

Gardening Newsletter



"The Friendly Garden People"
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From The Editor



Well no one can deny that 2020 has been a very interesting year. The Covid 19 pandemic has affected each and every person in so many different ways. And for gardeners, the summer of 2020 will be remembered as one of the hottest and driest that we can remember.

Claudia has done an amazing job of keeping our members in the loop with her regular emails and updates so we were very fortunate to have her as our president during this time. She called a meeting of the executive in August and Gerry and Judy graciously agreed to host us in their beautiful gardens so that we could discuss where we go from here. One thing became clear immediately. We're not going to let the current situation put an end to a garden club that has been around for over 90 years. We have no idea when we'll be able to meet again, but it will almost certainly be quite a while from now.

In the spring, we sent a digital issue of this newsletter to all members but many said that they would much prefer to receive a paper copy in the mail.

So a decision was made that I would write a September issue and that the club would cover the cost of mailing it out. Mariette sent in several articles to update us on club news and Doris and Claudia agreed to create the address labels and stuff the envelopes to send out. Claudia will continue to send out emails throughout the fall and winter and I will try my best to create some timely articles on gardening topics for her to include in those emails. She did look into the slight possibility of holding meetings at our usual location with members staying physically distanced but learned that this would not be possible. Therefore, since we haven't been holding meetings, your membership fees for 2020 will be applied to 2021.

So, for now, we will continue to stay in touch as best we can and hope that it won't be long until we can meet together again in person. In the meantime, we encourage all members to send along some garden photos to include on our website. We've heard from so many members that their gardens never looked better than they did this year because we all had so much time to work in

them. I know that in my garden, I've never had a better yield of vine ripened tomatoes. In most years, I'm covering plants covered in green tomatoes to protect them from frost in hopes that they'll still ripen. This year, I was picking not just the early cherry tomatoes, but large vine-ripe tomatoes in mid-August. I was offering cucumbers to delivery men who were coming to my door just to get them used up. One day when I was out working in the garden, a car pulled into the driveway to ask for directions – I insisted that they accept a bag of cucumbers and tomatoes before they left! In my flower beds my cana lilies were blooming long before normal, so I actually got to enjoy their blooms without fearing that frost would kill them! While our lawn was brown and crunchy by mid-summer, most of our perennials continued to bloom despite the lack of rain. By late August, I did have a few that were clearly at risk, so time will tell if a few drinks from the hose saved them.

Because of the hot dry summer, the WHS executive decided not to proceed with our original plans of holding a fall plant sale. With our plants stressed due to

drought, transplanting them would likely be the final straw. They would need to be pampered and watered every day, and with the risk of continued water restrictions, we decided that we would request that members hold their plants in place until our annual spring plant auction.

If there are members who do have plants that they need to dig up this fall for any reason, Gerry has advised us that you can still find them a good home. The New Brunswick Motor Sport Hall of Fame in Peticodiac has created a large new planting area at their facility and would certainly welcome all donations next spring, and likely this fall! You can contact Rick Wood at 384-0009.

I hope that you all enjoy this issue of the newsletter and please do continue to let Mariette know if there are any members who should be receiving cards throughout the fall. You can reach her at 386-4934. Also do send along any news that you would like Claudia to include in future emails.

So until we meet again, happy gardening. Enjoy the beautiful fall weather and the bounty of your harvests.
Laura Sarson

And into my garden I go, to forget my troubles and find my soul. ~ B.Moore



Ask Dr. Fill

Dear Dr. Fill

Fall is in the air and I'm very confused by the conflicting advice I hear on fall clean up in my garden. Some say I need to clean up everything to keep diseases and insects away next year, and some say Mother Nature knows best and that it's better for plants to leave everything in place until next spring since dead plant stalks and leaves are providing habitat for bees and beneficial insects. I'm curious to hear your opinion.

Sincerely,

A Confused Gardener



Dear Confused Gardener

For some gardeners, the arrival of fall means that the hours of hard work in their gardens are finally coming to an end and they can take a well deserved rest. However, you are correct that many gardeners will tell you that there's no time to rest - that a fall cleanup isn't just done to make your property look good until the snow arrives - it's also a really good way to improve the overall health of your gardens.

