# CROSS POLLINATION

Halton Master Gardeners Monthly Newsletter
NOVEMBER 2026 | VOL. 19 ISSUE 10



*Image: Olga Marranca, Hannon, Ontario*

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Halton Region Master Gardeners

## Sneezeweed, *Helenium autumnale*

By Olga Marranca, Halton Master Gardener

I was delighted by the radiant yellow of my Sneezeweed, (*Helenium autumnale*), blooms this year. The two tiny rosettes from the previous year turned into a rich lemony backdrop to a newly planted Red Osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*). As the Dogwood grows, the Sneezeweed will be a perfect understory. This year I gave it a Chelsea Chop in late June, a little later than I should have, so blooms did not show until the middle of August. Sadly a bit late for the Garden Journeys Open Days. Once they bloomed, the lemon yellow flowers were vibrantly stunning. Placed in a garden that receives afternoon sun with slightly dry soil, (it does prefer a moist area), the Sneezeweed does not seem to mind where it is.

I found the name Sneezeweed interesting, and upon researching the plant found that it had many other names: Autumn Sneezeweed, Bitterweed, Swamp Sunflower and Helen's Flower.

For centuries, the *Helenium* flower has bridged the divide between ancient mythology and cutting-edge cancer research. While Greek lore claims the flower grew from the tears of Helen of Troy, its name more likely stems from *helios*, the Greek word for sun, inspired by its brilliant yellow, daisy-like blossoms.

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## SNEEZEWEED, HELENIUM AUTUMNALE (CONT'D)

Long before entering modern laboratories, the plant was a staple in traditional medicine: the Meskwaki people, the Menominee and early settlers (learning from Native Americans) used the stems in a bath to treat fevers, colds, and congestion. Its dried petals were ground into medicinal snuff by the Nʉmʉnʉʉ (Comanches) to induce sneezing to relieve congestion or headaches, eventually naming it Sneezeweed. The historical application of Sneezeweed in traditional medicine gained modern scientific backing through research (still in trials) by the National Cancer Institute, which identified significant anti-tumor properties within the plant. This discovery was confirmed in an 1828 hypothesis by botanist Constantine Rafinesque who had argued that the species held unrealized pharmacological potential.

Common Sneezeweed *(Helenium autumnale*) will bring vibrant, late-season colour to your landscape. This native perennial wildflower blooms from August to October. Its cheerful yellow petals are a magnet for local butterflies and moths. If you want a more compact plant with sturdier stems, try utilizing the Chelsea Chop technique. This quick trim will also successfully delay flowering for an extra week or two.



*Image: Knight, Marilyn McBroom*, Wildflower Center Digital Library

Beyond its beauty, Sneezeweed is an ecological powerhouse that delivers vital nectar and heavy pollen when migrating or overwintering pollinators need it most. It is a favorite of hummingbirds, bumblebees, wasps, and flies, and it is crucial for native specialist bees like the Parallel Leafcutter *(Megachile parallela)*, Small Longhorn (*Melissodes microstictus)* and Broad-banded Longhorn (*Svastra petulca*). It is also a host plant for: Dainty Sulphur Butterfly (*Nathalis iole*) whose caterpillars feed on the foliage of Sneezeweed; Painted Lady Butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*) whose larvae use Sneezeweed as one of their host plants; Spring Azure (*Celastrina ladon*); Rigid Sunflower Borer Moth (*Papaipema rigida*) whose larvae bore directly into the plant stems and feed on the internal pith; and Silvery Checkerspot (*Chlosyne nycteis*) whose caterpillars utilize Sneezeweed and related *Asteraceae* family members as a larval host.

Sneezeweed can reach a height of between 2 to 5 feet and can spread from 1 to 3 feet. Despite the name, the plant does not cause allergies because it produces heavy pollen. It is hardy from Zones 3 to 7. It will grow well in either full sun or partial shade and prefers moist to wet rich soils. An ideal plant for a rain garden, it can be found near ponds, stream edges or damp woodlands. It is not very drought-tolerant. It is perfect for late pollinator gardens; this late-season window is important as it supports native bumblebees and fuels migrating butterflies preparing for winter.

