

# Gardening Newsletter



“The Friendly Garden People”  
Growing Since 1932

www.whsociety.ca



## Branching Out



The WHS welcomes new members. Everyone with an interest in gardening is invited to drop in to one of our meetings to see what we're all about. Meetings are held at **7:00 PM** on the fourth Tuesday of each month at the **Mapleton Park Rotary Pavilion**. As noted below, our April meeting will be at a different location. Find us on Facebook or check our website for upcoming events.



## Next Meeting

Our April meeting will be held on **April 23<sup>rd</sup>** and will be our **Annual Spring Potluck**. This year we are very excited to hold it at a new location – the beautiful **Lutz Mountain Meeting House**, located at 3143 Mountain Road. Doors will open at 5:00 and the dinner will begin at 6:00. Bring along a dish to share and enjoy a great evening with our gardening friends. In honour of one of the best parts of the spring season in New Brunswick,, we are suggesting that some members might want to consider making a

maple themed dessert or even main dish. If you have a favourite recipe that uses that liquid gold we all call maple syrup, bring along the dish (and the recipe, if possible).



## From The Editor

Well, after what seemed like a very long and very cold winter, spring seems to be on its way. There was a long period of time when our driveway looked more like a skating rink than a driveway, and I wondered if it would ever melt.

I'm going to be curious to see how my gardens fared this year. Winter certainly caught me unprepared in the fall. I had barely finished cleaning up my beds and getting all of my tools cleaned up and stored when the snow arrived and it never left. I still had lots of shrubs that I'd planned to wrap and new plants that I'd hoped to protect with some evergreen boughs and that job never got done. I did get some new bulbs planted, but still had some left when that November snow arrived, which was not the worst possible thing – I forced them and had some beautiful tulips blooming in my home in

the middle of winter. Now comes the long periods of melting snow, spring rains, and puddles everywhere. Sometimes I marvel that any of my perennials manage to survive! As the snow melts away, I hope that you all find that most of your babies pulled through.

I hope that you all enjoy this issue. If you've ever had problems with potatoes sprouting in their bags before you got to cook them, you might want to check out the letter to Dr. Fill on Page 2 for a few tips. And thank you to Mariette for the beautiful tribute to a long time WHS member which you'll find on Page 3.

If you've already begun to place your orders for new plants from seed catalogues, perhaps you'll want to forego some of the new hybrids for some of the tried and true ones that never fail to please – you'll find a few examples on page 7. And if you can't resist trying something new each year, maybe kohlrabi will be your choice this year. Learn how to grow it on page 7. So take some time to make a cup of tea and enjoy this issue because soon we'll all be too busy! Gardening season is on the way!

**Laura Sarson, Editor**

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## WHS Roll Call.

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**Newsletter Editor:** Laura Sarson



## Did You Know?

A study in the US found that all sales of herbs were to people who were 35 or younger.

The pharaohs of Egypt were so intrigued with mushrooms; they decreed they were food for royalty and gods, and that no commoner could ever touch them or taste them.

## Ask Dr. Fill



### Dear Dr. Fill.

This is not exactly a gardening question, but it is about potatoes so I am hoping that you will answer it for me. I'm wondering why my potatoes always seem to sprout in the bags as soon as I bring them home from the store. The reason I don't grow them is that I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to store them without them sprouting. I'm also wondering about the belief that it's not safe to eat them if they've sprouted in the bag. Is it safe to eat the rest of the potato if I remove the sprouted areas first?

### Sincerely Sprouted Spuds



### Dear Sprouted Spuds

I'm happy to answer your potato question. Let's begin with the fact that all potatoes will eventually sprout, usually within 1 to 4 months after harvest. While you can keep potatoes from sprouting prematurely, eventually they will start to go bad and sprout. So what can you do to keep yours from sprouting as long as possible? Luckily there are a few tips that might help.

The issue is likely the area where you are storing your potatoes. It's essential to follow the 5 main rules for storage.

