

CROSS POLLINATION

Halton Master Gardeners Monthly Newsletter
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Halton Region
Master Gardeners



Image: [Makin, Julie](#) - [Niagara Parks Botanical Garden, Natural Garden](#)

Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*)

By Tinamarie Jones, Halton Master Gardener

Despite their incredible diversity, the category of plants classified as 'spring ephemerals' all have one thing in common – they are only around for a very short period of time. True to their name, spring ephemerals are some of the earliest plants to bloom in the spring, bringing a welcome splash of colour and life to the awakening garden before going dormant in summer. Despite their short growing season, spring ephemerals such as Jack-in-the-Pulpit or *Arisaema triphyllum* bring enormous interest and beauty to the early garden, and should not be overlooked by gardeners hoping to extend their gardening season.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit is an herbaceous perennial. The genus name, *Arisaema triphyllum*, is taken from the Greek aris meaning arum and haema, meaning blood. This refers to the deep red colour found on some plants. Triphyllum refers to the fact that this plant is three-leaved. In terms of common names, *Arisaema triphyllum* is known by many names including Lord and Lady, Memory Root, Pepper Turnip, Bog Onion, Brown Dragon, Devils Ear, Lady-in-a Chaise, Starch Wort, Wake Robin, Wild Turnip, Parson in the Pulpit, and of course Jack-in-the-Pulpit.

Like many members of the Araceae (or Arum) family, the appearance of Jack-in-the-Pulpit is striking.

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JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT (ARISAEMA TRIPHYLLUM) (CONT'D)

The plant can be 1-2 feet tall at maturity. Each plant bears between 1-3 leaves, with 2 being the most common presentation, as well as a flowering stalk. Each leaf is compound and further divided into 3 leaflets. These leaflets are approximately 18 cm long and 7.5 cm wide. They are dark green, oval, elliptical or diamond-shaped and are glossy with wavy margins and a distinctive vein around the perimeter. Sometimes the leaves of this plant are mistaken for Trillium leaves; however, Jack-in-the-Pulpit leaves tend to form a T shape, whereas Trillium leaves are equally spread out around the centre. But the part of Jack-in-the-Pulpit that is most eye-catching is the flower inflorescence.



Images by Unknown Author licensed under CC BY-NC

The flower inflorescence is comprised of two elements - the spadix and the spathe. The spadix (Jack) is a flower spike covered with numerous tiny true flowers, is fleshy and cylindrical, and approximately 5-7.5 cm long. This structure is enclosed by the spathe (Pulpit). The spathe is a modified leaf or bract found below the spadix, surrounding and partially enclosing it. The spathe is usually green but can be striped with various darker colours including darker green and a very dark purple or maroon. Each plant is dioecious, bearing male and female flowers on different plants, but the reality is a bit more complex. Many plants initially produce only pollen producing male flowers. Once the plant matures and the corm becomes sufficiently large, the plant will start putting out female flowers. In addition, plants can also become hermaphroditic as they mature, with male flowers towards the top of the spadix and female flowers on the lower portion.

Once successfully pollinated, the spadix produces shiny green berries which gradually become bright red or orangish. These berries are approximately 8-12 mm wide and contain 1-6 seeds each. Although the plant dies back in late spring, the bright berries can persist well into the fall.

Propagation of Jack-in-the-Pulpit can be done via planting seeds, by separating baby corms (cormlets) from the parent corm in the fall, by root division, or by purchasing plants from a nursery. Propagation by seed can be done quite easily, with the seeds directly sown outdoors. However, the seeds require a double dormancy period (with 60-90 days in each of a period of cold, then warm, then cold, then warm again) in order to germinate. It often takes the seeds at least two years, sometimes more, to germinate. In addition, plants germinated from seed can take up to five years to flower. So, although sowing seeds directly is technically simple, it is not recommended as gardeners would need to wait for at least two years or more to begin to see results.

Separating the baby corms (cormlets) from the base corm of the plant in the fall and planting those brings quicker results. Similarly, propagation via root division is also an option, as Jack-in-the-Pulpit also produces rhizomes. Lastly, Jack-in-the-Pulpit plants can also be purchased from local nurseries; however, gardeners are cautioned to be sure that the plants were propagated by the nursery or seller and not removed from the wild.

This plant grows in zones 3-9 in deciduous woodlands, forests, marshy areas, stream edges, and swamps. It thrives on rich, moist soil with a pH that is acidic to neutral (pH 5.0-6.5). It does poorly in soils that are heavily clay. It can tolerate significant moisture as well as wet feet. It prefers full to part shade.

