

CROSS POLLINATION

Halton Master Gardeners Monthly Newsletter
MAY 2026 | VOL. 19 ISSUE 4

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**Halton Region
Master Gardeners**



Image: Ryan Hodnett Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

Early Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum dioicum*)

By Tinamarie Jones, Halton Master Gardeners

One of the greatest challenges for any gardener is trying to decide upon new plants for the garden. With such an incredible variety available, every gardener is spoiled for choice when it comes to selecting something new. Springtime is an ideal time to take stock of your current garden and assess whether there are open spaces you wish to fill, struggling plants that need to be replaced with something else, or another aspect of your personal garden design that you wish to complete. It's also a great time to reconsider the overall appearance of your garden in spring and think about ways to enhance the visual impact it can have during the earliest parts of the growing season. There are many plants which thrive during spring and early summer, and thoughtful incorporation of these into your garden plan can meaningfully extend the growing season and your enjoyment of it. One such often overlooked early bloomer is Early Meadow Rue or *Thalictrum dioicum*.

Early Meadow Rue is an herbaceous perennial and a member of the Ranunculaceae or Buttercup Family. In addition to Early Meadow Rue, you may also come across some of its alternate common names such as Quicksilver Weed, Feathered Columbine, Poor Man's Rhubarb, and Shining Grass.

Thriving in zones 2-8, *Thalictrum dioicum* grows to be 1-2 feet high with a spread of 1-2 feet.

Continued on next page

EARLY MEADOW RUE (*THALICTRUM DIOICUM*) (CONT'D)

The stalks of this plant are terete, smooth and glaucous. In addition to gray-green, the stalks can also incorporate a bit of a purplish tinge. The leaves present as alternate and compound, and can be doubly or triply, odd pinnate. Each leaf is approximately 1 inch in length and width. Each compound leaf branch sports 3-5 leaflets which are approximately 1.5 inches in length and width. Leaflets are ovate or orbicular and possess anywhere from 3-9 well rounded terminal lobes. The colour is light green but sometimes takes on a silverish hue, hence the common name of Quicksilver Weed.

Early Meadow Rue has particularly interesting flowers. The first part of its scientific name comes from the Greek term *thaliktron*. This term comes from the 1st Century CE father of ancient medicine and botany, Dioscorides, who used the term to describe plants in this genus. The second part of its scientific name, *dioicum*, also comes to us from the Greek and means “of two households”. This refers to the fact that the male and female flowers appear on different plants, and although both male and female flowers are pendulous, both types of flowers have distinctive appearances. The male flowers sport numerous yellowish-green stamens with tips of very pale yellow. In contrast, the female flowers sport approximately 10 thick white-green pistils which have a thread-like appearance. All Early Meadow Rue flowers are petal-less. The size of the flowers is around half an inch in diameter with 4-5 light green sepals. These sepals quickly drop off the female flowers. The flowers bloom in April or May.

In terms of pollination, it is important to note that Early Meadow Rue is pollinated by the wind only. Once pollinated, quarter inch long roundish seeds form on the female plant. The seeds have light brown vertical ridges as well as the curved and now brownish remains of the pistil at the seed end. In terms of propagation, seeds can be planted outside in the fall. They germinate within a year; however, it usually takes 2-3 subsequent years for flowers to be produced.



Image: Julie McMakin: Close-up of flower buds

In the wild, Early Meadow Rue is typically found in moist soil, in forests, and along seepages as well as floodplains and along creeks and lakes. It does well in soils that are moist and humus rich. It can tolerate full sun but performs best in dappled light or partial shade. It is very sensitive to high heat and humidity.

In terms of faunal associations, although it is not a host plant for any butterfly larvae, it has tremendous wildlife value as an important host plant for a wide variety of moths. Canadian Owlet (*Calyptra canadensis*), Pink-patched Looper Moth (*Eosphoropteryx thyatyroides*), Meadowrue Borer Moth (*Papaipema unimoda*) and Straight-lined Looper Moth (*Pseudeva purpurigera*) all utilize Early Meadow Rue as a host plant.

Early Meadow Rue has no serious pest or disease issues. It is also largely deer tolerant. Taller plants may require staking.

For any gardener looking for an intriguing spring and early summer plant that is easy to grow, Early Meadow Rue is a great option to consider. It can hold its own in the garden but works very well in borders and areas of the garden that receive less light or dappled light. Its profusion of interesting flowers are a real bonus and are sure to delight, especially early in the season.