**1)** Keep your potatoes in a cool (but not too cold) location. The problem is that many homes today simply don't have an area that's cool enough to store them long term. The ideal temperature is somewhere between 7°

and 10°. You also need to make sure that the temperature remains consistent. If it changes too much, the potatoes will almost certainly start to sprout (or possibly rot). However, you should also avoid keeping potatoes in the fridge. Cool temperatures are fine for potatoes, but too cold temperatures can ruin the texture and cause them to turn dark when cooked. If you must store the potatoes in the fridge, let them reach room temperature before you cook them to potentially reduce the discoloration. Most of all, always avoid storing potatoes in places that tend to get warm such as cabinets under the sink and next to stoves and refrigerators. Potatoes will always start to sprout if they are kept in a warm area.

**2)** Keep them away from onions and apples and any other fruit you are storing. Apples and onions in particular will cause them to sprout faster.

**3,** Keep them in a dry and dark place. Sometimes we think that our basements are "dark" but if there's even a tiny window allowing sunlight to come in on your potatoes, they are sure to sprout prematurely. And never store them in a bag sitting directly on a concrete floor.

**4.** You also want to keep potatoes properly ventilated. Storing them in a paper bag and avoiding plastic bags which tend to trap warmth and moisture is a good idea. A mesh or perforated plastic bag is fine, however, because it

will allow for air circulation without causing the potatoes to dry out. Of course there are other suitable containers to store potatoes in - baskets, cardboard boxes, cotton bags or wooden crates.

**5.** While we know we need to store them away from moisture, it is possible for an area to be too dry, which can lead to them shrivelling up. Humidity is fine as long as the moisture isn't trapped in a container with potatoes. Commercial storage facilities can provide the perfect temperature and humidity control which is why they look fine when they arrive in stores, months after they've been harvested. But commercial potato growers also often spray them with chlorpropham, a chemical which keeps them from sprouting.

As for your question of whether it's safe to eat potatoes that have sprouted, I've certainly always heard that we should not. But since I would never dare give health advice, and since there are so many food myths out there, I checked out a variety of sources and I'll rely on the experts.

Dr. Douches is the director of the Potato Genetics Program at Michigan State University and he says that sprouted potatoes are often safe to eat, but that the sprouts themselves need to be removed and discarded because they're not edible and contain toxins.

He went on to say that "if the potato is still in good shape and is firm, it is

fine to prepare as usual once all sprouts have been cut out. But if the sprouts are long or the potato has shrunk and wrinkled, then it needs to be thrown out. And if you notice an unusually bitter taste in the potato, this could be a sign of increased glycoalkaloids and it absolutely should not be eaten. These chemicals can affect the nervous system by interfering with nerve impulses."

One final piece of advice: It's not a bad idea to buy your potatoes in smaller and smaller quantities as spring approaches as they will all be getting ready to sprout at that time of the year. This can be delayed in the climate controlled warehouses, but not in our homes. Buying just the number of potatoes you'll eat each week can reduce the amount you need to throw in your compost bin - which, by the way, it's safe to do! Sprouted potatoes that you won't be eating can be safely composted - those that are sunburned and green or those that are rotting or sprouting in the bag - these are all fine in your compost. (The only potatoes that should not be composted are ones that are diseased by potato blight - these spores can survive a compost pile and the disease can be reintroduced into your garden from contaminated compost).

Thanks for the great question and I hope that some of these tips help you keep your potatoes at least a little bit longer!

Sincerely  
Dr. Fill

## Good-Bye, My Friend



**By: Mariette Sharpe**

I was very sad to hear that my good friend, **Fraser Hale** has passed away on November 19. He was a very active and friendly member of the W.H.S. for many decades and had fantastic gardens, both vegetables and flowers. I met Fraser when he and his wife Lois came to visit my garden 19 years ago. He suggested that I should join the W.H.S. Club. The following month, I went to a meeting and the rest is history. I became very good friends with the Hales and a couple of years ago I asked Fraser for some information on his gardening life and this is what he told me and I quote:

"As a boy, my late father planted a garden. His garden consisted of potatoes, beets, carrots, cukes, and many tomatoes, also a patch of raspberries. He raised his own transplants - by necessity, at that time. Flowers were sweet peas. The only fertilizer used or available was horse manure which was applied when the garden was plowed with horse power and it seemed O.K. I have photos of the garden, 5 or 6 rows about 60 ft. long. It seemed to be quite large and it was well tended. I worked in it, and was in charge of potato bug removal, and watering with heavy watering cans. There were a lot of gardens - and a lot of pride in them.