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JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT (*ARISAEMA TRIPHYLLUM*) (CONT'D)



In terms of faunal associations, some game birds, wood thrushes and small mammals consume the berries. The plant contains calcium oxalate crystals so is considered poisonous for humans, and care should be exercised when handling the plant. This is also a deterrent to browsing creatures such as deer and rabbits because it causes burning and irritation and is thus avoided. This plant is not a host for any butterfly or moth larvae. It has no serious insect or disease problems.

Gardeners looking for an interesting addition to their garden that provides a unique appeal throughout the growing season should consider Jack-in-the-Pulpit. The early and interesting foliage as well as the colourful berries later in the summer give this plant incredible charm. This plant is also a problem solver for gardeners who struggle to find something to grow in very shaded and very moist garden areas.






Jack-in-the-Pulpit surrounded by Hakone grass and native *Geranium maculatum*. Image: Claudette Sims

NAME OF PLANT - DETAILS AT A GLANCE

 FULL SHADE	LIGHT SHADE	
 MOIST		

Plant Type, Family: Herb, *Arisaema*, Araceae
Height/Width: (H) 30-60 cm (1-2') (W) 60-90 cm (2-3')
Features: The male plant has a small opening at the base of the spathe, whereas female plants do not, to trap insects.
Faunal Value: Fungus gnats are attracted to the fungal odor and are primary pollinators. This plant is also pollinated by thrips and biting midges. The berries are consumed by wild turkeys, wood thrushes, ring-necked pheasants, mammals and rodents.
Companion Plants: Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*), Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-fema*), Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*), *Trillium grandiflorum*, Fringed Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra eximia*) and Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*).
Landscape Uses: Shady, moist rich garden areas with slightly acidic (pH 5-6.5 soil).
Native Range: Ontario to Newfoundland

Supports

[Vascan](#)

Read More!

- Dickinson, R. and Royer, F. (2021). *Plants of Southern Ontario*. Lone Pine Publishing, China.
- Gray, R. and Booth, S. (2024). *The Gardener's Guide to Native Plants of the Southern Great Lakes Region*. Firefly Books Ltd., Richmond Hill, ON.
- Johnson, L. (1999 rev. 2017). *100 Easy-To-Grow Native Plants for Canadian Gardens*. Douglas & McIntyre, BC.
- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
- [New York Botanical Gardens](#)
- [Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
- [University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture](#)



APRIL GARDEN 'TO DO' LIST

By Claudette Sims, Halton Master Gardener

- Nature-Friendly Spring Tasks** – Cutting back plants or removing dead leaves is largely an aesthetic consideration-most plants don't benefit from it. Stems or leaves will slowly decompose and return nutrients to the soil as the temperatures warm, or will be covered by new growth. Leave plant material in place for nesting birds, especially milkweed stems. Assess your garden to determine priorities, e.g. plants that may need transplanting, gaps in garden beds, damaged fences, uneven paving, moss buildup on paths. Remove garbage, fallen twigs, debris. Check emerging spring plants and clear matted leaves as needed.
- Lights Out** – [Moths](#) are essential to food webs. Keep them safe by turning off lights at night or using [yellow](#) bulbs or warm coloured LED lighting (2,000 - 3,000 Kelvin).
- Pruning** – **STOP** pruning **oak trees** now to prevent [Oak Wilt Disease](#). If you absolutely must prune your oak when it is in leaf, treat cuts with pruning paint. Note: This is the only situation where pruning paint is recommended. Prune other trees, shrubs and vines before leaves emerge. Use clean, sharp tools to remove dead, damaged, or diseased wood. Prune to improve air circulation & appearance if needed (but it's not necessary). Cut back branches to just above another branch or a bud. Keep a sharp eye out for cocoons and chrysalises when pruning. [Lavender](#) can be trimmed back when new growth starts to appear; prune back dead or overgrown stems to a vigorous bud. Do not over prune.
- Seeds** – Time to start your tomato seeds if you haven't already done so. Start tender annual flowers indoors for mid- to late-May planting. Seed cool weather crops like peas, spinach, lettuce, beets, and radishes directly in the garden as soon as the ground can be worked.