While it attracts many insects, it is not a favourite of deer and rabbits as it has a bitter taste. It is toxic to cattle and poisonous to humans.



Spent blooms still providing fall interest and seeds for overwintering birds. *Image: O. Marranca*

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## *SNEEZEWEED, HELENIUM AUTUMNALE (CONT'D)*

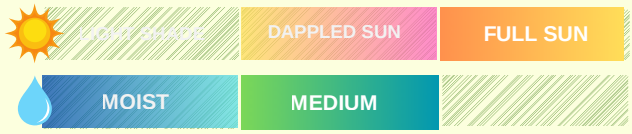


*Image:* Reveal, James L.
Wildflower Center Digital Library

Sneezeweed flowers measure 3.8 to 5 cm across, with bracts (modified leaves) whorled under the petals of these daisy-like flowers featuring a distinct, ball-shaped pollen-covered centre. This dense flowerhead, known as a capitulum, consists of a central disk packed with numerous tiny, dull yellow tube florets measuring just 0.3 cm each. Encircling this spherical cone are fan-shaped ray florets—or petals—which whorl around the edges and terminate in three characteristic teeth or notches.

You will not be disappointed with this pollinator magnet in your fall garden. Easily wintersown, this is a fast growing wildflower that is readily contained and ideal for providing late season pollen and nectar for wintering birds and insects.

### SNEEZEWEED - DETAILS AT A GLANCE




**Plant Type, Family:** Perennial, *Asteraceae*
**Height/Width:** (H) 60-150 cm (2-5') (W) 60-90 cm (2-3')
**Features:** Vibrant fall interest.
**Faunal value:** Host plant for Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*), Dainty sulphur (*Nathalis iole)*, Silvery Checkerspot (*Chlosyne nycteis*), Spring Azure (*Celastrina ladon*), Rigid Sunflower Borer Moth (*Papaipema rigida*), Plume Moth (*Platyptilia percnodactyla).*
**Companion Plants:** Great Blue Lobelia *(Lobelia siphilitica)*, New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*
**Landscape Uses:** Thrives in moist soils, sunny borders, and prairie-style or wetland gardens.
**Native Range:** Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec.

***Supports***





Vascan

Read More!

- Ottawa Society of Botanical Artists
- Native Plant Gardener
- Metro Blooms
- Xerces Society: Native Plants For Pollinators And Beneficial Insects: Great Lakes Region



### Fame is in the Flower Name!



**Iris**
Greek goddess of the rainbow



**Narcissus**
Greek youth who fell in love with his own reflection



**Helenium**
Helen of Troy, daughter of Zeus



**Achillea**
Greek hero Achilles

## *NOVEMBER GARDEN 'TO DO' LIST*

By Claudette Sims, Halton Master Gardener

- ☐ **General Garden Care**–Empty or cover decorative pots and store in a dry place to avoid damage from freezing. Turn off water supply to the garden and disconnect hoses and accessories. Empty watering cans and hang garden hoses to drain for winter storage. Clean bird houses, feeders and birdbaths thoroughly using a stiff brush and hot, soapy water.

- ☐ **Stems & Seedheads**–Leave seedheads and stalks intact over the winter. Stems offer shelter for cavity dwelling native bees & beneficial insects and also collect snow to insulate and protect plants. Seedheads provide food for birds and winter interest for everyone.

- ☐ **Bulbs–**Continue planting **spring flowering bulbs** as long as the soil is workable. You may also have time to divide and replant overcrowded spring bulbs and fall crocus which have finished blooming. Water bulbs after planting. Dig up **tender bulbs** for overwintering (e.g., caladium, calla lily, canna, dahlia, gladiolus), being careful not to damage them. Clean off soil and dry bulbs for 1-3 days. Inspect for insects or disease. Store dried bulbs in a breathable container such as a cardboard box, leaf or paper bag. Arrange bulbs so they are not touching, adding 3-6 cm (2-3″) of sand, vermiculite, sawdust, or wood shavings between layers. Label and store in a dark location at 4-7º C.