As a kid I was interested in the garden, and it was

not work. Any surplus beans I could sell, and keep the proceeds. It was a big deal! We had 100 tomato plants, so I learned about them. I grow and love tomatoes. The old varieties are not known now, but we have Brandywine and small cherry varieties unknown years ago. Older names 'Earliana, Bonny Best, Quebec, and Beefsteak came later.

In a coal mining town the miners raised prize poultry for show - a lot had regular hens for eggs. With the manure this resulted in an interest in flowers, and dahlias. We never had dahlias at home. There was a cadre of people who grew them, and they would go to the Exhibition at Pictou to show a few. My mother took me to see the Ex. before school started after Labor Day. We went by train. Later on, I met 2 growers and discovered dahlias, as we never grew them. When I got married here I began to plant some. I knew a few fanciers. I had many comments on my few dahlias - and maybe more will grow them - women now grow them too.

I began to attend the garden club at King St. School (near the Museum) and later we met at a school. It was mainly flowers. There were few men involved. Dahlias were man's flowers - but this is now changed. Ladies got involved and luckily they did. In my day, my mother picked some vegetables, but she was busy with housework, and it was the way it was. I cannot see children working in a garden now, it would be rare. I never

regret my past gardening - being asked to get a fresh cucumber for supper. Selling a few beans to get 12 cents for a matinee. We had jam and pickles, and today, home grown tomatoes - are strong motivators to garden.

I have a garden. Why? For the same reason a hen lays eggs. Not for the glory, it is a matter of self-fulfillment, because I still can!

Fraser Hale: About 3 years ago, his wife Lois went into a nursing home and I think Fraser missed her so much that he decided to go and stay with her at the Lakeview Manor, I went to visit him almost every month and always brought him a copy of the monthly W.H.S. newsletter. Fraser loved to talk. He was a real charmer and loved to tell stories. He was one of the most intelligent and smartest men I have ever met. He was a man of many talents and he played many musical instruments and was a very good photographer.

He grew and loved tomatoes. He preferred them when they were not too ripe.

I went to his funeral, and he got many beautiful tributes from family members and by a lady on behalf of the Sussex Avenue Fiddlers of which he was a member for many years. I was happy to see that my friend, Fraser went out in style under the sound of fiddling music from Maple Sugar and Friends, the St. Paul's choir, and also a Piper.

A life well lived leaves behind a beautiful bouquet of memories. I will miss you, my friend. **Mariette Lanteigne Sharpe.**



### Did You Know?

Pea "tendrils" the small shoots that wrap themselves around the trellis or fence to support the vine, are perfectly edible and have a very pea-like delicious flavour, and they're very pretty on a plate or in a salad.

87% of gardeners describe themselves as happy, whereas only 67% of non-gardeners do.

One rose hip contains as many as 40 to 50 seeds.

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located at 30 Desbrisay Avenue, Moncton.**



Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads. ~Henry David Thoreau on gardening

## Seed Germination Test

If you have seeds left from previous years, there's still a good chance that some of them will grow just fine, but there's also a chance that some won't germinate at all, or that only a few of them will. We need to remember that raising young seedlings is a LOT of work, and many of us won't want to risk spending weeks caring for seeds that are never going to grow.

