Image: Butterflies and Moths of North America

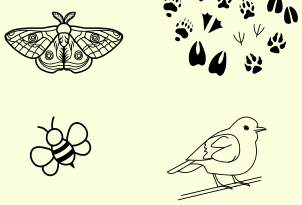
In addition, this shrub is used extensively for erosion control and for ecological restoration projects, as it tends to form thickets when unattended. Given its tendency to form thickets, the Common Snowberry has an extensive list of faunal associations. We have already mentioned the popularity of the fruit with various birds. The flowers are popular with many pollinators but specifically with a wide variety of bees. It is the larval host for the Vashti Sphinx *(Sphinx vashti*) and Snowberry Clearwing moths. The shrub functions as a food source for bighorn sheep, white tailed deer, grizzly bears, cattle, and sheep. Birds and smaller mammals use the shrub not only for food but also for cover and nesting sites. It is not uncommon for pocket gophers to tunnel underneath and overwinter in a burrow under Common Snowberry shrubs.

The Common Snowberry provides gardeners with a low maintenance shrub that provides year round visual appeal as well as a considerable host of benefits for local fauna and pollinators. Given all of its positive attributes, it's time to bring this appealing shrub back into the spotlight.

NAME OF PLANT - DETAILS AT A GLANCE

Plant Family: Caprifoliaceae (honeysuckle)
Height/Width: (H)1-2 metres (3-6'), (W)variable
Features: Grows in clay, poor soil, drought resistant, regenerates quickly after fire, and provides excellent erosion control. White berries provide exceptional visual interest in the winter garden.
Faunal Value: Larval host for the Vashti Sphinx (*Sphinx vashti*) and Snowberry Clearwing (*Hemaris diffinis*) moths. Food/cover for birds/small mammals
Companion Plants: Red-Osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*)
Landscape Uses: Erosion control, winter interest, hedge and screening
Native Range: BC and NWT to Quebec

Supports



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References

- Snowberry-Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center
- Common Snowberry-Credit Valley Conservation
- Common Snowberry-Network of Nature
- Low Growing Native Shrubs for Ontario-Snowberry
- Common Snowberry-Go Botany

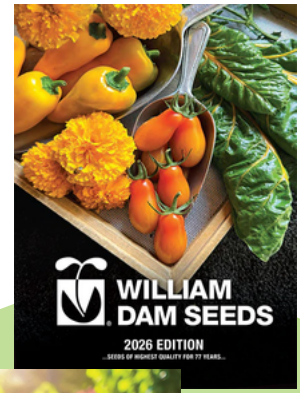
FEBRUARY GARDEN 'TO DO' LIST

By Claudette Sims, Halton Master Gardener

- ☐ **Winter Sowing** is a great way to start or add to your native plant garden. Learn all about winter sowing at this RBG link.
- ☐ **Seedy Saturdays**/Sundays are typically held in February and are great events to find seeds and information on how to grow plants. Find a Seedy event near you at **Seeds of Diversity** by setting the filter to Ontario.
- ☐ **Seed Libraries** offer free seeds! Search for one near you in Hamilton **or** Burlington.
- ☐ **Seed Starting** depends on your location and what you intend to grow. Use this Seed Starting Date Calculator to determine when to start your veggie seeds. Enter May 17th as our area frost free date. It's still too early to start your tomatoes-wait for March.
- ☐ **Pruning** – February to March is a good time to prune most trees and shrubs. Follow the 3 D's of pruning and remove branches that are Diseased, Damaged or Dead. Avoid pruning on the coldest days to minimize damage from freezing temperatures and to encourage wounds to heal. Check for Black knot fungus on **cherry** species (*Prunus*) and prune when temperatures are below freezing. This will prevent black knot fungus spores from infecting the pruning wound. Inspect **pagoda dogwood** for signs of dogwood golden canker. Healthy stems are brown/purple & diseased ones yellow to orange. Prune affected stems to slow the infection. If badly infected, cut the entire shrub to the ground. It will grow back beautifully in spring. Prune **grapes** to increase fruit production and contain their spread. **Raspberries** can be pruned to knee height in late February before the weather warms. Prune **crabapples** for a more open structure and remove crossing or rubbing branches and suckers at the base of the tree.