- ☐ **Trees and shrubs**–Check tree stakes and inspect any ties or wires to ensure they will not damage or girdle tree bark. Protect young trees and shrubs from damage with tree guards or chicken wire (60 cm/24" high) or by using wire baskets to cover very small trees or shrubs.

- ☐ **Bare Soil**–Protect bare soil from erosion and winter sun with a layer of organic matter, e.g., compost, leaves, straw or manure. Avoid tilling which destroys soil structure and soil organisms and encourages weeds to germinate.

> *The Remembrance Day poppy is the corn poppy (Papaver rhoeas), a wildflower that grew across the disturbed battlefields of Western Europe. It is traditionally worn on the left side, over your heart. Ontario has one native poppy species: the Wood-Poppy (Stylophorum diphyllum), also known as the celandine poppy, is listed as endangered.*





- ☐ **Houseplants**–Check individual plants before you water. If the soil feels dry/hard or the plant pot "feels light" for its size, it is likely time to water. If the soil feels cool/moist or the pot "feels heavy" for its size, wait and retest in a few days. Check for pests weekly & treat appropriately. Increase lighting in low light areas with grow lights or reflective surfaces. Grouping plants together and using a humidifier are now considered the most effective methods to ensure stable humidity.

- ☐ **Veggies and Herbs**–Mulch cold-hardy root vegetables such as **winter radishes** and **leeks** to extend the harvest through to ground freeze-up. **Leeks** can also be dug up while the ground is still workable; put into pots of loose soil and keep outdoors for easy harvesting as needed. Harvest **brussels sprouts** including the tops (which make excellent cooked greens). Sow **dill** and **corn salad** so seed can overwinter in situ for better germination in spring. Prepare for indoor growing of **chives** by splitting a clump, potting the separated section, and leaving the pot outdoors until late January; once through a freeze cycle of 6 weeks, the chives can be brought in for a winter crop. Indoors, sow quick-growing herb seeds in pots–-**cilantro** and **basil** work well for windowsill herbs.

- ☐ **Lawn and Weeds**–Rake or "mow" leaves and remove to garden beds. Leave some leaves uncut for beneficial insects and pollinators who overwinter in leaf litter. Keep on weeding as long as the soil is workable. When mowing is done for the season, clean the mower and sharpen the blades.

# *Shout-out to Atlantic Canada!*

By Cathy Kavassalis, Halton Master Gardener

*Cathy continues her exploration of the inconsistencies in invasive plant regulations across Canada, by focussing on Atlantic Canada.*
*(Adapted from a CCIPR FB post)*

Let's take a look at invasive-plant priorities, regulations and prevention efforts across Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

**What's happening on our East Coast?**
I was particularly pleased to hear from Glynis Thomas, who reached out after seeing my recent post. Glynis administers three FB groups, including the Goutweed Support Group, Native Plant Gardening Nova Scotia, and the Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs. She is one of many volunteers working to encourage better policy and practice. Glynis expressed a sentiment I see reflected across the region: governments and gardeners alike are reluctant to tell people what they can and cannot plant. As in much of Canada, prevention efforts therefore focus on education rather than regulation.

**Education IS critical**
Gardeners, growers and policymakers all need reliable information about which plants are likely to escape cultivation, the harm they can cause, and the alternatives available.

**But what about the marketplace?**
Should gardeners be expected to make *the right choice* when plants with known invasive potential are still being propagated, promoted and sold? Our government assesses the safety of many products and requires warning labels when there is the potential for harm – why not for plants? CCIPR believes regulation and better labelling are essential. At present, significant gaps remain across Atlantic Canada. Let's take a closer look.

**Newfoundland and Labrador**
There is currently no provincial legislation specifically regulating invasive plants or weeds.



Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation

The province did important work on invasive species in the late 2000s, including workshops and educational materials identifying plants such as Japanese knotweed, wild chervil, yellow iris and sea buckthorn. But much of that work is now more than 15 years old.