Continued on next page

EARLY MEADOW RUE (*THALICTRUM DIOICUM*) (CONT'D)



Image: Julie Makin, Guelph Ontario - Close-up of Staminate Flowers.

NAME OF PLANT - DETAILS AT A GLANCE

| | |
|---|----------|
|  DAPPLED LIGHT | FULL SUN |
|  MOIST | |

Plant Type, Family: Buttercup, Ranunculaceae
Height/Width: (H) 30-60 cm (1-2') (W) 30-60 cm (1-2').

Features: April to May blooms and foliage go well with spring ephemerals. No serious pests or diseases.

Faunal value: Larval host plant for several moths.

Companion Plants: Red Columbine, Wild Geranium, Virginia Bluebells, Wild Ginger, Blue Wood Aster, Ferns.

Landscape Uses: Low maintenance perennial that adds elegant fine texture to woodlands, shaded borders.

Native Range: Ontario to Quebec, Zones 2 to 8

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.
- [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
- [Missouri Botanical Garden](#)
- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
- [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox](#)

LEARN TO IDENTIFY SEEDLINGS IN THE GOURD FAMILY BY THEIR FIRST SET OF LEAVES.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| SPAGUETTI SQUASH  | CUCUMBER  | PUMPKIN  | WATERMELON  |
| ZUCCHINI  | MELON  | CANTALOUPE  | BUTTERNUT SQUASH  |

[Gardening Humour FB](#)

ISN'T IT GREAT WHEN YOU LAND ON A HUMAN AND THEY GET ALL HAPPY?



NOT READING THE ROOM



MAY GARDEN 'TO DO' LIST

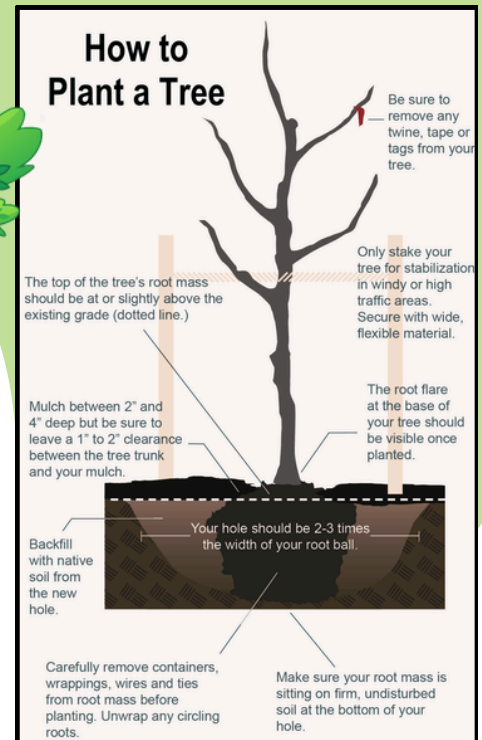
By Claudette Sims, Halton Master Gardener

- Bulbs** – Deadhead spent spring bulbs like tulips and daffodils, but leave foliage intact until it has died to replenish bulbs. Tender bulbs like [dahlias](#), [gladiolus](#) and [calla lilies](#) can be safely added to your garden (or containers) after your last frost date. If you've started them indoors to get a jumpstart on growth, make sure to gradually bring them out for a few hours a day for several days to help get them acclimated before planting them in the ground.
- Perennials** – Divide & transplant overgrown fall blooming perennials on an overcast day before they fully emerge. Check this [extensive spreadsheet](#) of individual perennials for when and how to divide them. Add wire supports or stakes around tall perennials as they grow.
- Veggies** – As the weather warms, **tomato** seedlings can be transitioned to the garden slowly, starting with a sheltered location, from 1-2 hours on day 1, and increasing each day to full sun. Plant in the garden when they're about 6" high (15 cm) and all danger of frost is past. Plant deeply, right up to the bottom leaves. Transplant tender seedlings like **cucumbers, eggplants, peppers** once the soil has warmed up and the daytime temperatures are consistently above 18°C (65°F). **Corn** needs warm soil to germinate. Sow corn seeds when oak leaves are the size of a squirrel's ear!
- Lawn** – Early to mid-May is a great time to revive your lawn, especially if it is looking thin and weak. Over-seed, especially in thin areas and then top dress with a ½ inch (2 cm) of fine textured compost/manure. Choose a [grass seed](#) or mixture that suits your light conditions. Areas with moss may indicate soil has been compacted and nutrient level is likely low. Consider [embracing the moss](#) and allowing it to grow, or transition that area to a [non-invasive groundcover](#), especially under tree canopies.

