

Gardening Newsletter

“The Friendly Garden People”
Growing Since 1932



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From The Editor

Well it seems like it takes more than a pandemic to damage our garden club spirit in any way. When we first announced that future meetings would be cancelled until the health risks of meeting were gone, I don't think anyone suspected that we would still be unable to meet a year and a half later. But Claudia has been faithfully sending out news updates in her emails and some members have posted their garden photos on our website since we were unable to do a garden tour. Several members came out in the spring to plant the Millennium Garden which has been looking great all summer, and you'll be getting an email from Claudia about our scheduled clean up day there. If you can spare an hour, we sure could use your help! I'm hoping that our members all had a successful gardening

season. I personally found it to be a rather strange one, and many other gardeners I spoke with said the same.

The early heat wave in June that actually forced us to shut down schools for a few days seemed to also force plants into bloom sooner than usual. It also seemed to interfere with germination in my vegetable garden and I, like many of my friends, had to re-seed some things several times.

Then came the invasion of the earwigs! Everyone seems to be waging war on them this year, and sadly, I'm losing! I've had the odd one nibbling a leaf now and then in past years, but this year there seem to be thousands of them. Hopefully you're not all experiencing this as it's enough to make you throw up your hands in defeat.

I hope everyone finds an interesting little tidbit or two in this issue. I for one was surprised by some of the news coming out about the inaccuracy of zone hardiness labels. Good to know those dead plants weren't all my fault!

As always, happy gardening to all as we move into the harvest season.

Laura Sarson, Editor

The Dirty Secret of Hardiness Zones

Many gardeners are willing to push their luck and attempt to grow a few plants that are just barely hardy where we live – we'll provide them perfect growing conditions – plant them in a nice sheltered location – and keep our fingers crossed that we have a mild winter and an early spring. If it only lives a few years, we'll be grateful for the few years that it did bloom. But sometimes we buy plants that we think are hardy, only to find out that they are not.

When a breeder rushes a plant to market, it may not have gone through enough field trials to prove how hardy it really is. One good example was when many local gardeners rushed out to buy a beautiful coreopsis named 'Limerock Ruby' which had gorgeous red flowers. All the Facebook gardening sites had happy gardeners posting pictures of their pretty new plant, blooming profusely all summer long. That encouraged more of us to race out and buy one. Then, a year later, we started seeing many gardeners posting about how their plant hadn't come back up, and many were asking for advice, which others were happily giving. They

all blamed themselves. Some thought they hadn't fertilized enough, some thought they should have added more mulch, some thought that perhaps their local deer population found it particularly tasty, and others blamed a groundhog. None of them wondered if perhaps it wasn't really hardy to Zone 4, which the label had promised.

But soon posts about its hardiness rating started showing up in warmer parts of North America too. Gardeners in Zone 6 were saying that it hadn't come back for them either. Finally the truth came out. The suppliers had simply assumed that it was a Zone 4 plant because most coreopsis are hardy in zone 4. It is now listed as hardy in Zones 8 to 10 and has to be grown as an annual everywhere else. This was an extreme example, but it did start to make gardeners question the information on labels.

In the industry, it was apparently fairly well known that new production methods meant that **plants were NOT being field tested.** Tens of thousands of plants are being produced quickly from just a single cell of one parent plant if they know it will catch our eye at a nursery. That means **(cont'd P.2)**

Hardiness Zones



they can have a LOT of plants to sell that have never been grown in a real garden – let alone in a garden in Florida and a garden in Connecticut and a garden in New Brunswick. Who knows where they will grow and where they won't! When plants were grown from cuttings from plants that had been crossed, it often took 20 years for the plant to show up in garden centres. Those plants were grown by breeders in their gardens and notes were made about weather conditions that they could – or could NOT – survive. On occasion, the zone hardiness actually dropped when it was discovered that the plant was tougher than originally thought. When I first started growing *Crocasmia* a decade ago, it was listed as Hardy to Zone 8 and when an early winter arrived and I hadn't dug up my bulbs, I was sure I'd seen the last of them. But the next spring they were back and bloomed like crazy that summer – and every summer since. Now they're typically listed as Zone 5 and sometimes even Zone 4! But that's unusual. Usually the zone is raised when gardeners here all complain that the plant didn't survive a winter.