“ Did you know milkweed stems are important to birds? Birds strip the filaments from the milkweed to build [nests](#)! Learn more about how you can help wildlife from [Rebecca McMackin](#) ”



Female Redwing blackbird stripping milkweed to make her nest. [Brooklyn Bridge Park video](#) (31:16 mark)

- Lawn** – To reduce soil compaction, avoid walking on the lawn when it is wet or if you leave footprints. Remove leaves and debris and replace grass where critters have lifted it or made holes. Remember that lawn damage from skunks, voles or raccoons is usually cosmetic and can easily be repaired once the weather warms. Start removing weeds, but wait for warmer weather before overseeding.
- Perennials** – Divide or transplant perennials as growth resumes and soil is workable.
- Invasive Plants** – Refer to this [factsheet](#) from the Invasive Species Centre to help identify and remove garlic mustard from your garden. Focus on 2nd year plants which will produce seeds this year. Garlic mustard produces chemicals that can harm beneficial soil fungi critical for our maples and other native plants. Remove individual plants as they appear, or smother larger infestations for at least a season. Here are more factsheets on invasive plants created by Halton Master Gardeners:
 - [Goutweed](#)
 - [Garlic Mustard](#)
 - [Creeping Bellflower](#)
 - [Invasive Knotweeds: Information & Control](#)
- Celebrate Earth Day** on April 22nd by engaging in eco-friendly activities like planting trees or native flowers, participating in community cleanups, and reducing waste.



OUR GARDEN SUPERHEROES WIN A NATIONAL INNOVATION AWARD!

Halton Master Gardeners and co-founders of the [Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation \(CCIPR\)](#), Cathy Kavassalis and Claudette Sims have been recognized with an [Innovation Award](#) at the February 2026 Annual Invasive Species Centre Forum. This national honour celebrates ideas that have been turned into real-world solutions. Their work focuses on a challenge that affects every gardener: invasive plants. Invasive species cost Canada billions of dollars each year and are the second biggest threat to biodiversity. The primary pathway for the introduction of invasive species is the horticultural trade itself, and it is common for many nurseries to sell high-risk invasive plants.

As Cathy explains:
“The Innovation Award recognizes efforts that have moved a creative idea to a practical reality, transforming invasive species prevention and management in Canada through substantive and enduring outcomes. We hope this recognition brings greater attention to the need for better screening, stronger regulation, clear labelling, and responsible plant choices across the nursery and garden sectors. Most of all, we hope this moment encourages continued collaboration — because real progress happens when we work together.”



Halton Master Gardeners and co-founders of CCIPR, Cathy Kavassalis (L) and Claudette Sims (R), recipients of the Innovation Award. Why the blue superhero capes? Because anyone can help stop the spread of invasive plants!
 Photo taken at the Toronto Home Show by Kate Sault

For both co-founders, the award is really a reflection of a much larger effort.

“We are deeply grateful to all the CCIPR members who are working with us to improve regulation and help prevent the spread of invasive plants,” Cathy adds.



In early March, Cathy and Claudette were back in front of an audience, presenting their talk *“Beyond Pretty”* at the Toronto Home Show. This inspiring presentation encourages gardeners to think beyond aesthetics and consider how their plant choices can support (or harm) the environment. And yes—there were capes!

“I grew up loving comic books. The idea that ordinary people could become superheroes and help others really stuck with me,” says Claudette. *“That’s part of why Cathy and I wear capes when we present. It’s a fun way to make a serious point: anyone can be a superhero through the simple act of gardening. Cathy even designed a whole cast of ‘garden superheroes’—people of all ages and backgrounds—because this isn’t about experts, it’s about everyone.”*



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OUR GARDEN SUPERHEROES WIN A NATIONAL INNOVATION AWARD! (CONT'D)

The message clearly resonates. The mix of practical advice, environmental impact, and a bit of fun helps audiences see that their gardens can be more than just beautiful—they can be part of the solution.

You can be a superhero by the simple act of gardening!