"Longing for your garden? Why not enjoy some of the many outdoor winter activities near you this month! Too cold for you outdoors? How about some fun indoor crafts?"

- ☐ **Celebrate Winter** with an outing on Family Day or Valentine's Day. How about a walk in a natural area near you? A visit to the RBG? Check out the amazing waterfalls in Hamilton. Visit the gorgeous tropical greenhouse at Gage Park or have a hike and hot chocolate at Westfield Heritage Village. For more Winter Activities, visit this Winter Guide from Tourism Hamilton or Winter in Burlington.
- ☐ Check out these online garden catalogues. They often include excellent seed starting tips!



A Gentle Look At Ruderals

Beverley Wagar, 1000 Islands Master Gardeners

Say you've driven to the grocery store and all the good parking spots are taken. So you go around back, to the barely used lot that's full of gaping cracks, heaved asphalt, and dried-up potholes. Allowing your inner botanist to take charge for a moment, soon you're outside looking at the plants growing in these places.

"Look at all these weeds!" you say to yourself. But, are they really? Weeds are simply plants growing where they're not wanted. "Weed" is an informal descriptive term with no technical meaning. There's no official list, no "weed" category in plant taxonomy.

Botanists and ecologists are more likely to use ruderal to describe a plant with weedy behaviour. "Ruderal plant" has an objective meaning. Defined by their function in a disturbed site, ruderals include many species that show up and thrive in harsh, changing conditions, in soil that is often degraded or polluted. In general they are not picky about soil type or nutrient availability. They are first-on-the-scene, early-succession, disturbance-adapted plants. Colonists, in the botanical sense.

Ruderal Roles In The Landscape

"Ruderal" derives from the Latin word rudus, meaning "rubble" specifically used as a base for Roman roads. Looking at an urban ruderal site you may not be reminded of Roman roads, but you'd immediately see that the place was created by humans, who subsequently abandoned, forgot, or shunned it. Ruderal sites exist in rural areas as well —consider roadside ditches, abandoned fields and farmyards, old landfill sites and mines.

Landscape architect Elizabeth Burdick, looking at urban places, puts it plainly: "Without construction debris, demolition wreckage or abandoned sites, there would be no habitat for ruderal plants. Ruderals are a set of species which can outcompete others in poor conditions, but typically are themselves outcompeted in rich environments."

This article was inspired by Lorraine Johnson's online chat on November 27th 2025, part of the ongoing TIMG "Ask a Master Gardener" webinar series held Thursdays at 1 pm.
For the zoom link, sign up for the TIMG Newsletter.

Ruderal sites are often, but not always, created by human disturbance of the soil. Plowing, digging, mowing, burning, and tree-felling are common examples. In a broader sense, disturbance includes any occurrence that abruptly changes the original community of plants. Consider how tree throws, landslides, wildfires, and invasive species (jumping worms, for example) alter the soil and the plants it is able to support. Even the act of clearing turfgrass to create a new garden is a disturbance that exposes buried seeds to light and moisture, removes the temperature-buffering vegetation layer, creates conditions for erosion during rainfall, and (on the positive side) provides habitat for ground-dwelling bees.

Many ruderal plants are annuals or biennials. Putting energy into fast growth and copious seed production results in an abundance of progeny that leaves little room for competitors. Rapid turnover (a new generation each year) results in high genetic diversity and adaptability which improves an individual plant's chances of surviving periods of stress long enough to set seed and ensure a new generation.

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A GENTLE LOOK AT RUDERALS (CONT'D)

Ruderals tend to be wind-dispersed. Not only are their seeds carried far and fast across open landscapes but also they are not reliant on water or wildlife (such as birds) to move them to a new place. As well, they are often self-fertile, meaning that the stigma of one plant accepts pollen from the same plant. This ensures that even a single, isolated plant can produce seed, regardless of the presence of bees or other pollinators.