Because of this, industry insiders are now admitting that many wholesalers apparently now try to protect themselves and **simply put "Zone 5" on all the new plants they produce** if they think there's a chance they'll grow in a zone 5 garden. **Why did they choose**

Zone 5? It's one of the most common zones that gardeners grow in, and many plants will survive there. And of course, if they don't, most gardeners assume that it was because of something that they did wrong! This has two huge disadvantages:

1) Gardeners in Zone 4 will find it difficult to find new plants that they think will survive in their gardens as so many new plants are now simply labelled Zone 5 – even when they might actually be hardy to Zone 3. The wholesalers really don't care that much. As one former plant breeder says, "Zone 3-4 only make up about 1 in every 100 or so of all gardeners buying plants, and they're accustomed to having plants die after a particularly tough winter".

2) Gardeners in Zone 5 are buying plants that have a small chance of survival because the label was not correct.

Those who work in the industry also say that changing a full colour, plastic label is quite expensive when profit margins on individual plants are small. They print millions of them at a time, and often won't make a change until those labels are all used up! So even years after nurseries have discovered that a plant they offer is hardier than previously thought, or not nearly as hardy as they thought, the original label is still used until every last one is gone.

This also explains something else that most long-time gardeners have experienced; the label said their new tree would

grow to a mature height of 2 meters and it's already 5 meters and it's still growing. For example, *Diablo Ninebark*, which is very common here in Moncton gardens, was advertised on their label and in gardening magazines, as having a mature height of 5 feet and those of us who grow them know that 10 feet isn't at all out of the question! They say that suppliers have known for 15 years that their initial growth estimates were way off – but they've just never really been given a good enough reason to bother changing their labels!

Another thing to keep in mind is that different varieties of the same plant often have different ratings when it comes to hardiness. Some Japanese Maples and some magnolias, for example, are considered hardy to Zone 5, most others only to Zone 6 and still others only to Zone 7. Some of the fancy new hybrids of hydrangeas are also proving to be not reliably hardy here.

The way that Americans and Canadians rate their zone hardiness is also not the same. There is typically a one zone difference, so a (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) zone 4 plant would only be labelled as hardy to Zone 5 in Canada, and a USDA zone 5 plant would actually be a Zone 6 plant here – so unless you're willing to risk losing it – a USDA Zone 5 plant likely should be left on the shelf.

Most gardeners have become aware that a plant labelled Zone 5-9 also isn't necessarily hardy here either, since we're at the

very lowest end of its range. One labelled 4-6 would be a much safer bet.

Over the past few years, there have been a lot of articles in various magazines questioning the ACTUAL hardiness of several plants that many WHS members have no doubt tried to grow. Three that turned up in my research that are typically labelled Zone 5 that would be more accurately labelled as Zone 6 or even Zone 6B are Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*), Rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*), and Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus Kousa*). So if you've tried to grow these and been unsuccessful, stop blaming yourself! It wasn't your fault! And if your neighbour did successfully grow them, they don't necessarily have a greener thumb – they may just have a more sheltered corner.

But if you see an AgCan Zone label for your Zone, you can be much more confident that the plant is going to grow well in your garden and come back reliably year after year. And if you don't like wasting money, wait until a new variety of a plant has been tested here in our area. If it survives a few tough winters, it will be a safe purchase.



Did You Know?

The word "basil" is derived from the Greek word "basileios" meaning king or royal, as ancient cultures' believed that this herb was noble and sacred. When planting basil here in the spring, always wait till night time temperatures are consistently above 10° and the soil is nice and warm.

New Gardening Neighbours

By: Mariette Lanteigne Sharpe

We have new neighbours who moved behind us last year, a young family with a 3-year-old daughter named Emmylou who loves to garden and also sing, laugh and talk when she is on her swing set.

Our new neighbours Kris and Catherine are very ambitious gardeners for their first year. They have a lot of gardening projects on the go. They are building a giant trellis and raised planters and had hemlock lumber cut at a local saw mill.

They planted 7 apple trees, raspberry and blueberry bushes, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots and peas. Emmylou has her own planter. When I asked her what she would plant she said strawberries and peas. She also has her own wheelbarrow, garden gloves and tools, and does all her own work for her planter. I have a lot of small trophies and red ribbons, so when I saw a beautiful flower in her raised bed, I put a trophy and red ribbon beside it and wrote down "Best in Show". My husband gave her one of his handmade blue heron birds and she put it near her planter. I would not be surprised if one day Emmylou is a future president of the WHS.