However, lately we're hearing more warnings that fall cleanups destroy habitat for beneficial insects and that cleaning up our beds can actually be doing more harm than good. Meanwhile, landscape companies will insist that everything should be cleaned up

leaving your property sterile and free of disease. As with many things, sometimes when a pendulum swings, it swings a bit too far. After all, if garden debris is providing a habitat for beneficial insects, it's also providing habitat for some that can really do a lot of damage! And leaving plant debris that is harbouring mold and fungal diseases is definitely not wise. But it's also true that those spores are very possibly on plants that we leave in place - they just haven't taken hold yet - but they may do so next year if we leave them on plants that "look" healthy. We don't need to rush out and remove everything from our vegetable gardens at the first signs that fall has arrived if we want to avoid fungal problems next year. Lots of semi-hardy and hardy vegetables can withstand light frost and air temperatures in the freezing range. For beets, carrots and parsnips, the tops will die but the roots will tolerate lower temperatures and the starches will be turning to sugars, making these veggies taste even better. Hardy vegetables that can withstand heavy frost include spinach, leeks, kohlrabi, kale, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and turnip. And for tender vegetables like tomatoes, they'll continue ripening during the day if we toss a sheet over them at night to protect them from light frosts. We just need to keep our fingers crossed that we won't have an early snowstorm

that buries the plants before we get our veggie patch cleaned up and removed. Any spent vegetable plants, especially those that are killed by frost, should be removed immediately as this type of dead debris invites disease and insects. We somehow have to find a happy medium that gives our plants and our soil the best shot at being healthy and happy next spring. With that being said, here's a list of recommended chores to consider doing before winter arrives. It's up to each of us to decide where we are on the spectrum of leaving everything in place just as nature left it or cutting back every single flower stalk that could have provided seed heads to hungry birds this winter.

1) Do not leave fallen leaves on your lawn. Some gardeners continue to believe that leaving them in place protects your grass from the cold, but a layer of soggy fall leaves creates a barrier on top of the turf blocking water, sunlight, and healthy air flow, which can create disease and ugly brown patches.

Other gardeners insist that you need to remove every single leaf from your lawn to keep it healthy, and that's not a good idea either. The fact is, leaving some leaves is a GOOD idea - BUT ONLY IF you run a mower over them to chop them up into tiny pieces.

Soil specialist, Dr. Thomas Nikoai of

Michigan State University, says that by mowing over the fallen leaves to turn them into smaller pieces, the leaves will actually enhance the lawn's fertility, not kill it off. And while it's usually recommended to use a mulching mower, or a mulching attachment, to convert the larger leaves into smaller-sized particles, virtually any mower can do the job - it's merely a matter of mowing over the leaf-filled yard a few times during the season.

As for leaving fall leaves in your perennial beds, once again it's not a black and white or right or wrong answer. It really comes down to what trees you have in your yard (and what trees your neighbours have in their yard!). Some leaves get soggy and wet and form dense mats that can really harm your plants. Those NEED to be removed. Others stay dry and don't decompose so quickly, and leaving these in place can actually protect your plants and you can remove them in the spring. If you are willing to do a bit of extra work, (and who doesn't enjoy being outside on a crisp sunny fall day!) you can rake the leaves OUT of your perennial beds, run over them with a lawn mower to chop them up, and then return them back INTO your flower beds as a mulch which will return nutrients and microorganisms to your soil.

2) Reduce disease next spring by removing old,

I have learned to seek out only plants that live well and also die well - plants that are beautiful in the summer, remain healthy looking throughout the fall, and have structural interest in the winter. ~ Piet Oudolf

Ask Dr. Fill (cont'd)

dead, and diseased plant material. It will reduce the spread of fungal and bacterial infections in spring. Any rotted and unharvested fruits, dead branches & limbs, and diseased plant parts can all be composted to create a healthier winter environment before temperatures rise again. Leaving rotting tomatoes or apples or other produce on the ground can invite disease for next year. After removing plant debris, it is a good idea to look for areas that need mulch. Mulch protects the roots of perennial plants and the topsoil during winter's harsh conditions. In vegetable beds, you might consider planting a cover crop such as clover that doubles as a mulch but also will be a great natural high nitrogen fertilizer when you turn it under. If that isn't something you can do, covering your vegetable garden soil with mulch or a layer of compost is the next best thing. It will protect the topsoil as well as improve the health of the soil to boost next year's harvest. Apply 3 to 6 inches of an organic mulch or compost over the soil to provide food for the microorganisms within the soil. You could also use shredded leaves or clean straw without seed. This material will lie on the soil's surface and the microorganisms will break it down throughout the winter. Next spring turn it over into the top 6 inches of soil.