Healers and first-responders

Ruderals take hold in bare ground, dominating and holding space—but only temporarily. They comprise an ecological social safety net that works so well it's eventually not needed. Selfless, tireless healers, they create the conditions for their own demise. They trap leaves, which break down to form the beginnings of topsoil to provide nutrients and water-holding capacity. Like all terrestrial plants, their roots grow and die back as conditions change. Dead roots become organic matter that decays, leaving channels for water and air that will, over time, provide habitat for soil-dwelling organisms, reduce compaction, hold moisture, and moderate surface temperature. Root exudates are essential to material cycling, energy exchange, and information transfer between the below ground parts of plants and the soil. As the soil changes, it becomes more hospitable to species able to compete with ruderals, ones generally longer-lived and better suited to later successional stages.

Being first-on-the-scene plants, ruderals are nature's first responders, the gritty paramedics of the plant world. Not only do they change the soil and, in many cases, buttress against invasive species, they also attract insects and birds wanting pollen, nectar, and seeds, especially if they're native ruderals. Their presence can buy time for more complex, diverse, and shade-tolerant communities to establish. Some species are used in site remediation work because they are able to remove pollution and contaminants from the soil.

Erigeron philadelphicus / annual fleabane
Kathy Webb / Bill Depew CC BY-NC

Native and Exotic

Urban **non-native** ruderals, whether they blow in from the roadside or from nearby gardens, provide many of the restorative services described above, but they contribute little to the ecosystems we need to protect and restore. These ecosystems support a robust food web that provides for native species, especially insects, that are experiencing alarming declines. It's important to look past the butterfly on a chickory, blueweed, or dandelion and instead consider the evolutionary relationships crucial to the health of native insect and bird populations. Native plants, having evolved with native fauna over many thousands of years, are recognized as food. They're "host" plants—ideal places for insects to lay eggs because the larvae can eat the leaves they were born on. This is why native ruderals are so important.

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A GENTLE LOOK AT RUDERALS (CONT'D)

Look at any field guide to Ontario wildflowers and you'll see a preponderance of non-native ("exotic") species. It's no wonder that novice gardeners often think a plant must be native because "it's everywhere." Native ruderals are less likely to show up in urban sites if they don't already exist in nearby fields or woodlands. So what should the concerned urban gardener do to help native ruderals get established?

First, work to protect nearby native plant communities, especially forest remnants. Join a volunteer group that does invasive plant removal and plants native plants, especially trees and shrubs. Second, if there are no native plant communities nearby, plant some—in your own garden or a community garden. But make sure they are regionally native, not rare or endangered, and ideally from a local wild population. Third, resist the urge to "help" by scattering seed from over-the-counter wildflower mixes, which tend to be heavy on non-native "pretties" and light on the ecological workhorses.

Should you deadhead the exotic ruderals in the parking lot to make space for potential native ones? Only if you see native plants starting to make inroads on the same site. Consider collecting seeds from native plants growing close by, on a similarly disturbed site. These reference communities will show you what species are already adapted to local conditions.

Ruderals in the garden

Should we introduce these plants to our gardens? It depends on your site, goals, and available time. As you wait for your perennials and shrubs to mature, ruderals can serve as fillers for a season or two. If you leave bare soil, they will inevitably show up uninvited—and soon you'll be orchestrating some kind of balance between your new guests and the ones you're waiting on.

Grey Goldenrod / *Solidago nemoralis* in a "Pocket Prairie" garden in the parking lot at Duke University Hospital, Durham NC.

Remember that a ruderal is defined by its function, not its species name. A grey goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*) is ruderal in a neglected hellstrip. But put it in a garden and it's an adaptable, tidy, keystone perennial. A common evening primrose wears the ruderal hat when it pops up in a recently cleared roadside ditch, but many native plant gardeners overlook its fecundity and embrace its tap-rooted, clay-busting, back-of-the border bee magnetism.