We are so happy to have ambitious gardeners as our new neighbours. They are very hard workers and they make me think of

myself when I was 30 years younger and doing all those flower and vegetable beds, and some days looking at them really makes me feel younger.

Would also like to say, congratulations for a job well done, to my next-door neighbour Karen who ended up with a spectacular flower garden this summer. They moved here 3 years ago and she started to dig sod near her backyard fence last year and planted some hostas, phlox, spotted dead nettle etc. She enjoyed gardening so much that she made her flower bed much bigger this year. She added some decorations like a night light etc. and it really looks nice. I consider myself lucky to have such great neighbours.

I really do love my tall phlox. Most of them are pink but I also have some white, purple and red ones. One year I counted 55 phlox in my backyard. I have found them to be winter hardy and long-lived perennials. They are long blooming and make great cut flowers. I planted them in the back of my flower bed as sometimes they get powdery mildew on the older foliage during the middle of the summer. It does not bother me as other flowers in front of them hide those leaves. The flowers catch your attention for 5 or 6 weeks. I cut them down in the fall and they just grow again the following spring. I divide them every couple of years. That is why I have so much.

Many thanks to my friend Rob DeWolfe for giving

me, and other WHS members, beautiful Brugmansias (Angel's Trumpet). This small tree has large, fragrant, pendulous flowers. I got a picture of my friends Doris and Donna in front of a very big one when we visited Judy and Jim Steeves' garden in 2018. It was really a stunning plant.

As Card Convener I sent a get-well card to Doris Brown when she was in the hospital. Sadly, I sent a sympathy card to her family as Doris passed away a week later. The 95th birthday card that I sent to Marshall Thompson came back to me as he had moved to North Carolina so I sent it back to him in the U.S. Sadly, the card that I sent to the States, with the right address, came back to me. So, I called Marshall and told him that if he ever comes to Moncton, I will deliver his birthday card myself.

I do hope that everybody really had a great gardening season. And remember, don't tell secrets in the garden. The potatoes have eyes, the corn has ears and the beanstalk.

Mariette



Overwintering Fushias

Many gardeners who buy fushia plants for hanging baskets each spring may not be aware that they can be over-wintered indoors and bloom again next summer. In fact, you even have a few options, but it is important to know what

type of fushia you are growing.

One option is to keep it as a houseplant, placed in front of a very sunny window. However this isn't always the best option, unless you are growing the "honeysuckle fuchsia" (*F. triphylla*) which can be quite happy in a home that's 18-24°.

Hybrid fuchsias (*F. x hybrida*) don't make such great houseplants. They prefer a much cooler winter (4 to 10°) and they just don't do well under the combination of warm indoor temperatures and poor light and they have a hard time tolerating the dry air commonly found in our homes over the winter.

If you're still considering bringing hybrid fuchsia indoors over the winter, at least be very careful to treat the leaves with a safe insecticide when you bring them in. Whiteflies love fuchsias and will follow them indoors. They go into dormancy in the fall, but when they wake up in March and start to fly around your house and infect all your other plants, you'll wish you never brought the plant indoors.

If you're comfortable taking cuttings, that's also an option, but they often end up being quite weak and leggy. The **best option** for most gardeners is to force the plants into dormancy. You need a **frost-free location** like a basement or a slightly heated garage, where temperatures remain between 4 and 10° through the winter. The spot can be in the dark or

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When dealing with frost it is always best to be paranoid. In the spring never think it is too late for one more frost to come. And in the fall never think it too early.

Fushias

receive light and the air can be humid or dry as they aren't fussy about that at all.

You can start as soon as frost is in the forecast, or you can even wait until they've been touched by a light frost which some say seems to shock them into a deeper dormancy. Prune back the stems by about a third. Clip off any remaining leaves (they will have lost a lot after undergoing cold fall temperatures) so that you aren't bringing in any whitefly that would be hiding under the leaves.

Once you've found them a good spot to spend the winter, there's not much more to do. Water them just enough that the soil doesn't dry out completely – once a month is likely enough.