“ Celebrate Arbor Week by planting a new tree!
Just follow these instructions! ”



Graphic: [Marshall Grain Company](#)



- Trees** – Stop pruning oak trees to prevent deadly [oak wilt disease](#). Inspect all trees for [scale, fungus or other disease](#). Add traps or barrier bands around trees to trap **spongy moth** caterpillars which emerge from April to June. Protect tree trunks from mechanical damage by replacing lawn with mulch or plants. Spread mulch 5–10 cm (2–4 in) deep and keep away from stems and trunks. Check that stakes are not damaging the bark and remove any supports or ties after 2 years so trees can move naturally and develop trunk strength. Follow [these instructions](#) to successfully plant a new tree!

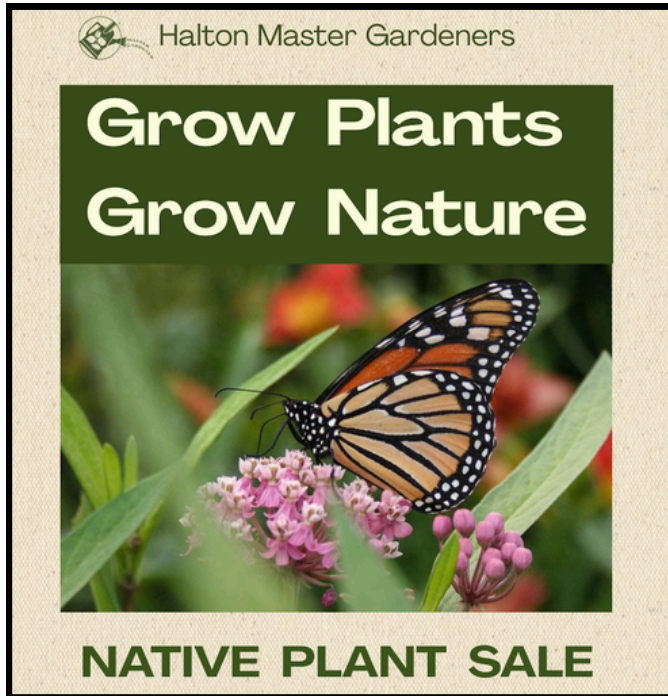


Lichen and moss on trees is not a disease. Lichen can actually be an indication of healthy air!
Image: C. Sims





Halton Master Gardeners Native Plant Sale!



June 6, 2026

9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Dundurn Castle Pavilion

[610 York Blvd., Hamilton](#)



Trees and Shrubs, from \$16.00

- *Aronia melanocarpa, Black Chokeberry 40-75cm
 - **Betula papyrifera, Paper Birch 100-125cm
 - *Celtis occidentalis, Hackberry 40-75 cm
 - *Cephalanthus occidentalis, Button Bush 40 -75cm
 - *Cornus florida, Flowering Dogwood 100-125cm
 - *Cornus sericea, Red-twig Dogwood 40-75cm
 - *Corylus americana, American Hazelnut 100-125cm
 - **Gymnocladis dioicus, Kentucky Coffee Tree 50-75 cm
 - **Juniper virginiana, Eastern Red Cedar, 60-80cm
 - *Ptelea trifoliata, Common Hoptree 20-40cm
 - *Quercus rubra, Red Oak 100-125 cm
 - *Rosa blanda, Smooth Rose 40-75cm
 - *Rubus odoratus, Purple Flowering Raspberry 40-75cm
 - *Sambucus canadensis, Elderberry 40-75
 - *Viburnum lentago, Nannyberry 40-75 cm
- *1 gallon
**2 gallon



Payment by cash or e-transfer

[Learn more here](#)

Perennials, Ferns, Grasses \$7.50 each

- Asclepias incarnata, Swamp Milkweed
- Carex eburnea, Ivory Sedge
- Chelone glabra, Turtlehead
- *Dryopteris marginalis, Marginal Shield Fern
- Echinacea purpurea, Purple Coneflower
- Eutrochium maculatum, Spotted Joe-pye Weed
- Fragaria vesca, Woodland Strawberry
- Gentiana andrewsii, Blue Bottle Gentian
- Geum triflorum, Prairie Smoke, plug
- Lobelia syphilitica, Great Blue Lobelia
- Monarda fistulosa, Wild Bergamont
- Penstemon hirsutus, Hairy Beardtongue
- *Polystichum acrostichoides, Christmas Fern
- Schizachyrium scoparium, Little Bluestem
- Sisyrinchium montanum, Blue-eyed Grass
- Solidago caesia, Blue-stemmed Goldenrod
- Symphyotrichum laeve, Smooth Aster
- Pycnanthemum virginianum, Virginia Mountain Mint
- Tiarella Stolonifera, Foamflower
- Vernonia missurica, Ironweed

*4" pot





COMPOST VS. FERTILIZER: What Actually Works in the Garden?