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A GENTLE LOOK AT RUDERALS (CONT'D)

Here are some ruderals that may show up in a garden or a disturbed site near you. Eastern burnweed (*Erechtites hieraciifolius*) is an annual most likely to show up after a fire. *Erigeron canadensis* (syn. *Conyza canadensis*, better known as horseweed) along with its cousins the biennial *Erigeron philadelphicus* (common fleabane) and *Erigeron annuus* (annual fleabane), are likely to show up in disturbed urban sites but can be introduced to new garden beds, especially hellstrips and boulevards, as temporary cover. *Clinopodium arkansanum* (low calamint / wild savory) and *Polanisia dodecandra* (red-whiskered clammyweed) are ruderals for full sun and dry conditions, as is the unquestionably garden-worthy *Rudbeckia hirta* (black-eyed Susan) and the aggressive but useful *Achillea millefolium* (common yarrow).

There are two Ontario native avens (G*eum* spp.) and two Ontario native false bindweeds (*Calystegia* spp.), although you probably don't want to deliberately introduce the bindweed. If your disturbed space mimics a forest edge you could introduce clearweed (*Pilea pumila*) or *Clinopodium vulgare* (wild basil, a perennial).

You may not want to deliberately introduce ruderal plants to your garden, but if they show up, do treat them with respect—or at least as a botanical curiosity worthy of further study. These "first encounters" are fascinating opportunities to grow your expertise. So before you yank, learn their names and their ecological function. And be open-minded when it comes to inconspicuous flowers—remember that ecological function includes more than just pollinator appeal.

Three ruderal landscapes in New York City. © Christopher Lee Kennedy. Used with permission.

Further Reading

- Ruderal Resilience Christopher Lee Kennedy on Medium. A wide-ranging essay on "'marginal landscapes', their particular resilience to climate change, and how they might thrive in the Anthropocene.
- Bio-Inspired Land Remediation (book introduction).
- Ruderal Plant Diversity as a Driver for Urban Green Space Sustainability European research but still relevant.
- City of Weeds: Tracing the Origins of the Urban Ecological Imaginary from MIT press. Geographer and urbanist Matthew Gandy explores the fascinating history of spontaneous forms of urban nature.
- Ruderal Heritage (book chapter). Another expansive look at the ruderal, for those interested in critical heritage studies. "The wider recognition of inevitable transformative change has been paralleled by the emergence of new theoretical approaches, which understand heritage as a socially-embedded, future-oriented process through which the past is brought into the present to shape novel environments and practices."

Ruderal vs Aggressive:

The key differences are based on their definition within an ecological framework: a ruderal plant is a species that thrives in disturbed, resource-rich environments but is a poor competitor in stable conditions, while an aggressive plant spreads rapidly and can outcompete other plants, including natives, whether or not the environment is disturbed.

Genome Editing Plants for a Changing Climate

Science Spotlight

By Nikolina Radulovich, Halton Master Gardeners

Let's face it — plants don't behave the way they used to. Heat waves arrive earlier, rain is less predictable, familiar varieties struggle, and pest patterns are changing. Plant scientists see the same patterns, and one of the tools they're using to help plants adapt more quickly is gene editing, a technique known as CRISPR/Cas9.

At its simplest, CRISPR/Cas9 works like molecular scissors. Instead of adding genes from another species, scientists can make very precise edits to a plant's own DNA, sometimes changing just a single "letter" in the genetic code. In many cases, no foreign DNA remains in the plant at all. Think of it less as rewriting a recipe and more as fixing a typo that's been holding the plant back.

These edits aren't hypothetical. A recent review pulled together dozens of real examples already tested in fruits, vegetables, and ornamentals. Tomatoes, for instance, have been edited at genes such as *RIN* and *SlACS2*, which control ripening. By slowing down the ripening process, these tomatoes soften more gradually, giving growers a longer harvest window and reducing losses during hot weather. Strawberries, another famously fragile crop, have been edited at a gene called *FaPG1*, which affects how plant cell walls break down. With just this single gene altered, strawberries stayed firmer after harvest without sacrificing flavour. These small changes potentially have big implications for local growers and gardeners.