It's not technically part of "clean up", but do

take the time this fall to make a note of what plants were grown where in your vegetable garden. Don't rely on your memory! This will help in planning next year's planting. It is never good to grow plants in the same family in the same place year after year. Not only does it allow pests and diseases specific to that family to become entrenched, it also depletes the soil of the same nutrients each year. Think about where you were growing legumes like peas and beans which have been pulling nitrogen down into your soil, and plan to plant crops that love nitrogen there next spring. Fall is also the best time to do a soil test in your veggie garden to see what nutrients have been used up by this year's crops. If there's something that is sorely lacking, adding that nutrient now will allow it to dissolve and break down and be available to your young plants next spring.

3) Prepare your trees.

Many of us pamper our perennials in the fall to prepare them for winter, but neglect our trees, assuming that they're big enough to take care of themselves. Examine all trees carefully for any damage and if there are any weak or damaged limbs that could be torn off during a winter ice storm, it's best to carefully prune them off in the fall. When a branch is ripped from a tree in a storm, it often removes a large section of trunk bark which is crucial for the tree's

health. Preventative pruning avoids this. Continue to water your evergreen trees up until the ground is frozen. They've endured a VERY dry summer, and they will need moisture in their needles to stay green throughout the winter. If you don't normally protect them with a burlap fence, this might be the year to start as they're going into winter extra dry. Pound some stakes and make the fence on the sunny side of small cedars and other evergreens as it's the heat of the sun in the spring when the ground is still frozen that is going to leave them looking brown and crunchy.

4) Don't cut everything back.

Experts will say that some plants absolutely do prefer to be left standing over the winter as it protects their crown from cold temperatures and reduces deadly frost heave in the spring. But some plants, like peonies and iris that are prone to diseases such as botrytis, would prefer to be cut back. And as for those flowers like coneflowers or rudbeckia that do provide food for birds, perhaps you can find a happy medium – leave a few standing and cut some back if you don't like the look of them in your fall beds or if you find that you never have time to cut them back in the spring.

5) Lime. Lime. Lime.

While it's technically not part of fall clean up, liming is a great way to keep your plants healthy

next spring. Invest in an inexpensive soil test kit and check the pH of your soil. If you are growing plants that can't thrive in acidic soil, fall is the BEST time to add agricultural lime. It will begin to slowly dissolve and break down over the winter and be available to your plants in the spring. And if you wait to lime in the spring, it's not safe to be fertilizing at the same time!

Dr. Fill



A Great Covid 19 Photo

By: Mariette Lanteigne Sharpe

I hope the temperature was hot enough for you this summer. On a positive note, we were very lucky to have zero black flies or mosquitoes in Riverview. First, time ever! Because of the virus, I couldn't have a plant and yard sale this spring. I have been doing a garage sale since the last 25 years and I was stuck with a couple hundred plants. I had transplanted them all in my vegetable garden last fall and had to get rid of them to plant my vegetable seeds. I gave 35 perennials for the W.H.S. plant sale and gave all the rest to my son's friends and neighbours. They loved me!

I had nothing to do this summer, so decided to really take care of my property and I enjoyed every minute of it. After putting so much effort into crafting an almost, perfect garden, I was

Don't tell secrets in the garden. The corn has ears, the potatoes have eyes, and the beanstalk. ~ Anonymous

A Great Covid-19 Photo (cont'd)

glad to have many friends coming to visit me. I always say, why keep it to yourself? Sharing a garden with your friends can be highly validating for all the work that has been put into it. I really do hope that next summer, everything will be back to normal and we will be able to have a garden tour.