In a 2023 CBC news article, "Fighting an aggressive weed made me realize my garden is full of invasive species," journalist Ainsley Hawthorn wrote: "In my yard, the goutweed has choked out all opposition. There's no indigenous plant that can keep it in check. Even if there were, none of the local nurseries sell native ground covers anyway, and most of their customers, like me, don't even know the difference." It's a problem that hasn't gone away. In a more recent CBC piece (2025), one struggling St. John's gardener said, "I would love to see Newfoundland, for one, ban the sale of it."



*Journalist Ainsley Hawthorn wrote that invasive goutweed "choked out all opposition" in her garden. Goutweed is recognized as invasive from the Atlantic to the Pacific North-West.*

There are efforts to raise awareness of native flora, including the Meades' online *Flora of Newfoundland and Labrador*. But more needs to be done, including asking Memorial University Botanic Garden to stop promoting invasive plants such as bouncing bet and Scilla on its website.

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## *SHOUT-OUT TO ATLANTIC CANADA! (CONT'D)*



Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation

**Nova Scotia**

Nova Scotia regulates ten weeds under its Agricultural Weed Control Act. The list includes common milkweed, a native plant, as well as wild chervil (*Anthriscus sylvestris)*, which is sometimes sold by nurseries as 'Ravenswing'. Wild chervil is also designated a Primary Noxious Weed Seed under the federal Weed Seeds Order.

Interestingly, Nova Scotia's 2021 Biodiversity Act gives the province explicit authority to regulate invasive species. Yet five years later, no specific invasive-species regulations have been made under the Act.

In 2019, a Global News story bemoaned "no funding" to protect the health of Nova Scotia lakes from garden espapees such as yellow floating heart. The city of Halifax developed an invasive-species strategy to address this kind of problem, but the report missed the opportunity to target the marketplace, so many invasive aquatic and terrestial plants continue to be sold.



A resident of Albro Lake spends 2 hours everyday pulling out the roots of invasive yellow floating heart. Image:@Alicia_Draus on 'X'

**Thankfully, Nova Scotia is doing excellent educational work.** The Nova Scotia Invasive Species Council runs the Plant Wise program and helped create a really good Grow Me Instead Guide in collaboration with the New Brunswick Invasive Species Council. Folks like Glynis are getting the word out through gardening clubs and social media.

Another bright spot is the K.C. Irving Environmental Science Centre and Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens, which teach students about native and invasive plants, including multiflora rose, and actively encourage gardening with native species-an investment in wiser choices for the next generation.

**New Brunswick**

New Brunswick repealed its old *Weed Control Act* in 2003 and replaced it with the *Plant Health Act*. That Act gives the province authority to designate invasive plants as pests, but none has been designated to date. The New Brunswick Invasive Species Council is doing valuable work through Plant Wise and the Grow Me Instead guides. They are developing one of the stronger models for partnership through their Plant Wise Partner Program, encouraging nurseries and garden centres to post their educational materials. This is a terrific initiative to reduce the sale and distribution of invasive plants. Let's also celebrate the Fredericton Botanic Garden's commitment: "The Garden does not knowingly plant or distribute invasive alien species."
These are the kinds of leadership examples that give me hope.

**Prince Edward Island**

PEI can regulate invasive plants under its *Weed Control Act* and has one specific regulation: The Purple Loosestrife Control Regulations prohibit the import, propagation or sale of purple loosestrife and other species of the genus *Lythrum*.

I particularly like the use of the genus here. Regulation need not be limited to a single species or cultivar name. It recognizes that regulation shouldn't necessarily be limited to one particular cultivar or species name. (*Lythrum salicaria, L. virgatum*, and other species have been hybridized, and some of the resulting cultivars have added hybrid vigour.)