If you're willing to gamble, you can try the **germination rate test** to see whether the seeds are still viable. Simply put a piece of moist (not wet) paper towel in a sandwich bag and add about 10 seeds and close up the bag. Then wait to see how many of the seeds sprout. If 7 of the 10 seeds germinated, you have a 70% germination rate, which is considered by most to be good enough to plant the rest of your seeds. **However**, this test is only reliable if you know how long it takes those particular seeds to germinate. Some seeds take 2 or 3 days, some take a week, and some take a month. So if your seeds didn't show any sprouting after a week, it doesn't necessarily mean that the seeds are dead! They could all be perfectly capable of sprouting and therefore worth planting! And if the seeds need to be chilled to germinate, you need to put them in the wet paper towel in the fridge. If they shouldn't be chilled, you need to keep that plastic baggie at room temperature. So

this test does work - but it also has its limitations.

You can also use this test to judge how far apart to space your seeds. If they had a low germination rate, you can space them much closer together than the recommended distance as you know many of them won't grow. And one more thing about doing a germination rate test - don't be tempted to select ten of the biggest, healthiest looking seeds. Choose ten seeds **randomly** - some that are darker in colour and some that are lighter; some that are bigger and some that are smaller. This will truly reflect how many of all of the remaining seeds are apt to grow. If less than 40% germinate, you might want to buy new seeds.

If you're testing vegetable seed, here is a list of the expected number of days in which they should germinate: Beans:6-14; Beet 5-15, Cabbage 5-10, Carrot 14-21, Corn 7-14, Cucumber 3-10, Lettuce 7-14, Peas 9-13, Radish 3-7, and Tomato



## Vegetables From Seeds

You've waited all winter to plant your vegetable garden and now the time is getting closer. But just exactly when should you plant each crop? We all know some seeds like cold soil and some need warmer soil, but just exactly what does that mean? It's important to understand this as the germination of your seeds and/or the health of your transplanted seedlings actually depend more on

soil temperature than on air temperature. And it's not just an issue if the soil is too cold. It is also important not to plant seeds in soil that's too warm. Some seeds can literally bake in hot soils and only germinate in cool soil. Cool soil temperatures result in weak and slow growing seedlings for other vegetables.

When seed packs say they need "**warm**" soil, that means it needs to be warm down to **3 inches deep** - not just on the surface. And when seeds such as peas say they like cool weather and tolerate a late frost, that does NOT mean they'll germinate well in cold soil. In fact, chances are good that most of them will rot before they germinate, and if they do germinate, it could take 3-4 weeks so you are much better off if you wait until the soil is "cool" but not "cold". Peas sown in soils with a temperature of 15° C take about nine days to germinate, while peas take about 36 days to germinate in soil with a temperature of 4°C.

Outdoor air temperature also has some affect on the early growth of a crop. For example, peas get off to their best start with an outdoor temperature of 13 to 21°. While some plants can recover from a "slow start" when the weather isn't great, others usually don't. Pepper plants rarely recover from temperatures that are too cold or too hot or soil that is too wet or too dry as young transplants. When pepper plants are stunted as young transplants, it's

usually best to pull them and replant new ones. Tomato plants that were in cold soil will be far more susceptible to blossom end rot later on.

For the best results, you need to use a garden soil thermometer, to check the soil temperature. Simply insert the thermometer to a depth of 2-3 inches. Wait three minutes (or as long as the instructions on your particular thermometer indicates), and then take the reading. Then use the list below to identify the ideal soil temperatures for your vegetables. If you don't have a soil thermometer you can use an old meat thermometer.

Here is a list of vegetables with the temperature range where they will germinate best according to the Department of Agriculture. You might want to snip it and save it till planting time.

Celery 21-23°  
Snap Beans:23-29°  
Beets: 23°  
Carrots: 23-26°  
Cabbage, Cauliflower, and Broccoli: 18-29°  
Cucumber: 21-29°  
Eggplant 21-29  
Lettuce 18-21  
Melons 26-30  
Peas 18-21  
Peppers: 23-29  
Radish: 18-21  
Spinach 21  
Swiss Chard: 20-23  
Turnip: 18-21  
For planting seedlings into the garden, minimum temperatures are 15° for tomatoes, 10° for broccoli, and 18° for cucumbers, peppers, and pumpkins

## How To Water



You might think that watering plants is pretty easy – fill up a watering can and pour the water on your plants. Job done! Well... not quite! Let's look at some of the rules of watering that can help your plants not just survive, but thrive. Over watering and under watering are the 2 main causes of plant death for most gardeners. First we'll look at container grown plants (houseplants and outdoor containers) and then at ones growing directly in your garden.