At the end of March or in April, move the plants to a windowsill or set them in a heated greenhouse, ideally in full sun. Begin to water and soon you'll see new growth appear. As new leaves grow and the plant fills in, you can water more and you can also start fertilizing them again: use the fertilizer of your choice at one quarter the recommended rate.

Following these steps should have your plants ready to be back out in their hanging baskets when you would normally be spending a lot for new ones. Put them back outdoors, in partial shade, keep watering and fertilizing, and you'll have beautiful blooms again all summer long.

Companion Planting or Common Sense?



Many gardeners began following the rules of companion planting nearly fifty years ago when the famous book, "**Carrots Love Tomatoes**" was published in 1975. Some of the advice from that book has been passed down, and many still follow it today. Many people still plant marigolds in their veggie garden as they have heard they're a good "companion" – even though many who plant them can't tell you just what the marigolds are supposed to do.

The original theory was that they are supposed to repel harmful root nematodes – especially ones that bother tomatoes. This claim has actually been thoroughly studied and proven to be false. They have no effect whatsoever. Some gardeners will insist, "But I plant marigolds with my tomatoes every year, and I've never had nematodes". That is almost certainly true – but it would also be true for those who say "I've never planted a marigold anywhere in my yard and I've never had nematodes either." The fact is, nematodes are rarely a problem with tomatoes in a small home garden. And if you do have the type of nematodes that attack tomato roots, marigolds won't keep them away. It IS true that those nematodes won't harm the marigolds, but sadly it is also true that the marigolds won't save the tomatoes.

As with so many things in gardening, there are gardeners who swear that companion planting works, and there are those who swear it's all nonsense. The truth likely lies somewhere in the middle, and if you follow the advice from that book and grow prize winning veggies, then by all means keep doing what you're doing! But do consider whether you'd be winning the same prizes without the trouble of using companion planting guides to lay out your vegetable garden.

One thing is for sure: if you've ever tried to follow a companion planting chart for a veggie patch that has more than 3 crops, you've likely experienced a lot of frustration. Put the beans next to the tomatoes but not next to the cukes, but don't put the cukes near the tomatoes or the peppers, and for heaven's sake, don't put the carrots next to the onions and keep the celery away from the broccoli. Huh???? I've always wondered how many new gardeners threw up their hands and quit, assuming that if the planning was that complicated, the growing would be impossible! And it is a bit ironic that the title suggested that carrots love tomatoes – this came as a surprise to many farmers who insist that carrots prefer a dry, sandy leaner soil and tomatoes love a very fertile soil that remains consistently watered. Therefore it's possible that they'd actually be terrible companions!

Fans of companion planting often point to the long used planting scheme known as "the 3 sisters" –

beans climbing on corn stalks surrounded by squash vines – where the pole beans can climb the corn, the beans provide nitrogen to the corn, and the squash vines reduce weeds and helps with some of the need for watering. At least... that's the story that gets passed down from generation to generation. Historians, however, say that **this is not the story that was passed down among the First Nations people.**

While it is historically true that our First Nations People did **sometimes** plant this (or similar) combinations of plants, their reasons had nothing to do with providing shade or providing nitrogen; It was for space saving and not having to cultivate more land than needed to grow enough food to store away for the winter. If they wanted to grow a lot of corn, records show that they grew it alone as they knew it would do "better" than it would growing next to beans and squash.

And now we know that the nitrogen from the beans wouldn't have been going into the squash or corn as the nitrogen that plants fix in the soil is nearly ALL used by that same plant. (Fixing nitrogen in soil means that beans and peas can pull nitrogen from the air and store it in small nodules on their roots). It's not spread out into the soil for other nearby plants. And in historical re-enactment tourism sites, such as King's Landing or Fortress Louisburg, they often grow "the 3 sisters" to show how the native peoples did it, and they always find that the plants don't do any better – in fact, they don't thrive at all. **cont'd**

Today a bee landed on me and instead of being scared, I felt happy that it thought that I was a flower. ~B.Cain

Companion Planting

The squash take so much water that the beans and corn actually suffer a bit!

(The 3 sisters advice has also led many gardeners to grow their leafy crops that need nitrogen where they grew their peas and beans the previous season, assuming that there would already be lots of nitrogen in the soil. Unfortunately, the nitrogen was all in the beans and peas they picked last season – none of it remains in the soil for future crops).