By Nikolina Radulovich, Halton Master Gardener

If you've ever wondered whether compost is actually as effective as fertilizer, [a recent study in the Canadian Journal of Plant Science](#) gives a clear, data-backed answer using carrots as a model crop. Researchers compared vermicompost (worm compost), hot compost, a combination of both, and a standard chemical fertilizer (NPK), measuring growth, yield, but also eating quality - something gardeners care about as much as production.

When it came to yield, the results were surprisingly even. Vermicompost produced **1.68 kg/m²**, the compost combination **1.53 kg/m²**, and fertilizer **1.15 kg/m²**, but statistically, these differences were not significant. In other words, compost kept up without delivering nutrients in the same fast, targeted way as fertilizer. Instead, compost acted as a slow-release amendment, improving the soil while still supporting comparable production.



Where things start to separate is in overall plant performance. The combination of vermicompost and hot compost consistently came out on top. Plants were taller (**67.0 cm** vs. **53.5 cm** with fertilizer), canopy coverage was greater (reaching **95.2%**), and the largest carrots were heavier (**3.07 kg** compared to **2.10 kg** with fertilizer). This suggests that blending compost types may be more effective than using just one, likely because each contributes something different—vermicompost bringing microbial activity and available nutrients, and hot compost improving structure and stability.



The most interesting results, though, showed up at the table. Carrots grown with vermicompost or the compost blend scored highest for flavour (**4/5**), while hot compost alone lagged behind (**2.91/5**) and fertilizer sat in the middle (**3.91/5**). Fertilizer did produce the firmest texture (**4.64/5**), slightly ahead of the compost mix (**4.36/5**), and also led to the highest water content (**4.73/5**). The takeaway is clear: fertilizer can influence structure and juiciness, but compost plays a bigger role in flavour.



For gardeners, this reinforces something many already suspected but rarely see backed by data. Compost isn't a second-best option—it's a different approach that delivers comparable yields while improving plant growth and quality. Fertilizer still has its place, especially when a quick nutrient boost is needed, but relying on it alone misses the long-term benefits of building soil. The most effective strategy is not choosing one over the other, but using compost as the foundation and supplementing only when necessary. For anyone growing vegetables at home, especially for taste and quality:

that's a powerful shift in how we think about feeding our plants.



By Hariette Henry, Halton Master Gardener

How about [starting a spring vegetable garden in containers](#), an experience that is easy, and will allow kids to grow their own plants on a back patio or balcony. Vegetables are a good choice because they sprout quickly and provide kids the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labour quite literally. Involving them at every stage of the process nurtures their innate curiosity and gives them a sense of responsibility and achievement. Setting up a garden for kids is a fairly straightforward process. Choose a location that is accessible to the children and visible for supervision. It should also be in a spot that provides ample light and water.

Finding the [right containers](#) is the next step in your project. Plant pots are made of many different materials including wood, plastic, terracotta and even cement. All pots need drainage holes so that excess water can flow out easily, preventing the plants from dying due to lack of oxygen. The following are pot sizes for a variety of vegetables:

- Small 1-2 gallon: lettuce, radishes, spinach, basil, cilantro
- Medium 5 gallon, 12" depth: bush beans, peppers, eggplant, chard and herbs
- Large 10-15+ gallon: tomatoes (indeterminate), zucchini, broccoli and cucumbers

Now that you have your containers, you'll want to decide on the [growing medium](#) (potting soil). What your plants will grow in is very important as they are dependent on a small volume of growing material. Unlike plants growing in garden soil, these plants' roots cannot mine the soil far and wide for nutrients and water. Commercial soilless mixes are an excellent choice for containers, as they are lightweight, drain well and hold water and nutrients. Some recommended mixtures for growing container vegetables are as follows:

- 100% compost
- 100% soilless mix
- 50% soilless mix + compost

“ My grandchildren who are seven and nine have shown an interest in gardening that I would like to encourage. Can you suggest a project that I could do with them that would be simple, and not take too much time or space? ”

At this point you may want to go on a shopping trip with your grandkids to your nearest garden centre and select seeds or young plants. Starting plants from seed is much cheaper and works well for root vegetables. On the other hand, using young plants will give you a significant head start, skipping the fragile seedling stage. You could compromise and buy young plants for tomatoes and peppers, but sow seeds for veggies like leafy greens, peas and radishes.