A great habit to get into is picking up your potted plants that aren't too heavy. By **picking up the pots**, you soon develop a feel for if it feels lighter than normal (water it) or if it feels heavier than normal (don't water it!).

You've likely heard that you should always **water potted plants from below**, but why? There are actually several reasons!

**1.** The potting soil is thoroughly dampened all the way through, especially deep down at the tip of the roots where it needs to be, rather than just on the surface levels.

**2.** If the top layer of soil stays moist, the plant may keep its root growth limited to that space, rather than sending roots down looking for water, which they need to do to build strong root systems capable of supporting the weight of the plant.

**3.** Most commercial potting soils for containers contain a lot of peat moss which, when

dry, **sheds water rather than absorbing it.** You could pour an entire container of water onto the soil and not realize that every single drop of it has poured out the bottom – the soil can still be bone dry. Allowing the pot to sit in water for a while until the peat soaks up moisture can be the best way to return the soil to the condition the plants need. If the container is too large to do this, poke holes in the soil with a pencil or a long dowel and water from the top slowly, making sure that no water is coming out the bottom. Wait a bit and water some more. Continue doing this until you're confident that there is no powdery, dusty peat moss in the pot that will shed water away from the roots.

Your peat based potting mix can also pull away from the sides of your containers when it gets too dry, so while you may think you are giving your plant a good drink of water, the water may be just flowing over the soil, going down the sides of the pot and out the bottom, leaving your plant gasping for a drink. If you see the soil is pulled away, give the plant a really good soak until the soil expands.

**4.** Some plants are very prone to fungal problems if leaves are left damp. Tomatoes grown in containers are particularly vulnerable to blight if leaves are damp as the air-borne spores can only cause the disease if they remain in contact with water on the leaf. It's crucial to keep the leaves dry and watering from the bottom guarantees it!

**5.** Watering from below also helps if you feed your plants with **liquid fertilizer.** Watering from the top can wash all of the fertilizer through the soil and out the bottom of the pot before the plant ever gets to use what you've provided.

The next rule of watering is: **Don't rely on the Rain!** Even if you think that a rain shower has watered your outdoor container plants, check anyhow. Sometimes a plant's dense leaves and flowers can act like an umbrella and shed water off to the sides, actually keep every drop of water from getting to your soil. (This is also be true in your outdoor gardens if your plants are crowded!)

Don't let YOUR schedule affect a plant's chance of getting water. We shouldn't decide that we'll water all of our houseplants every Tuesday and Saturday. Some plants won't be thirsty yet, and some may be parched. **Water them based on their needs** – a cactus and an umbrella palm have VERY different water needs. The time of year also affects how much you should water! There is less light in winter and the temperature is cooler. This means the plant slows down because photosynthesis is less effective. Providing the room isn't excessively hot you may be able to reduce watering for some of your houseplants to just once or twice a month over the winter months!

So just exactly how should we water plants in containers? For most

plants, this is the best technique: Fill a tray with water (not too cold) and dip each plant pot into it up to one third of its height. After a few seconds when they have had time to draw water up, lift them out and wait while the excess water thoroughly drains off. Never leave them sitting in the water for long periods of time

**For plants growing in the ground,** the best rule of thumb is to water as deeply and as infrequently as possible. You don't want soil that is wet and soggy – or too dry. And, definitely, not dry one week and wet the next. That's hard on flowers but it's disaster to most fruits and vegetables.

Watering to make sure the soil is moist to at least 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 inches) deep is best because it helps the plant grow its roots deeper into the soil. You don't want to flood your plants - just a good deep watering is best.