Some gardeners have followed the companion planting advice that says to plant nasturtiums because they repel aphids. Then they'd go out and find their nasturtiums covered in aphids. Seems they don't repel them all that well after all! But that doesn't mean that all companion planting tips are false.

Some things about companion gardening do make sense. As with any advice we're given, it is always a good idea to **ask yourself if it makes common sense**. It is absolutely true that some plants are "common sense companions". If someone tells us to plant things that have the same watering needs together, that makes common sense, so of course they're good companions. No experienced gardener would plant anything that prefers dry soil next to something that demands constant moisture and expect both plants to thrive! Asparagus loves sweet, high pH soil and potatoes thrive in acidic soil. They would NOT be great companions.

Flowers are a good companion for veggies since they attract more pollinators which some veggies aren't very good at doing. But choose any flower you like – it doesn't have to be marigolds or nasturtiums! Again, use common sense. Choose a flower that isn't going to grow tall and cast shadows on veggies that need full sun.

It's also a theory of companion planting that highly scented plants, like marigolds and herbs, attract some good insects and repel some others. This MIGHT be true, but it does seem to defy common sense. We know that insects don't "smell" scents the same way we do. So while we think that a marigold or a dill plant is strong smelling – it might – or might NOT – be strong smelling to an insect. It's very possible that some insects can smell plants that to us have no scent whatsoever. And scientists have proven that colour seems to draw insects to plants more than scent. Once they land, they seem to take a bite and decide whether to stay, or leave and find a better tasting leaf. Researchers now are learning that insects also "learn" a lot about where to look for certain plants and are smarter than we might think. Odour seems to be the last sense many of them use, so planting strong smelling marigolds or dill likely won't affect how many of our plants get nibbled in any particular year.

Most of us have experienced some years where everything seems to get eaten, and other years where our plants are

not bothered much at all – whether or not we grew marigolds! So there's likely nothing wrong with planting strong smelling herbs in your garden – but choose herbs that make "common sense" good companions. Plant ones that like moist soil next to veggies that need to be watered, and choose herbs that prefer dryer soils to plant in a section where the soil can be kept dry. Plant herbs that like a bit of shade (cilantro for example) next to taller vegetables that can provide some shade, and plant herbs that need full sun where they won't be shaded by huge tomato plants.

Controlling some (not most) pests actually MAY be possible with companion planting, but there's not really any science to back that up. Many of us plant radish and allow the flea beetles to go after the leaves on it, hoping they might leave our other crops alone. The theory is that you can still harvest a decent crop of radish and toss away their chewed leaves. However, common sense says that if you've got flea beetles all being attracted to your garden because they love radish so much, they aren't all going to stay on your radish leaves – and while they're all there, they're reproducing like crazy! Common sense might say to find another way to keep flea beetles off your other crops – like netting over them – or like planting them when the flea beetle life cycle is winding down.

Another popular companion plant belief is that tomatoes grown next to basil taste better. No

blind taste test has ever proven this is true, and in fact, common sense says it's highly unlikely, if not impossible. For this to be true, the basil plant would have to exude a chemical from its roots into the soil, but the chemicals that give basil its flavour are found in the leaves – not the roots. And even if some flavour molecules did get into the soil, once a tomato starts to ripen, there is what is almost a shut-off valve that stops the entry of chemicals from the stem. So the odds of enough basil molecules getting through to actually change the flavour of a tomato is a nice idea – but it's highly unlikely.

It's also common sense to mix flowers and herbs through your vegetable patch as "companions" as it prevents a monoculture – a large area of only one crop. Studies show that monocultures make it easy for every known insect that enjoys a little bite of them to find them. Surrounding veggies with herbs and flowers may make it much harder for the insects to find them.

So the bottom line seems to be this. If your gardens are doing great, and you think it's because you're following some of the companion planting rules, then don't change a thing! But if you hate marigolds but think you need to plant them, or if you don't like radish, but plant them to attract flea beetles away from other crops, then consider going with the "common sense companion" planting rules for a season or two and see what happens!