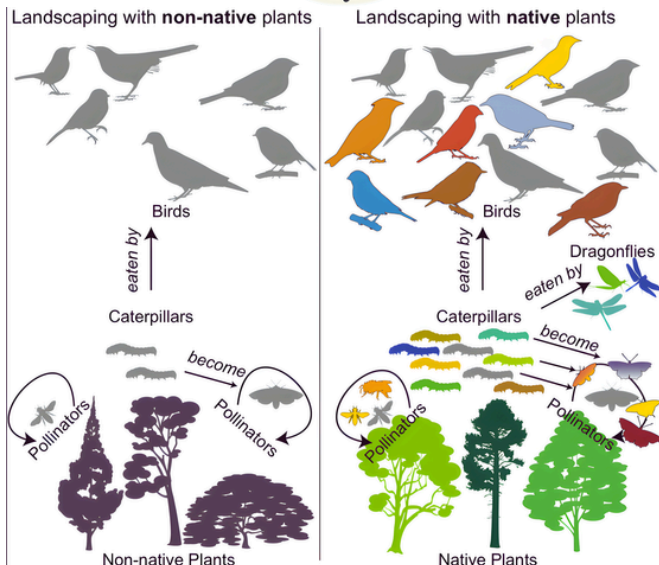


Garden Superheroes created by Cathy Kavassalis + AI

Plant Choice Matters

Native plants bring more birds, butterflies and bees:

- 3x more butterfly species
- 2x higher abundance of native bees
- 50% higher abundance of native birds
- 9x higher abundance of rare birds



Regional Invasive Species & Climate Change Management Group

By definition, invasive plants cause harm to the environment, human health, natural lands or the economy. Sadly, this lone trillium won't last long surrounded by invasive periwinkle.



Photo by A. Fyon, Inglis Falls

Small actions, multiplied across thousands of gardens, can have a powerful impact. You can help prevent the spread of invasive plants by:

- Choosing non-invasive, eco-friendly plants
- Removing invasive species from your property
- Sharing knowledge with neighbours and friends
- Asking questions at garden centres
- Supporting better plant labelling at point of sale and asking for better regulation

You don't need a cape to make a difference, but you might start to feel like you're wearing one by making these small changes in your garden!



Designed by Cathy Kavassalis + AI

Learn More and Do More

- Watch Cathy's talk, "[Gardens That Give Back](#)," (starts at the 19:07 mark)
- Visit the Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation [website](#)
- Follow CCIPR on [Facebook](#)
- Join our growing number of CCIPR [supporters](#)





By Hariette Henry, Halton Master Gardener

Gardening with [native plants](#) is a good first step. They offer birds food, shelter and nesting sites year-round. Your garden should be a space with plenty of diversity – a variety of plant species of various heights, a mix of densely planted and open areas, some bare soil or sand that can act as a dust bath for birds (a place where birds can roll in dry, fine soil or sand to clean their feathers), and brush piles that offer safety, shelter and food in the form of insects and invertebrates that are attracted to the decaying wood.

By [including a range of plant species in your garden, you provide food for birds between and within seasons](#). You may also wish to offer birdseed at certain times of the year as a supplementary source of food. If you use bird feeders there are some safety issues you should be aware of such as:

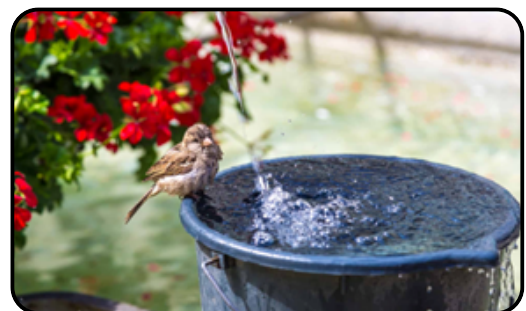
- Disease transmission – Concentrating many birds in a small area makes it easy for bacteria to spread. Scrub and soak bird feeders every two weeks with a 10% bleach solution. You should also rake the ground underneath the feeders to remove moldy seed and droppings.
- Window Collisions – To avoid collisions it is recommended to place feeders either less than 3' from windows where birds won't have enough momentum to hurt themselves or more than 30' from windows. Window decals and [visual markers](#) can also make glass more visible.
- Predation risks – Cats should be kept inside the house. Most municipalities have bylaws prohibiting cats from roaming off their owner's property. Hawks and other predatory birds can be a risk, therefore placing feeders near dense shrubs will give the songbirds a chance to escape. Baffles on poles can deter squirrels and racoons from climbing up to the feeder.

I would like to attract more birds to my garden. I'm transitioning to a more eco-friendly one by adding native plants. What additional steps can I take to make my garden more attractive to birds?

- Food Quality & Spoilage – Avoid cheap seed mixes as they often contain fillers that birds will discard, creating a mess. Keep the seed dry as wet seed grows moldy and becomes harmful to the birds. Only put suet out in cold weather as it goes rancid in heat and if it covers the bird's feathers it will need to be removed with soap and water.