Stress tolerance is another major focus. In cucurbits like cucumbers and pumpkins, researchers have edited genes involved in water movement and salt balance, such as *CmoPIP1-4*–gene related pathways. The result is plants that handle drought stress better and tolerate saline soils and water shortages, challenges that are increasingly common in home gardens.

Disease resistance has also seen promising advances. Apples edited to reduce susceptibility to fire blight and citrus plants modified at the *CsLOB1* gene show significantly lower disease symptoms, offering the possibility of fewer chemical treatments rather than total immunity.

CRISPR/Cas9 is also being used beyond food crops. In ornamentals like petunias, editing genes involved in ethylene production has delayed flower aging, meaning blooms stay open longer. Other studies have tweaked pigment pathways to create more stable flower colors, all without altering the plant's basic form or growth habit. Newer techniques described in the review — such as base editing and prime editing — don't even cut DNA anymore, instead swapping individual genetic letters with greater precision and fewer unintended changes.

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EDITING PLANTS FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE (CONT'D)

Science Spotlight

Because CRISPR/Cas9 is used so widely, it's natural for gardeners to have questions, especially since the technology is also common in medical research. In laboratories, CRISPR-edited mice are routinely used to study cancer, inherited diseases, immune system function, drug responses, infectious diseases, metabolism, and aging, all under strict ethical oversight. However, the technology became widely controversial after a 2018 incident in which Chinese scientist He Jiankui announced the birth of twin girls whose embryos had been gene-edited to alter a gene linked to HIV susceptibility. The work violated international ethical standards, involved unnecessary risk, and lacked proper consent. It was condemned globally, and He Jiankui was later imprisoned. Since his release, reports suggest he has expressed interest in returning to research, a reminder of why strong ethical boundaries and oversight remain essential when powerful technologies are involved.

That episode is often cited as a warning, and not that CRISPR/Cas9 itself is dangerous, but that powerful tools require clear limits. Editing plants to improve drought tolerance or reduce disease pressure is fundamentally different from editing humans — unless, of course, we decide to start breeding human-eating plants 🙂. Many plant edits mimic changes that could occur naturally through mutation or breeding, just accomplished more precisely and more quickly. Still, the review emphasizes that transparency, regulation, and public trust are essential as these tools move forward.

For gardeners, the takeaway is not that CRISPR/Cas9 technology will replace good soil, biodiversity, or careful stewardship. It won't. But it may help plants keep pace with a climate that's changing faster than traditional breeding alone can manage. Used responsibly, gene editing has the potential to reduce waste, lower chemical inputs, and support more resilient gardens and food systems. As with all good gardening, the key lies not just in the tools we use, but in how thoughtfully we choose to use them.

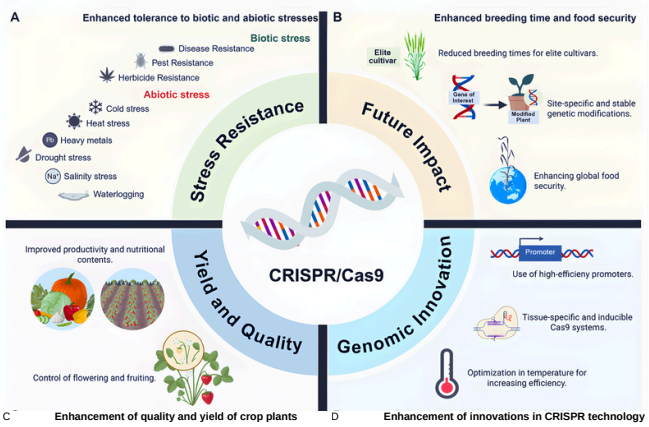


Figure. Strategic applications of CRISPR/Cas9 and future prospects for horticultural crop improvement. The figure illustrates how gene editing can be used across horticultural crops to improve stress tolerance, disease resistance, yield, quality traits, and post-harvest performance, while supporting more resilient and sustainable production systems. Adapted from Hamza Sohail et al., 2025.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As climate change outpaces natural adaptation, **where should gardeners draw the line** between preserving traditional varieties and using new tools to help plants survive?