When you have done your best for a flower, and it fails, you have reason to be aggrieved. ~Frank Swinn

Growing Coleus



Most gardeners can find a spot for a coleus – whether it's in the garden or in a container. It can be hard to resist those amazing colours and patterns on this popular foliage plant. While many might guess that they are a “modern” hybrid, they were actually very popular in Victorian times. They became less popular for nearly a century but made a huge comeback in the 1990's and it's doubtful that they'll lose their popularity any time soon. Coleus plants give us all-season colour, in full sun or shade and everything in between. And best of all...they are the ultimate **low maintenance** plant. Just prune off the thin flower stalks before they bloom, to keep the plant's energy going toward producing a bushy plant.

You might hear gardeners disagreeing about whether they should be grown in sun or shade, but the fact of the matter is that **some are best for sun and others need some shade**. The old fashioned seed-grown coleus do best in partial shade, but some of the newer vegetatively cultivated varieties have their best colour when they're growing in full sun.

There are miniature coleus varieties that only grow a few inches tall and others that can grow several feet. In fact, a recent trend is to train coleus into standards. To do this, you would either

need to be in Zone 11 or have somewhere to overwinter your plants indoors, which might be a fun project for a really avid club member! (Gerry Jim, and Rob, are you up for a challenge?) ☺

Coleus is not at all frost tolerant. Wait until temperatures remain reliably above 16° or so, before you move them out in the garden. Although coleus love heat, they also need a moist soil. The soil should not remain wet all the time, but long dry spells will slow the plants' growth and the leaves will start to turn brown around the edges. As with all plants, mulching will help the soil retain moisture longer. You'll get the best colour from your coleus leaves if you **go easy on the fertilizer**. If you have rich soil, you may not need to feed at all. If not, use a balanced fertilizer at half strength monthly.

Sometimes coleus become a bit too tall and gangly. To get full, bushy plants, **pinch out the growing tips** when the plants are about 15 cm tall and keep pinching them to keep them full. Other than keeping your plants trimmed, the only real maintenance required is ensuring they get **plenty of water**. Coleus in containers may need watering twice a day.

If you have found a coleus that you absolutely love, you can get it through the winter and grow it again next year. You certainly need to get it indoors before the cold temperatures

arrive as the plants turn to mush at the first hint of frost. Then you have a couple of options. You can grow it as a houseplant or you can take stem cuttings and grow smaller plants indoors until next spring.

Coleus don't have a lot of outdoor pests, with the exception of groundhogs and rabbits who seem to find them quite tasty. But when you are growing your plants indoors, watch out for scale, whitefly and, mealybugs.

You can weave them into your garden design in so many different ways. You can fill entire flower beds or large containers with lots of different coloured and patterned coleus that form a quilt like pattern, which was how the Victorians loved to use them, or try a massive planting of just one pattern and colour. They also mix well in borders and containers.

The designer at one botanical garden describes how he uses them in several ways. He says, “They don't get lost in a mixed planting with dramatic elephant's ears, castor beans, trailing sweet-potato vines, or towering canna lilies, and they're sophisticated enough to pair gracefully with ferns or heuchera. We also use them as bright spotlights, plopping a pot full of lime green coleus in a bed that needs a jolt of colour. We plant white alyssum flowers to make a lacy edge around chocolate-leaf coleus varieties. We edge beds of spiked plants such as

fountain grass with the soft, frilly coleus which make a handsome counterpoint. I find them one of the easiest plants to design with.”

If you decide to try growing coleus for the first time, always check the tag to see if it's a sun loving variety or a shade loving variety, and if it's a dwarf size or a regular size. Beyond that, you're sure to be thrilled with your purchase!

To grow coleus as an **indoor plant**, you just need to follow a few simple rules. They like bright light, but not intense sunlight. Look for a spot where the plant gets bright morning sunlight but indirect light during the afternoon. You may need to supplement available light with artificial lights during the winter. Watch the plant closely. If the leaves fade and lose colour, the plant is probably getting too much sunlight. However, if the plant is dropping its leaves, try giving it a little more light.



Did You Know?

A survey showed that on average, Americans waste \$10 worth of fruit weekly due to spoilage. They often may be throwing it out when it's still perfectly safe to eat. According to the US Dept. of Agriculture, it's safe to eat fruit like raspberries or blueberries that are in a box next to a moldy one. Just rinse them off – but if a berry is stuck to another that is moldy—toss it, even if it doesn't seem to have mold on it yet.