**Always avoid frequent light watering;** it is not good for your plants because it only wets the surface of the soil which encourages roots to grow upwards in search of moisture. The water evaporates quickly and the soil dries out, leaving the roots in hot, dry soil. So next summer when we have a heat wave, don't give in to the temptation of spraying your garden with your hose for a few minutes each day. This does far more harm than good. Water it deeply, mulch it well, and it can survive the heat! You might not, but your plants will!!! **(Cont'd Page 6)**

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We learn from our gardens the most important question there is – how much is enough? Hal Broland

## How to Water (cont'd)



Many of us are tempted to come home from work and wait for the cool evening air to go outside to water. The only thing worse is not watering at all! The best time of day to water is always in the morning. This gives the plant time to absorb the water it needs to handle the heat of the day, and the energy it takes to produce chlorophyll, grow, and move nutrients around. If you water in the evening, the problem is that the plant is now wet and the air temperature is cool. Those are the perfect conditions for mildews, molds, and all kinds of disease problems. If you can't water in the morning before you leave for work, water in the early evening rather than later in the evening. And while we're on the topic of when to water, it's worth pointing out that there has been a **long-standing myth** that the reason we should not water during the day is because rain drops on leaves act as a magnifying lens that will burn the leaves. This gets repeated far too often in far too many gardening books. Even the Royal Horticultural Society of England offered this advice on their website until very recently! They now acknowledge that this is simply not true. The reason not to water in the heat of the day is simple. The water can evaporate VERY quickly and not all of it will be

absorbed. So if that is the only time you can water and your plants are dry, go ahead. Just realize that some of it will evaporate from the top layer of the soil before it gets down to root level. The only real no-no here is don't water during the heat of the day if you've dissolved fertilizer in that water. The water will evaporate leaving the dry fertilizer salts on your leaves and that CAN burn your leaves!

A few tips are true for both container and in ground plants. Learning to perform the finger test is good for all plants. Stick a finger in the soil up to your first knuckle and notice if the soil is moist enough. If your finger can't even enter the soil, it definitely needs to be watered. If you reach an inch or so deep but your finger is completely dry, it probably needs water. If the top inch feels fairly moist, and some of the dirt sticks to your finger, it probably has enough water. Even better is a moisture meter. You can buy one for about five dollars. It sticks in the soil and tells you when the plant needs water, which saves guesswork. This is especially true in a garden that has been mulched where it is very difficult to judge the moisture levels of the soil deep down under the mulch.

Last but not least, air-temperature water is always best. For your indoor plants, after each watering, refill your watering container and let it sit until the next time you water. This

way, the water can warm up to your room temperature rather than whatever temperature it would be from the tap. Outdoors, a rain barrel is the perfect solution as the water will be the right temperature for the plants, whereas the ice cold water from a garden hose can shock some roots and really harm others.



### Grandma's Flowers

There's an old saying that everything old is new again and that is certainly true with flowers. There seems to be a swing away from a lot of the new fancy hybrids that turned out to be less than reliable in our gardens and back to the flowers of Grandma's gardens. Maybe it's because they remind us of simpler times. Or maybe it's just because they are beautiful flowers. If you're looking for a few sure winners for your garden, here's some suggestions for lots of colour, bloom, and fragrance. And best of all, many of these are easily started from seed indoors in winter!

**Columbines** are a must-have plant in any garden. There are so many varieties that you can find the colour and height and flower shape that your current garden is missing. Some begin blooming right after the tulips and they can continue until midsummer. Columbine is a derivative of the Latin word *columba*, which means dove, and

when you turn the spurred flowers over you'll see a shape like five doves grouped together. Columbines readily cross-pollinate, producing the rainbow of colours we all love, and often produce a surprise in our gardens – a brand new flower shape that we've never seen before. This shape may reappear again next year, or it may revert again. That's the fun of growing columbines. Some prefer full sun, and some prefer dappled shade but most columbine don't seem to be too fussy about where they grow. They'll often self-sow, and you can easily transplant seedlings to wherever you want them. They are reliably hardy to Zones 3 and very easy to care for, and reward us with a great splash of colour in the spring.