Image: Canva

A children's vegetable garden should provide easy-to-eat, snack friendly vegetables and fruits that can be taken straight off the vine. Choose vegetables that thrive with minimal fuss and that spark curiosity among your young gardeners. The following is a list of the most often recommended [vegetable plants that thrive in pots](#): lettuce, herbs, bush beans, bell peppers, peas, radishes, strawberries, potatoes, spinach, carrots, green onions (scallions), beets, tomatoes (determinate cultivars) and cherry tomatoes. You might also want to add some [annual flowers to your potted garden](#). Nasturtiums can serve as a trap plant for cabbageworms, white flies and aphids. Marigolds also attract predatory insects such as lacewings, parasitic wasps and ladybugs that help control pests.

Best of luck and have a wonderful growing season with your grandchildren!



Garden Inspiration!

By Morag Johnston, Halton Master Gardener

It finally feels like spring when the daffodils bloom, and the first flowering perennials start to show their shoots -- along with hundreds of maple seedlings, hairy bittercress and oh-so-resilient garlic mustard. 'Twas ever thus.

“A garden is always a series of losses set against a few triumphs, like life itself.”

May Sarton (1993). “At Seventy: A Journal”, W. W. Norton & Company

“We will begin these rites, As we do trust they’ll end, in true delights.”

William Shakespeare (1623). “As You Like It”, 5.4. 207 – 208.

“In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous.”

Aristotle (350 BCE). “Parts of Animals”. Book I, 645a.16

A Bouquet of Gardening Emotions

“It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.”

Confucius

“In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.”

Margaret Atwood (1983). “Bluebeard’s Egg”, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto.

“The beautiful spring came; and when Nature resumes her loveliness, the human soul is apt to revive also.”

Harriet Ann Jacobs (1861). “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl”.



What's Growing On?

Halton Master Gardeners Present Two FREE Events

Monarch Awards

Garden Journeys

Featuring Gardens in the City of Hamilton (Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough, Glanbrook, Stoney Creek & Waterdown)



Applications Opening May 2026

The [Monarch Awards](#) celebrate and support Hamilton gardeners who are helping create habitat for pollinators. If your front yard garden includes native plants like milkweed and provides food and shelter for butterflies, bees, and other wildlife, this is your chance to be recognized.

Applications open May 15 and close June 27.

Selected gardens will be visited by Monarch Award teams between **July 13 and August 27**, with award recipients announced in **September**.

Every pollinator-friendly garden makes a difference - consider [applying!](#)

Want to know more about the Monarch Awards?

Join us on **ZOOM**, Thursday, May 14th at 7 p.m. to learn how your garden can support biodiversity — and be recognized for it!

[REGISTER HERE](#)



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



Applications Opening May 2026

[Garden Journeys Open Days](#) is an opportunity to visit beautiful gardens across the City of Hamilton. **Free** to the public, gardens 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. This event will again take place over two weekends:

August 8 - 9 & 14 - 16

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.

- 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?



Don't miss this exciting event!

Email us at:

gardenjourneysopendays@gmail.com

What's Growing On?

By Trish Moraghan, Halton Master Gardener

Niagara-on-the-Lake In Bloom

Floral and Garden Show Friday, May 8 to Sunday, May 11



[Learn more here](#)



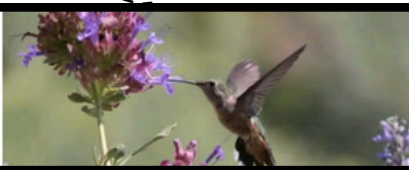
How many early Ontario wildflowers can you spot this spring?



[Learn more here](#)



Create a naturescape with native plants to provide valuable habitat for pollinators



[Learn more here](#)

Ontario has a variety of native plants favoured by pollinators



What's Growing On?



[Garden Tours](#)



[Birding](#)



[Bloom Watch](#)



Get Tools Ready for a New Season



The Seeds are Alright

Enjoy planting seeds this season without the worry of using genetically modified seeds.



[Learn more here](#)



| 2026 | | | | | | MAY | |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|
| 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 | |
| 31 | | | | | | | |

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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