With fingers now scented with sage and rosemary, a kneeling gardener is lost in savory memories. ~Dr. Sun Wolf



Blueberries

Wild blueberries have been growing for a LONG time – they first appeared after the glaciers retreated after the last ice age! Ten thousand years later, in 1911, a New Jersey farmer teamed up with a botanist to see if they could do what many considered impossible. They wanted to domesticate the wild blueberry, as they knew if nature has not placed wild blueberries on your property, then you will not be growing wild blueberries! Wild blueberries are one of the few commercial crops that are not planted, they are managed. The berries grow naturally, and spread by growing runners underground. What may look like a group of plants is actually one plant that has spread out its root systems. This is a fairly slow process and it can take years before a new wild blueberry field is ready for production.

Since blueberries are grown on a 2-year cycle, one year is a vegetative year and the next is a crop year, so most farmers divide their farms into two. They will harvest half their fields each year. After each harvest the fields are mowed down.

It can take years for the wild blueberries to cover a new field as the spreading of the plants is a very slow process. Wild blueberries spread through underground runners. Left to their own, wild blueberries will spread about five centimetres a year. In a field that is managed by a blueberry farmer, the growth is still only about

30 cm a year. The rhizomes will eventually sprout new roots and stems. Even though there can be huge spaces between patches of berries, all the bushes connect by the underground runners so are considered to be the same plant! That's why so many attempts by commercial growers to transplant the wild blueberry have failed.

So back in 1911, people wanted to create a breed of blueberry that could be planted and contain only the best attributes of the wild berry. They selected the larger berries and cut and grafted. They overcame the problems with sterility of the plants. And they managed to create a successful domesticated blueberry. Fifteen cultivars were soon developed and many more were grown later. If you're shopping for domesticated blueberries for your yard, you want to be sure to research the variety you buy, as you'll want the ones that suit your taste. Cultivated berries are designed with certain flavours – some are sweeter and some are more sour, but every berry on the plant will taste the same. The reason chefs prefer wild blueberries is that nearly each berry will have a different level of sweet or tart and this leads to a more interesting overall taste, and they also have a much stronger "blueberry flavour".

There are several differences between the wild and cultivated berry besides the obvious size difference. The cultivated berry contains much

more water than the wild berry. This extra water accounts for the shrinkage and the "blue holes" you might see in cakes and muffins when you bake with cultivated berries. The wild blueberry is said to have twice the antioxidants of the cultivated berry, but this is not based on a berry to berry comparison. A cup of wild blueberries does have twice the antioxidants of a cup of cultivated blueberries. It's because the antioxidants are in the skin of the berry. And since it takes twice the amount of wild blueberries to fill a cup, there is twice the amount of blueberry skin and so twice the antioxidants.

If you want to grow blueberries at home, they want full sun and acidic well drained soil that's high in organic matter to thrive. If your pH is above 5.5 they will struggle to absorb the nutrients they need from the soil. You'll likely notice yellow leaves, slowed growth and poor fruit production, or the plants may just die if the pH is too high. Soil amendments don't work quickly enough to fix this in one season, so be sure you have a low pH when you plant.

Some blueberry varieties can self-pollinate, but you will always get a bigger crop if you **plant two different varieties** of berries that bloom at the same time to cross-pollinate. This also results in a longer season of picking in most cases.

It's also good to know that many varieties won't have much fruit for

the first 2 to 3 years, but you can easily seek out potted bushes that are already 3 years old. Give the shrubs time to mature, and know that the harvest will be a lot bigger after about 5 years. They do grow quite slowly and can take 8-10 years to reach their fully mature size.

Rabbits and deer enjoy nibbling on the stems of blueberry bushes which can drastically stunt the plant, so consider surrounding them with chicken wire or similar fencing. But do consider planting this yummy, nutritious treat in your garden!



It's Confusing!

We all know Monarch caterpillars eat only milkweed, so when you think you see some dining on your carrot tops, you might wonder what's going on! Chances are what you're seeing are swallowtail butterfly caterpillars which look a LOT like those of the monarch. But their favourite food includes carrots, parsley and Queen Anne's Lace. There are a few specific traits to know that's what you've found. Their black/white/yellow striped pattern is like a Monarch's, but they have dots, and the monarch's don't. They are also slightly wider at the front end where a monarch is the same width down its whole body. And Monarch larva have black antennae and the Swallowtail have no obvious antenna – until you give them a gentle poke- then they extend their yellow antennae.