**Sweet peas** were found in almost every garden back in Grandma's day, and these old-fashioned flowers that are so easy to grow from seed should never have disappeared. Not many plants can rival the scent of a bouquet of sweet peas. In fact, I'll bet that the sweet smell of these annuals probably evokes more pleasant memories than any other flower.

Sweet peas grow when the weather is cool, covering a trellis with masses of flowers. Pick them frequently to encourage additional blossoms. Sweet peas became popular in the early 1900s, with the introduction of some exquisite new varieties. (Cont'd Page7)

## Grandma's Flowers



Many modern sweet pea hybrids were bred to grow in warmer weather, but while they succeeded there, they lost their signature fragrance. And make sure you grow the traditional annual form – the perennials don't have that same amazing scent either. For a sweet smelling bouquet, look for 'Old Spice,' a variety from 1901, or 'Painted Lady', another of Grandma's favourites that is still available in seed catalogues.

It's often recommended to soak sweet pea seeds to improve germination, but many gardeners claim to have had better luck nicking them with a knife or fingernail clippers instead. In our area, we can sow the seeds outdoors three to four weeks before the average last frost date.

**Delphiniums** will offer the wow factor in any garden. From the small, two-foot-tall varieties, such as the Magic Fountains series, to the seven-foot Pacific Giants, delphiniums make a statement. A single plant can be a focal spot in a small garden, while a group makes a real statement in a larger space.

Some gardeners avoid delphiniums because their size can cause them to topple over, but it's worth providing support or trying a shorter variety. Whenever possible, choose a place that is sheltered from the wind. Delphiniums prefer full sun, fertile soil and consistent watering. You

can start them easily enough from seed by sowing them in the middle of winter, although they won't bloom until the following year. Space them a couple of feet apart in a large display.

With over 20 species in the **Rudbeckia** genus, there is plenty to love! Some of the most popular are those that bloom from late summer into fall, like the common black-eyed Susans and the less common yellow coneflowers (*Rudbeckia fulgida*). Many varieties produce blooms that are different colours, even on the same plant, with shades of browns and yellows and oranges. Some have double, frilled petals and others have single wider petals, but all of them are beautiful in the late summer garden. Within the family, you can find tall plants, short plants, orange flowers, yellow flowers – there's something for every garden. You can start rudbeckias from seed, although it's much easier to buy plants, or ask someone who grows them to share a few babies from their clump. They do spread, so this is often no problem, but they wouldn't be considered invasive by most gardeners.

Last but certainly not least are **zinnias**. While the others are all perennials, these annuals can't be beat for their late season blast of colour. With double varieties, short ones, tall ones and all sorts of colours, there's nothing boring about zinnias. But this wasn't always the case. As a native flower of the Americas, zinnias weren't

highly sought. In fact, people thought they were ugly. But by the nineteenth century, breeders developed more interesting varieties, giving zinnias a place in gardens and a favourite, durable cut flower. There's a zinnia for every situation – shorter ones ideal for the front of the bed, while the 'California Giants' tower at 4 feet in height. Start zinnia seeds inside four to six weeks prior to the last frost date. You can just as easily direct seed them in the garden a couple of weeks before the last frost, but you'll wait longer for blooms. Choose a site in the full sun, and keep them well watered to enjoy brilliant flowers from the late summer through the fall.

If you aren't growing any of these garden staples, make this the year to add at least one of them to your flower beds. You won't regret it!

## Grow Something Different!



If you're a gardener who likes to experiment, why not try to grow some **kohlrabi** this year. It looks like no other vegetable you've ever grown – whether you plant the purple variety or the green variety. Some describe the flavour as similar to a sweet turnip or rutabaga. Some say it has a taste and texture somewhere between cabbage and broccoli. Some say it has a bit of a peppery flavour closer to a radish. But all agree, it's easy to grow, and crisp

and delicious. You can eat it raw in coleslaw or sliced on a veggie tray, or cooked in soups or stews or dozens of other recipes.