Q&A

By Hariette Henry, Halton Master Gardener

> *My cat likes to nibble on my houseplants? I've heard that some houseplants are quite toxic. Can you tell me which ones can be a problem and if I should remove them?*

You might wonder why cats and sometimes dogs develop a taste for houseplants. There are a number of explanations that have been put forward by veterinarians and other experts. The first and most often repeated reason is that cats are curious and want to explore anything that smells or looks different. Another explanation is that cats crave a different texture or feel of fibre in their mouths. This might be true, however it should be said that cats are obligate carnivores and trying to turn them into vegetarians could have life-threatening consequences. Some experts believe that cats eat grass or plants to aid digestion. The fibrous material could help them regurgitate hairballs or eliminate indigestible matter. Finally, it is sometimes suggested that plant eating may simply be associated with boredom or with stress and anxiety.

Can houseplants be harmful? Yes absolutely, houseplants have developed some physical and chemical defences to protect themselves from herbivores. Herbivores are the organisms, primarily animals and insects who live by eating plant tissues. Most of the chemical compounds found in plants are quite toxic as they include calcium oxalates, sapogenins, or cardiac glycosides that help them to repel these insects and animals.

These compounds, if ingested or touched by pets, can cause reactions ranging from mild skin irritation and mouth burning to severe internal poisoning, vomiting, or even, in rare cases, death.

Obviously, if you want to ensure that no harm comes to your pet as a result of having houseplants, you should:

- Identify all the houseplants in your home with their botanical and common names. There are many resources available that provide lists of toxic plants as well as safe ones. Here are a few options: **Atlantic Canada Poison Centre**, ASPCA Animal Poison Control for **Dogs** and **Cats** and finally **Pet Owners Beware: 11 Poisonous Houseplants to Avoid**.
- Check and remove some/all of the dangerous plants if your pet is very curious and determined.
- You could also find ways of keeping toxic plants out of the reach of your pet, **by using physical barriers** such as high shelves, hanging baskets and terrariums.
- Another option would be to train your pet through positive reinforcement to leave plants alone. Having had kittycats myself I know that is a tall order.
- Another strategy might be to offer small quantities of alternate **"Planty" Treats for Pets.**

Most poisonings occur in the home. If your pet does consume part of a harmful plant or anything that might be harmful you should:

- Stay calm and keep a clear head
- Remove your pet from the area
- Secure and identify the harmful substance
- DO NOT induce vomiting unless instructed to
- Call for expert help immediately. Contact your local vet or vet hospital, or the **Ontario SPCA and Humane Society.** (7)

Garden Inspiration!

Finding Garden Wisdom in Winter

No doubt you're doing some spring garden planning as you gaze out at your snow-covered yard. Winter is a great time to learn more about your garden.

Snow cover makes it easy to see the layers

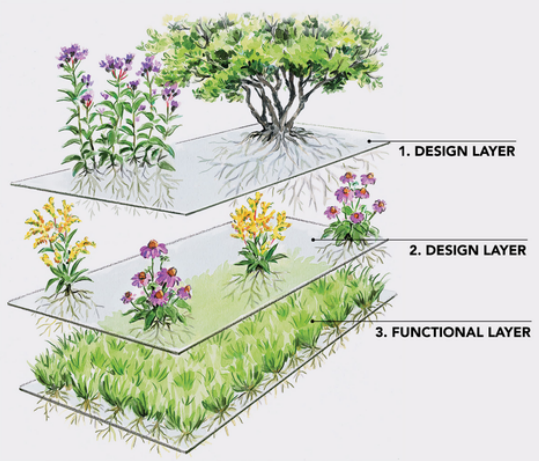
Are there places you might want to add a tree or shrubs to add more visual structure to the landscape design?

Tall stalks provide winter interest and hollow cavities for hibernating pollinators.

Brush piles might act as shelter for foxes or wrens, both of whom eat garden pests.