Society News



The WHS executive met at Gerry Gillcash's on August 26 to discuss how our club will move forward. Claudia is sending out a detailed email on all of our discussions, but for those who are not paid-up members, and therefore not getting our emails, we voted unanimously to postpone club meetings until February, 2022. With Covid still making it risky to meet, we voted to continue sending out the newsletter and sending out regular emails to members, but to play it safe and see what the new year brings.

Since our Annual General Meeting, and voting in of new executive will therefore not be possible in October, some members have agreed to carry on with their duties. However, we will be seeking nominations for a treasurer, a membership coordinator and someone to update our website. These are all vital positions for our club to continue, so PLEASE, if you think you can help out with any of these, contact Claudia and let her know!

Club members were all saddened to hear the news that Doris Brown, our membership chairperson, had passed away. She always greeted us with that beautiful smile as we signed into the attendance book for meetings, and often she would pass me a little clipping from a magazine with a gardening joke or

some information that she thought I could use for an upcoming newsletter article. She was also an amazing photographer, and on many occasions took the red ribbon in the photography category at our garden shows. I can recall so many occasions during the show setup when I was placing my photos to be judged and thinking that a few of them weren't bad - then I would see that Doris was entering hers in the same category and I resigned myself to second place at best! I want to thank Mariette for submitting the beautiful tribute to Doris that follows. They were long-time friends and no one knows better how lucky we all were to have known her, and how lucky the WHS was to have her as a member



Forever in My Heart By: Mariette Lanteigne Sharpe

It was with profound sadness and shock that I learned of the passing of a very beautiful and special lady, one of my best friends, Doris Brown.

Doris took charge of membership in 2010 and she did an excellent job. She sent the executive the name, address etc. of every member who joined the club. As the Card Convener she sent me a complete list of all the members every couple of years. She was a very organized person. She welcomed everybody with a smile at every meeting.

She helped set up the WHS show in 2013 and sat with me at the welcome table at the last big show in 2014. We sold tickets for a door prize and she was good at it! She was at the welcome table at the following two shows at MacArthur's Nurseries. Every year at the garden show I set up a couple of tables where members would display articles they had made during their life. In 2014 Doris contributed many articles including an apron that she gave me the following Christmas. I still have it!

She helped many times in the kitchen at the Easter or Christmas potluck. Sometimes she was the first one to get there. I always wrote an article about the potlucks in the newsletter and Doris could tell me who came to help in the kitchen, set up tables etc.

Doris was a very good cook. She surely did her share of sandwiches and desserts for the lunch at WHS meetings. A couple of times she gave me some chocolate cookies made with peanuts and noodles. They were so delicious that I never shared them with my husband and never felt guilty!

Doris was always on the go. She was just simply never home. I often said that her life was an incredible social whirl; if you rang Doris and caught her at home you felt you had achieved something.

Doris typed my newsletter articles for years and rarely made a mistake. She would send me at least one email a day and saved dozens of gardening articles for me or fishing articles for my husband.

We met every Wednesday for years at Superstore in Riverview for coffee and doughnuts with our friends Rob and Donna. Doris always had lots of photos to show us and a story to tell. We went knitting at the Riverview Library often. She always had to start and finish my project as I could just knit or pearl or something like that! She was an excellent knitter.

Finally, I just want to say that Doris didn't just live life.... she celebrated it. She laughed lots and her laughter spread to others. She was one of a kind. Full of intelligence, compassion, humour and a tremendous sense of fun, she lived life to the full. As I write this tribute, I cannot help but smile through the tears. In this time of grief, yes, I am still grieving, there is also the acknowledgement of a life well lived, a life full of deep connections and celebration. Thanks, Doris for all the memories, for all the laughs and the mischievous fun.

These memories will always bring a smile to the faces and hearts of those who loved you, Doris. I know you would want that. I will miss you, my friend. Always on my mind and forever in my heart.

Mariette

A garden should make you feel you've entered privileged space; to achieve this, the gardener must put some kind of twist on the existing landscape, and turn its prose into something nearer poetry. ~ Michael Pollan