Monday, June 22, was a very hot day, but that didn't stop 12 great W.H.S. members from going down and cleaning and planting hundreds of flowers at the Millennium garden. I really did enjoy working with such a great group. Gerry brought the potting plants that the club purchased at Vienneau Nursery near Cap Pele, plus a lot of beautiful calla lilies and several flats of begonias that he donated and Parker and Verna brought the club canna lilies that they had planted and overwintered in their garage. We also got a few plants from the City. In about 2 1/2 hours, we were all done and very proud of our hard work. Here is the names of those 12 dedicated members. Parker and Verna Elliot, Claudia Schaerer and Fernand Daigle, Gerry Gillcash, Rob DeWolfe, Dave McCullough, Sheila Gorman, Jessica Seely, Jeanne Maddix, Betty Vick and myself.

We took a great Covid 19 group photo at the end of the morning. Thanks to this very smart group for coming out to help clean and plant. It made it so much faster and more

fun, to have so many members participate.

Since the beginning of 2020, I sent 8 (eight) cards. A sympathy card to Anita VanBuskirk on the passing of her son, a sympathy card to Doris Brown on the loss of her brother, and a sympathy card to Betty Vicks as she lost her father. I also sent a 50th Wedding Anniversary card to Jim and Judy Steeves. Congratulations! A sympathy card was sent to Marion Garland as her husband, Ken, passed away and I sent a 'Thinking of you' card to Garth Berry who was sick in the hospital and sadly a sympathy card, 2 weeks later, to his wife, Simone as Garth passed away. And finally, a sympathy card to the family of Connie Clark, a member for many years, who passed away in August.

Wishing all the members a great Thanksgiving Day in October. Hope you enjoy the following joke. On Thanksgiving day, if my relatives wanted me to be truly thankful, they'd do all the cooking.

Mariette Lanteigne Sharpe



A Golden Heart Stopped Beating.

I was also very sad, on July 20th, to her of the passing of member Garth Berry. He was married to his loving wife, Simone for over 61 years. The Berrys were members for many years. They rarely missed a meeting, a garden tour or pot luck. I remember that Garth put a couple of articles on

display the last year we had a garden show at MacArthur Nurseries. He was also there to help for the set-up of the show. Also, he went to help clean the Millennium garden with a friend, a couple of years ago. He gave a drive to the meeting to many members. He was a very nice, quiet man and always had a smile. I always went to bring them a copy of the newsletter, when they were not able to come to the meeting as they were very good members and also because Simone is a very dear friend. My sincere sympathy to all his family.

Mariette Lanteigne Sharpe



I Learned From The Best!!

I was very sad on June 22nd to hear of the passing of a very friendly W.H.S. member, Mr. Kenneth "Ken" Garland at the age of 93.

Ken was a very active member in the club for many years. It was always an honor for me to compete for the vegetable table in the W.H.S. Garden Show. He won many red rosettes in this category. He was always so much a friendly competitor and gave me excellent tips and ideas to display a nice table. Like we say in French "I learned from the best!"

The last time Ken participated in a show was in 2013. The many vegetables displayed by Ken and his wife Marion

were the best I ever saw and also their beautiful blue hydrangea was breathtaking. This very friendly couple had a small misadventure. They came the day of the show to register their entries and the entries were supposed to be done the night before the show. The Show Chairman, Karen Carrier, a very smart and diplomatic person let them display their entries on a single table but not to be judged. Very great idea, as everybody was able to admire entries that could have won red rosettes. They promised me they would be back the next year so I could enjoy his friendly competition. Sadly, 2013, was the last year we had a big garden show.

I went to bring them the W.H.S. newsletter for many years. They always welcomed me with open arms and proudly showed me their flower and vegetable gardens.

I regret that I didn't join the W.H.S. as soon as I moved to Riverview 44 years ago, so I could have enjoyed a lot longer the company of this excellent and dear friend. Ken was a nice, quiet, shy, friendly and wonderful friend. I will miss him.

Mariette Lanteigne Sharpe



Did You Know? The Sundew is a native plant in N.B. that feeds on insects. In one summer a Sundew plant can catch and eat 2000 insects!

I used to be afraid when a bee landed on me, but now I'm happy that it thinks I'm a flower! ~ B. Tyson

Consider a Xeriscape!