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## *SHOUT-OUT TO ATLANTIC CANADA! (CONT'D)*



PEI also has an active invasive-plant council that addresses horticulture and identifies plants escaping from gardens, nurseries and landscaping. Its work includes prioritizing species already established on the island and those for which prevention could still make a difference. Look at some of the plants on its radar:

- Periwinkle
- Yellow archangel
- English ivy
- Goutweed
- Creeping Jenny
- Japanese barberry
- Norway maple

These are familiar names from coast to coast. And yet, sales continue.

**So, what do I see across Atlantic Canada?** Certainly, not a lack of effort. Invasive-species councils, native-plant advocates, garden clubs, botanic gardens, municipalities, researchers, Master Gardeners and home gardeners are all doing excellent work.

But I see a growing problem, with cost no community can bare. We know that the ***horticultural industry is the primary pathway for the introduction of invasive plants***. We need to ask ourselves how much responsibility should fall on hard-working volunteers, on individual gardeners, and how much should be addressed upstream, before a plant reaches the garden centre?

This isn't about telling gardeners what they must plant. It's about asking whether plants that cause harm, that pose an unacceptable ecological risk, should be marketed and sold in the first place.

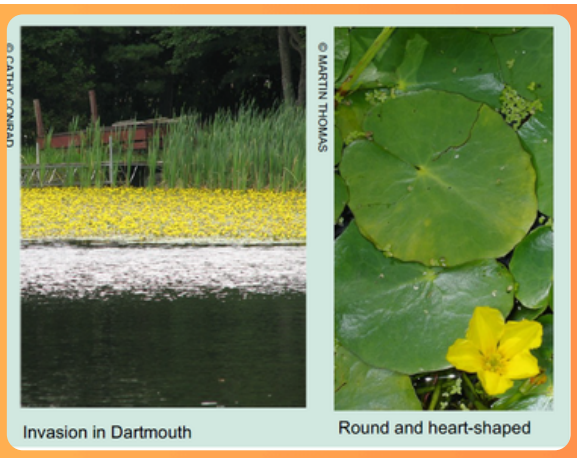



Plants are products and CCIPR believes that consumers have a right to know that plants can cause harm. New York State prohibits the sale of some ornamental invasive plants and requires labels for others.

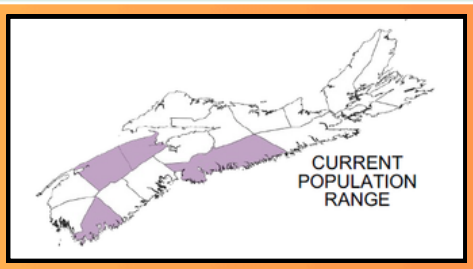
### A Condensed Story of One Invasive Plant

**Yellow Floating Heart** (*Nyzmphoides peltata*) is native to temperate regions of Eurasia. It was first marketed as an ornamental plant in 1891 in the United States, and subsequently **spread as a horticultural species**. It was only recently introduced to Nova Scotia, where it was first reported as escaped from a water garden at Little Albro Lake (Halifax County) in 2006.

It can form dense mats of floating vegetation that exclude native species. It can also create stagnant areas with lower levels of oxygen which negatively affect native fish habitat. Its dense growth threatens the quality of native freshwater habitat, and can cause recreational activities (like swimming and canoeing) to become difficult or impossible.




Invasion in Dartmouth — Round and heart-shaped




Information and images from Nova Scotia Invasive Species Council

# Q&A

By Hariette Henry, Halton Master Gardener

> *My Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight' hedge has grown to over 15' high and 6' wide. I would like to reduce it by at least 3-4'. How and when should I go about this task?*



*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight"

The best time to prune Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight' is in late winter to early spring, when you start to see evidence of new green growth on the plants. In southern Ontario this typically falls between late March to mid-April.

Limelight hydrangea is a specific cultivar belonging to the *Hydrangea paniculata* species. This hydrangea blooms on "new wood", which refers to growth that is produced in the current season. Pruning the plant in early spring (before the new growth begins) ensures that you won't accidentally cut off any potential flower buds that will carry the large blooms appearing in July and August.

Before you begin the task of re-shaping your hedge it's a good idea to gather together the sharpened and cleaned tools you will be using to complete the task. It is not recommended that you use a power tool of any kind for this type of work.