Incorporating a [water feature](#) into your garden is also a great way to attract birds. Water features can take many forms, from bird baths to ponds to pails of water with an attached hose. Regardless of size or type, they provide drinking water and bathing opportunities. It's important to keep the water clean through a filtration system or by regularly changing it. Some keen backyard birders even add heating systems to their water features to extend the seasonal availability of water. Just as with bird feeders, it is important to keep bird baths clean and to supply fresh water.

Install [nesting boxes](#) if you wish, to offer cavity-nesting species a place to raise their young. Boxes should have the right size entry hole and dimensions for the species you are trying to attract. They should be well ventilated with holes near the top for air and drainage holes below for water to escape. Mount the box at the natural nesting height for the bird species you hope to attract.



Water features need not be complicated - a simple pail with a running hose can do a great job.



Garden Inspiration!

It's a Grass, Grass, Grass

Decorative grasses provide height, structure, movement, winter interest, texture, and support for flowering plants. [Native grasses](#) and cultivars provide habitat and food. Ensure any non-native grass that catches your heart is not [invasive](#).

“Sedges have edges, rushes are round, grasses are hollow with joints to the ground.”



1. and 2. [Little bluestem](#) (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
Photo 1: Photo: Mervin Wallace 2: [Cultivar 'Blue Heaven'](#) 3. [Pink Muhly Grass](#) (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) Photo: ©visionspictures.com
4. [Switchgrass](#) (*Panicum*

virgatum L.) Photo: Fannon, Carolyn 5. [Sorghastrum nutans](#) Photo: n/a 6. [Mexican Muhly](#) (*Muhlenbergia mexicana*) Photo: Diderot 7. [Blue Grama](#) (*Bouteloua gracilis* nativar 'Blonde Ambition') Photo: n/a 8. [Tufted Hairgrass](#) (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) Photo: n/a

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!



Applications Opening May 2026

The Monarch Awards celebrate and inspire eco-friendly gardening. Whether you're just getting started or already building a healthy space for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife, your efforts matter!

Is your garden a Monarch, Chrysalis or Caterpillar garden, or are you just 'Getting Started'?

If you're making efforts to support wildlife, consider [applying](#) to the Monarch Awards.

Who's eligible to apply for a Monarch Award?

Residents in the City of Hamilton with a front yard garden that supports birds, bees and other wildlife.

Take the '[Am I Ready Quiz](#)' to find out more information.

OUR GOALS

- Raise awareness of biodiversity.
- Increase the amount and quality of habitat for native flora and fauna.
- Promote sustainable landscapes.
- Recognize ecological gardening practices.



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

Media Contacts: Janet Mackey, Kate Sault,

Co-Chairs of the Halton Region Monarch Awards

Questions? Contact: monarchawards.hmg@gmail.com

Garden Journeys



Applications Opening May 2026

- Are you curious about gardens that support biodiversity and our ecosystem?
- Are you taking steps to build your own nature-friendly garden?
- Want some garden inspiration and practical ideas for gardens that are both beautiful and sustainable?



Garden Journeys Open Days will again take place in 2026 over two weekends:

Aug. 8-9 & 14-16

Free to the public, gardens across the City of Hamilton will be open for visitors, with the gardeners available to discuss their own journey to eco-friendly gardening, from first steps to fully mature gardens.

If you are working towards a biodiverse eco-friendly garden, consider applying to be a host gardener. It is a wonderful way to inspire members of the public and to meet other like-minded gardeners to exchange ideas.

Don't miss this exciting event!

Email us at:

gardenjourneysopendays@gmail.com

What's Growing On?

By Trish Moraghan, Halton Master Gardener

Go pesticide-free

EARTH DAY TIPS: 50 EASY WAYS TO HELP THE PLANET EVERY DAY

Go forest bathing

Grow an organic garden

Shop at local farmers' markets

Plant a tree

Learn about pollinators

[Learn more here](#)

SUSTAINABLE MILTON

Environmental Stewardship

Planting & Biodiversity

Education & Workshops

Welcome to the Garden!

[Learn more here](#)

Building a resilient Milton, together.

What's Growing On?



[Bloom Watch](#)



[Trails](#)



[Science Initiatives](#)



HALTON REGION MASTER GARDENERS

Native Plant Sale



We are excited to offer a carefully curated selection of locally sourced native perennials, shrubs, and trees for sale.



[Learn more at our Events page](#)

Check our [calendar](#) for events

2026		APRIL					
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	
			1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
26	27	28	29	30			

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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