Most gardeners have heard of the new trend of xeriscaping – growing plants in a way that reduces the need for water. Many xeriscape gardens have a coloured stone or gravel mulched surface, but you don't need to be growing cactus in a rock garden to xeriscape. However there are some traits that must be present for a true xeriscape.

A true xeriscape uses 30 – 100% less water by incorporating low-water plants, efficient irrigation, proper mulch, a good soil base, and reducing turf areas. Most landscapers say that a xeriscape needs 30 – 100% less maintenance, **saving money and time.**

Gardeners begin to xeriscape for a variety of reasons. Some do it to save water, either to save money on their water bill or to reduce their use of this non-renewable resource. Some just don't want to have to water their gardens during a dry summer. Whatever the reason, it's important not to believe the myth that their drought tolerant plants don't need to be watered. They do! At least, at first!

For the most part gardeners in our area have to rely on buying plants that are native to dry parts of the world. Our nurseries don't carry a lot of cactus or plants from true deserts. It would be nearly

impossible to replicate their soil conditions and weather patterns to keep those plants healthy. But we can buy "drought tolerant" plants such as lavender, yarrow, red hot pokers, beebalm and Russian sage. But just because the label says "drought tolerant" we can't remove them from their pots and place them in a planting hole in our garden and walk away. These plants need to be watered until they are fully rooted into your garden and until they are able to get a drink from deep down in the soil. And they will also benefit from a drink during an extended hot, dry period. The term drought tolerant should be viewed as meaning two things: 1) Do not plant these plants in an area where the soil is moist or boggy most of the time. That will be their death sentence. They must be planted in well draining soil. 2) You can leave for the cottage and they'll be fine if it doesn't rain while you're gone.

Some plants like cacti and succulents have tissues that store water, so they may be able to survive long dry periods without much damage. There are hardy cactus (such as some species of Prickly Pear cactus) that can survive a winter here if you give them perfect conditions, but most local xeriscapers plant "indoor cactus" outside for the summer and bring them back indoors for the winter and they'll thrive with very little water. But if you neglect thin-leaved flowering plants

that are labelled drought tolerant, they may not make it through the summer if you don't water them from time to time.

Another option for reducing water usage is planting native plants whenever possible. Landscapes that use native plants are the ultimate xeriscape – the plants are perfectly adapted to the local growing conditions without the need for supplemental water. They've been thriving in the wild for hundreds of years, and what's more, they support biodiversity by encouraging local bird and insect life. However, even these plants will need supplemental watering when you first plant them or if you transplant them during a hot dry spell.

If you grow flowers in containers, you no doubt find yourself watering them every day, if not twice a day. But you can still have lots of containers and reduce your water consumption significantly. For a drought tolerant container, try planting a variety of Sempervivum (hens and chicks), Armeria (seathrift), dianthus cheddar pinks, and portulaca, lemon thyme, and a blue fescue grass such as 'Elijah Blue' for height. This planter may require watering weekly vs. daily.

If you're interested in xeriscaping and reducing water consumption, there are several principles that should be followed which include more than

buying drought tolerant plants.

- 1) Plan the layout of your garden to optimize water usage. If you have any areas that slope, plant the things that need more water at the bottom of the slope, and plant things at the top of the slope that are happy in dryer soil.
- 2) Plant things with the same water needs together. Instead of beginning your garden design with heights of plants or colours of plants, begin with placing any that need more water together and all that thrive in dry soil together and try to create at least one bed that is entirely drought tolerant.
- 3) Amend your soil with organic matter to make it more fertile and to improve water retention so that it holds the little bit of moisture you get from a light rainfall.
- 4) Don't waste water by giving plants a light sprinkle from your hose each day. That water never reaches the roots and it truly is wasting water. You might see the water sinking into the soil and think you're doing a good thing, but if you brush away just the top inch of soil, chances are that underneath, the soil is still dusty dry.
- 5) Choose native plants, or ones clearly labelled drought resistant (best) or at least drought tolerant.
- 6) Mulch all flower and vegetable gardens to prevent moisture evaporation.
- 7) Limit your lawn size – or allow it to get brown and crunchy during a hot summer. Replace lawn with flowerbeds that don't require much water,