Kohlrabi is a member of the mustard family and is close relatives with cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, kale and Brussels sprouts. It has always been very popular in Indian cuisine, but is now making its way into Canadian dishes. There are white, reddish and purple varieties, some of which will mature early (around 38 days) and some which mature late (80 days or more) so choose carefully.

Kossak is a popular variety that is a large, white skinned hybrid. As it continues to grow, it has been bred to remain tender without getting pithy or hollow. Kossak also has excellent storage capabilities and is easy to grow, requiring about 65 days to maturity.

Many people who have only seen kohlrabi in a grocery store think that it's an underground bulb like an onion but it's not – the bulb is actually the stem of the plant and it sits just above the level of the soil. This part of the root will swell and become the sweet tender vegetable that will certainly spark curiosity among visitors to your veggie patch. And kohlrabi is actually somewhat easy to grow.

Kohlrabi is fairly new to grocery stores in the Moncton area, and you might want to pick up one before gardening season to try it and see why it's

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worth growing. While the kohlrabi bulbs are what you'll usually see being sold, don't pass up an opportunity to pick them up if you see the greens still attached — they're delicious and can be eaten raw in salad if they're young and tender, or sautéed or steamed like mustard greens. One of the advantages of growing it in your garden is that you'll have the greens AND the bulb.

To eat it raw, you can slice the bulb and toss it in a salad, grate it for coleslaw, or eat them on their own with a drizzle of good olive oil and a sprinkling of sea salt. To eat it cooked, it can be thrown into a vegetable soup, added to a creamy, puréed soup such as cream of potato, or cream of broccoli, or roasted in the oven along with potatoes or other root veggies. Kohlrabi needs little prep, but you should always peel off the tough outermost layer of the bulb with a vegetable peeler.

Once you've decided that it deserves a spot in your garden, you can find seeds at Vesey's or most other seed companies. Sow seed early in the spring once the soil has warmed to 10-18°C. Choose an area with **full sun** and soil pH of 6.0-7.0 (This may mean you'll need to grow it in a part of your vegetable patch that you **lime each fall**, or in a special raised bed, but if you've successfully grown cabbage or broccoli or other vegetables that don't like acidic soil, you

are probably all set to plant kohlrabi). Maintaining a soil pH of 6.8 and higher will discourage club root and give you much healthier plants. You'll want to enrich the soil with compost or well rotted manure and it's a heavy feeder, so you may need to add additional feedings of liquid fertilizer during the growing season. You'll also need to **keep it well watered** or you'll have tough, woody stems.

When it's harvest time, if you plan to eat it right away, you can pick the first stem when it is 1 inch in diameter. It can be continuously harvested, up until the stems are 2 to 3 inches in diameter. After that, your plants will be too old and too tough, unless you chose varieties bred for larger bulb sizes. It's vital to keep an eye on the swelling base. Once the swelling area on the stem reaches the right size, cut the bulb from the root with a sharp knife.

If you're so excited that you can't wait to try growing kohlrabi, it's good to know that you can start your plants indoors about four to six weeks before you plan to put them outside. After four to six weeks, plant the baby plants outdoors in well drained, rich soil. Remember that growing kohlrabi is most successful in cooler weather. The early crops started indoors and then transplanted outdoors will provide you with a nice crop.



## Society News



### Hats Off!

Hats off to **Karen Nelson** for her gorgeous presentation at the February meeting on the orchid gardens she visited during her recent trip to Singapore. There were lots of Oooohs and Aaahs coming from the members in the audience. And speaking of the members, hats off to all who were brave enough to venture out on such a cold and blustery night. I'll admit that I was white knuckled at times on my drive home through some nasty white-outs.

I'm sad to say that our secretary, **Connie DesRoche -Gallagher**, has let us know that she can no longer continue to fill that role. We all thank you, Connie, for taking on this task. Job well done!

Our executive have been very hard at work planning a wide range of activities for the upcoming year. Hats off to **Elaine** for hosting us at her home as we planned upcoming speakers, potlucks, seminars, tours, and other surprises.

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