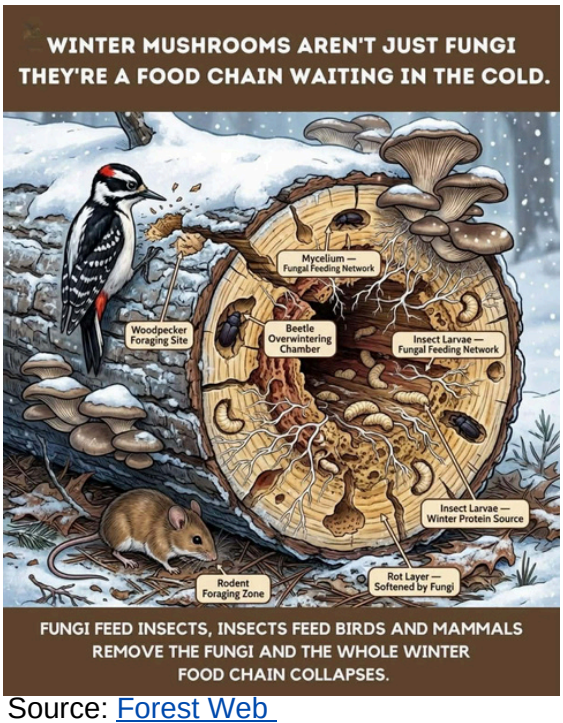
Footprints

Where are the birds hanging out? Are there tiny footprints near the plants with seed heads? Little mammal tracks near the trees? Bigger mammal tracks that might indicate you're part of a local nature corridor? All these tell you which plantings are contributing to the local ecology.



Sources and Resources:

- Plan It Wild
- Less Lawn More Life
- Plants for a Layered-Style Garden



Source: Forest Web

Where can you do less?

Lawn edges, slopes, and awkwardly shaped areas can be hard to maintain. Consider converting one into a small prairie-style perennial pollinator plot, adding a brush pile, or planting native shrubs to remove the need to do much maintenance at all.

Map the melt

"Snow melts first over loose soil, heat retaining surfaces and winter sun corridors – making January one of the clearest windows to read microclimates, disturbance history, and stress patterns across your yard." (@planitwild on Instagram)

In contrast, snow melts more slowly over compacted soil, letting you know where you might want to put in some effort in the spring.

What's Growing On?

By Trish Moraghan, Halton Master Gardener

Workshop and Demonstrations

Children's Activities

Vendors and Exhibitors

[Learn more here]

Look for the Halton Master Gardener's advice table

Free Seeds

Seeds of Diversity

[Learn more here]

Planning and Planting

Starting Seedlings Indoors

Sowing Seeds Indoors

Choosing Seed Varieties

At Home (Virtual) and Outdoor (in Person) Programs

THE ARBORETUM UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

[Garden Fundamentals]

[Growing Houseplants]

[Winter Twig Identification]

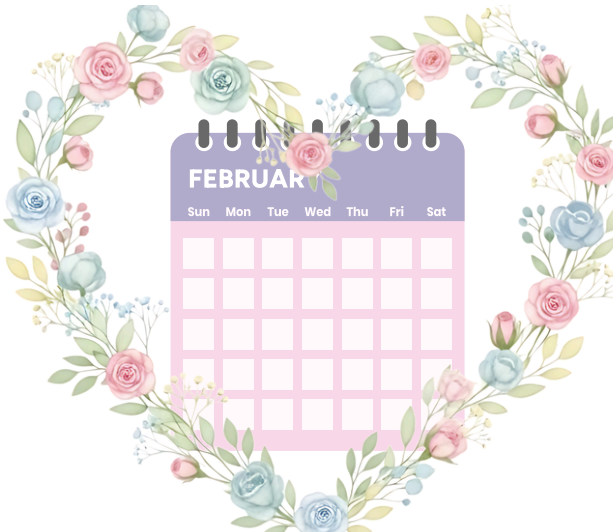
What's Growing On ?

Royal Botanical Gardens

[Birding]

[Bloomland in Oz]

[At Home Activities]



Check our calendar for events

HALTON REGION MASTER GARDENERS

Indoor Veggie Garden

[Learn more here]

Starting Seeds Indoors

[Learn more here]

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.

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