The best thing one can do when it's raining is to sit and simply enjoy the rain. ~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Xeriscaping

and with paths made of stone or mulch. 8) Install rain barrels below your downspouts for a constant supply of chemical-free, warm water at hand for watering containers, hanging baskets and newly planted seedlings that cannot go without water. (As an added bonus, the grass below the downspout is no longer waterlogged for days after a storm). 9) Keep up maintenance – a xeriscape does not mean that you don't have to tend your gardens. Follow all your good gardening practice – just don't buy plants that demand moist soil unless you have a naturally boggy area no matter how beautiful they are – as global warming is bound to bring us lots more hot, dry summers. And last but not least, if you have a shady area, place your gardens there instead of in full sun. Shade beds can go MUCH longer without water than beds in full sun.



So Many Leaves, So Many Choices!

Raking leaves in the fall can seem like an unending chore. You get yours all raked up and your neighbour's leaves seem to inevitably blow into your yard. But **don't complain!** In fact, you might want to send him a thank you note! Those leaves are the best gift any gardener will ever receive. You can use them to make **leaf mulch, leaf mold,** or

leaf compost – or maybe all three. And it doesn't stop there!

If you have raised vegetable beds, there's a 4th option. Filling up a raised bed with shredded leaves in the fall and turning them into the soil as soon as possible in the spring is one of the most beneficial things you can do for your contained soil. Covering the bed with plastic over the winter will speed the process of the leaves breaking down.

Another great option is for gardeners with compost bins. Shred some leaves with your lawn mower, bag them up and set them aside until next summer when you'll need them to keep the ratio of carbon to nitrogen in your bins. During summers, everything we add to our bins tends to be "green" materials (high in nitrogen) – plant tops, faded flowers, coffee grounds, veggie peels, grass clippings, etc. If carbon isn't added, our bins will be slow to compost and the materials will become smelly. They **NEED** to have carbon added and those leaves you bagged up are the perfect source of carbon. You don't need to be exact, but when you've added a layer of green materials, you should add a layer of leaves of similar thickness. You'll be surprised at how much faster your compost will decompose.

To use leaves as **mulch**, they can be applied directly under trees and

shrubs or around the roots of tender perennials to protect the soil and provide insulation from the cold. Don't be afraid to pile it on. The higher the pile and the more air trapped inside it, the better the insulating properties. Several inches is a good start, but you'll need to pull them back in the spring to allow the soil to warm. Whole leaves can also prevent moisture from getting into the ground – another reason to pull them back in the spring.

For leaf mold or leaf compost, shredding or chopping the leaves is necessary. Making **leaf mold** is one of the easiest things we can do with all those fall leaves. Piling leaves in heaps or in bins and cages is about all that's necessary. Keep the piles uniformly moist. Turning them on occasion is helpful because matting is minimized by frequent turning. When whole leaves are piled in wire cages, leaves can take three years to reach optimum condition of leaf mold. But if you shred finely, turn the pile and keep it uniformly moist, you'll have usable product in six to 12 months. Leaf mold can also be made in plastic bags by filling lawn bags with shredded leaves, dampening and poking a few holes to let in air.

Leaf mold absorbs five times its weight in water. Turned into hard clay soil, it will help make the soil more friable and root-friendly while maintaining good moisture levels. The high carbon content of leaves

is a crucial food source for the millions of beneficial microscopic organisms we need in healthy soil.

But with just a bit more effort, you can make **leaf compost**, and your plants will love you! Leaf mold is a great soil additive, but it does not offer the nutrients of leaf compost. Pound for pound, the leaves of most trees contain **twice the mineral content of manure**. But they need a nitrogen boost to get them composting and releasing those nutrients, and **nitrogen is what separates leaf mold from leaf compost**.

Making leaf compost isn't much different than making other compost, but you won't have to save all your kitchen scraps which is why so many people don't make compost.

To make quality compost, leaf shredding is essential. This can be done with your lawn mower, but don't just run over your leaves once. Maximum shredding is important for quick breakdown. Several passes will give you a fine, quick-to-decompose product.

(This is true whether you're making compost or leaf mold. Unshredded leaves will pack tightly in layers, delaying the molding process sometime for as much as two or three years. Even in a compost tumbler, unshredded leaves will sit through the season while all other green materials around it decompose).