The following are tools that you will need:

- Bypass hand pruners that operate like scissors where two blades pass each other. They make clean cuts on live wood up to a 1/2" thick.
- Bypass loppers are cutting tools (much like pruners) with long handles that give you more leverage to cut through thicker branches.
- A folding, pruning saw is a good option for cutting old, thick, dead wood on major structural branches.
- You should also have thick gardening gloves and rubbing alcohol or disinfectant wipes on hand, to clean your tools before you begin and between plants. Eye protection is also recommended.

You may find some conflicting information on the order of steps to take when pruning *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'. However, many experts agree that Bottom-Up, Inside-Out is the most efficient order for pruning these plants:

- Before you do any styling or shaping, clean the frame of the plants. Cut back any dead, brittle, or hollow stems to the ground. Remove stems broken from winter snow or wind and remove canes showing disease or peeling bark.
- Next make structural corrections. Look closely at how the branches interact. You want an open, vase-like shape that lets air and light into the centre of the plant. If two branches are rubbing together, remove the thinner or poorly positioned one. Cut away branches that are growing horizontally back into the centre of the shrub. If a branch ends in a Y or a three-pronged cluster, thin it down so only one strong leader continues forward.
- Remove wood that is thinner than a pencil. Because panicle hydrangeas flower on new wood, thin stems may not support the heavy flower heads.
- Shortening and shaping the plants in your "hedge" is your final task. Cutting back heavily creates fewer, larger panicles. A lighter trim such as removing the top third will give you a taller shrub with more flowers. Find a pair of healthy, plump buds and make your cut ¼" above the buds. You should also select outward-facing buds so new growth expands away from the centre of the plant.

# Garden Inspiration!

By Olga Marranca, Halton Master Gardener

## "I planted a bunch of asters this spring... it was an aster-risk I was willing to take."

Late blooming native wildflowers such as Asters (*Symphyotrichum* spp.) and Goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) emerge just in time to feed bumblebees and south-migrating butterflies that require vast amounts of pollen and nectar for their journey. Asters are divided into four genera: the “typical” Asters (*Symphyotrichum* spp.), the Wood Asters (*Eurybia* spp.), the Whorled Asters (*Oclemena* spp.) and the Flat-top Asters (*Doellingeria*). Let’s look at some of these beauties!



New-England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*).

Image: Prairie Moon Nursery

Smooth Blue Aster (*Symphyotrichum laeve*)

Author Credit: © Lostafichuk, Dreamstime.com



Calico Aster (*Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*)

Image Elise Smith, Wikimedia Commons, via CC BY-SA.





Arrow-Leaved Aster (*Symphyotrichum urophyllum*)

Image: Prairie Moon Nursery

Swamp Aster (*Symphyotrichum puniceum*)

The Natural Edge, A Program of Watersheds of Canada



Read More:

Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy

The Natural Edge, Restoring the Ribbons of Life

# What's Growing On?

By Trish Moraghan, Halton Master Gardener

GROW NATIVE HALTON

[Learn more here]




HALTON HILLS nature

*Halton Hills is working towards being a more sustainable community and preserving its natural heritage.*

[Learn more here]

BIRD FRIENDLY HALTON HILLS

*Bird Friendly Certification from Nature Canada*



*Yard Care*



*Invasive Species Removal*



*Tree Planting*

# What's Growing On?

Royal Botanical Gardens



[Winter Wonders]



[Birding]



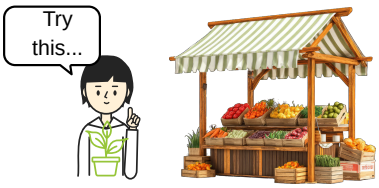
[Conservation Projects]




**Check our calendar for events**

HALTON REGION MASTER GARDENERS

## *Farmer's Market Advice Clinic Oakville, Saturday, Nov. 28th*




[Learn more here]

## *Print Resources*




[Learn more here]

## *Wildlife in Your Yard*



[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.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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