Cont'd Page 7

It is not so much for its beauty that a country garden makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle quality of air that emanates from old trees and overgrown rose beds that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.

~Robert Louis Stevenson

When making compost piles, because leaves are often available in such large quantities, it's tempting to construct very large piles. But large piles are harder to turn and contain. Two or three manageable piles, all with sufficient nitrogen source added, are much more effective and more easily worked. The classic "three bin" method of composting is a great way to keep large amounts of leaves organized and progressing through the decay cycle.

Chopping and mixing leaves with other brown (carbon) and green (nitrogen) ingredients will speed decomposition by as much as four times!

Nitrogen sources could be manure, green grass clippings, or blood meal. Nitrogen is what starts the compost heap heating up. Adding about 2 cups of blood meal to each wheelbarrow load of leaves will do the trick. OR mixing five parts leaves to one part manure will get your compost pile nice and hot. Green grass clippings also provide nitrogen - five part leaves to two or three parts clippings will work. Being sure your pile gets enough oxygen is also essential. Frequent turning to keep the leaves from becoming matted down is a must. Turning also helps distribute moisture among leaves like maple which break down quickly to dryer leaves like oak which need the moisture to break down faster.

Keep the pile moist, but not soggy. Cover the pile

with a plastic sheet or tarp, but remove it and turn the heap every two weeks or so. It will be easy to turn as leaves are very light. Turn the pile as late in the fall as you can, but it will eventually freeze up. But in the spring, begin turning it again as soon as you can. You should have beautiful fine compost ready for late spring/early summer planting.

Harvesting Carrots



For first time carrot growers, the biggest question is often, "Are they ready to harvest?" and a more important question gets overlooked, and that is, "HOW do I harvest?" Most new gardeners have experienced grasping their carrot tops and giving them a nice strong pull and seeing half of their carrot pop out of the ground and half of it staying where it was. But it doesn't have to be that way!

The question of when to pull them is partly based on personal preference - little baby carrots are good, but you might want to wait until they've fully developed and been hit by a frost. Picking your veggies after a couple of frosts will make them taste sweeter because the lower temperatures will tell the plant to start storing sugar in its roots instead of its greens. You can also choose to store your carrots in the ground during winter, using the earth and a thick layer of straw mulch as a form of outdoor refrigerator. You can dig

your carrots up until your soil freezes solid.

For the best harvest, you'll need to follow a few rules. Experts recommend harvesting the day after you've received some rain, or water them well, and then wait a day. Make sure your soil is moist - but not soggy, as this will make digging them up and removing them messier. The next step is equally critical. Once you are satisfied that they are a harvestable size and the soil is moist, it's time to loosen the soil. You can use a hand cultivator, or your garden fork to gently loosen the soil around your roots. This is an important step to ensure that the roots don't break off in the soil - which often happens if you attempt to pull them straight out of compacted soil. Of course, you need to do this carefully and make sure that you aren't accidentally poking your carrots.

Once you have pulled them out of the ground, don't wash them unless you plan to eat your entire crop within the next few weeks. Just brush off the excess soil.

Before you store your crop, you need to trim off the green tops, even if you intend to eat them soon. Yes, they do look pretty with the tops still attached, but the greens will leech out the sugars from the roots and those sugars are what make those carrots taste so good.

When it comes to storing your harvest, it depends on how soon you think

you'll eat them. If your crop is small enough that you plan to eat them within the next month or so - you can give them all a thorough cleaning. Then dry them well and store them in perforated plastic bags in the crisper drawer of your fridge.

But if you grew a lot of carrots and need to store them for long term, don't give them this thorough cleaning. A little dirt and a lack of added moisture will help them last longer in storage. In modern homes, it's tricky to find a place where you can safely store them for a long time. They like an area where the temperature is just barely above freezing and with relatively high humidity. If you have that in your basement or garage, you can pack your carrots in moist sand in a crate and they'll keep just fine for 4-6 months (But it's a good idea to check on them occasionally and remove any that show any signs of rot).

If you're digging up your carrots, you might find that some of them don't exactly look like the ones in the seed catalogues. They might be bent or hairy or joined together or split open up the side. Some of these might give you a chuckle and look quite rude, but they certainly aren't what you'd hoped for. You can't fix the problem now, (but you can grate them for a yummy carrot cake or make a big bowl of coleslaw), and you can try to aim for more normal looking carrots next year!

Cont'd Page 8

Harvesting Carrots

The most important thing for growing "perfect" carrots is to prepare the soil you plant in REALLY well. As a carrot root grows, it is highly sensitive to soil conditions and the tip will detect anything it comes to – a tiny rock – a clod of hard clay – a large root of a nearby weed – these will all tell the carrot it might be growing in the wrong direction and it will turn to the left or to the right or even do a U-turn. If you're growing in heavy clay, you will almost certainly have short stubby malformed carrots. Even if you have better, fluffier soil, you want to keep it that way, – so you'll need to avoid walking on the soil where they are planted and avoid kneeling close to the carrots as this will compress the soil. And if you're amending your clay soil with compost or peat moss or leaf mold, be sure that you do it to the depth of your carrots, so if you are growing 12-inch carrots, you'll need a MINIMUM of 12 inches of good loose soil with all rocks removed.

You also need to avoid fertilizing with a high nitrogen fertilizer in the area where you're growing carrots – and avoid growing them too close to legumes (beans and peas) which fix nitrogen in the soil. In research studies, the soils highest in nitrogen resulted in the most branching, and soil lower in nitrogen resulted in the least amount of branching. If you tend to use commercial fertilizer, Departments of

Agriculture recommend working a balanced fertilizer (5-10-10) into the soil prior to planting seeds. A lower ratio of nitrogen (N) to phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) is recommended for growing not just carrots, but all root vegetables.

There is also a clear relationship between plant density and the number of deformed roots – the higher the density, the more deformities you will find. Carrot seeds are small so they are often thickly planted at the beginning. They NEED to be thinned when they are 3-4 inches tall. And it's not just the carrots that need to be thinned – you need to keep those weeds thinned too! Their roots will cause your carrots to twist and turn in their effort to avoid them and to seek some of the nutrients that the weeds are stealing from the soil.

Some gardeners are disappointed to dig up their carrots and see that they are covered in little side roots, making "hairy" carrots, or to dig them up and see that they have all begun to split open. Carrots are very sensitive to soil moisture levels. When the soil isn't moist enough, the main root develops many small feeder roots so it can soak up any available moisture more efficiently. At the same time, it forms extra tissue to carry the water, so it becomes thick and tough. On the other hand, if there's too much soil moisture, carrots sometimes split along their whole length. This happens most often when

we get a heavy rain when they are close to maturity.

The key to assuring even, sufficient moisture is soil that's rich in organic matter, which lets it hold moisture, yet drain well. Improve your soil by adding chopped leaves, peat moss or compost. Try to keep the soil evenly moist during dry spells by watering regularly and deeply, and use mulch to prevent evaporation.

Over fertilization can also lead to hairy carrots. To avoid over-fertilization at any stage of their growth, mix a slow-acting granular fertilizer into the soil in the spring when you plant. You really should not need to feed the carrots for the rest of the season. Follow these tips and you'll have the carrots you dream of having!



It's Apple Season!

One of the best things about fall is that it's apple season, and one of the best things about apples is that they make ridiculously tasty baked goods like muffins. If you have a good crop of apples this year, here's a **recipe** that you'll definitely want to try, and

they freeze beautifully.

Freezing one cup amounts of applesauce now during apple season also lets you make these muffins all winter long. Thanks club member Judy Davis for this great recipe!

Ginger Apple Muffins



Topping: Mix together and set aside:
2 heaping Tbsp. flour
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
2 heaping Tbsp. packed brown sugar
1 Tbsp. margarine

Muffins

2 cups flour
1 tsp. b. soda
1 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 tsp. salt
Mix dry ingredients in bowl. Then add all at once:
1 cup applesauce
1/2 cup oil
A few chopped walnuts or pecans (use more or less, depending on your preference)
1/2 cup molasses
1 egg

Stir just until everything is mixed well. Pour into greased muffin tins. Sprinkle with topping crumbs. Bake 19 – 22 minutes at 400°. Cool 5 minutes before removing from tins. Enjoy!

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