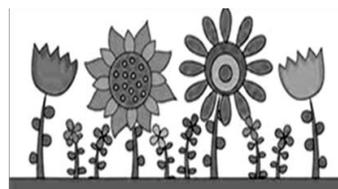


# Gardening News



“The Friendly Garden People”  
Growing Since 1932

www.whsociety.ca



## Branching Out



The WHS always welcomes new members and 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**.



## Next Meeting

Join us on **May 22** for one of the most popular meetings of the year – our plant auction. As you are digging and dividing this spring, set aside your extra plants that need a good home and bring them to our next meeting with a label identifying the type of plant and any important details you can provide – height, colour, growing habit, preference for sun/shade, wet/dry soil, etc. Our very own Jim Steeves will act as auctioneer so be prepared for a few good belly laughs! This is a great way to get some new plants for your garden as they've been proven to grow well in our area and you can talk to the person who grew them for extra tips you may find helpful.

## From The Editor

While some gardeners go to great lengths to rid their lawns of dandelions, the first dandelion of spring always makes me smile. Their cheery yellow flowers are a sign that gardening season has arrived. And I know that soon I'll have my students bringing me bouquets of them – just like I used to do for my teacher when I was in school. But this spring, the sight of dandelions may be extra special for some.

Back in 2009, a group of Canadian researchers from the University of Windsor in Ontario started investigating this “weed” as a potential cure for cancer.

An oncologist in Windsor had some cancer patients who showed improvement after taking dandelion root tea. A post-doctoral fellow at the University of Windsor heard this and began studying the anti-cancer properties of dandelion. According to Dr. Ovadje, “We decided to start studying what was in this tea that made patients respond to it.” She admitted she was quite suspicious in the beginning, but says the results are more than amazing!

They have been able to successfully assess the effect of a simple water extract of dandelion root in various human cancer cell types in the lab and have observed its effectiveness against some forms of leukemia, and pancreatic and colon cancers, with no toxicity to non-cancer cells. These efficacy studies have been confirmed in mice that have been transplanted with human colon cancer cells.

Dandelion root extract is now approved in Canada for Phase 1 human trials for end-stage blood-related cancers, such as leukemia and lymphoma.

Researchers believe that this extract appears to be causing cancer cells to basically “commit suicide” without affecting the healthy cells around them. A LOT more research will need to be done, but it is interesting to think that dandelion extract may be the future of cancer treatment!

Perhaps knowing this will help those determined to have a dandelion free lawn think again. And it definitely makes us think twice about the definition of a “weed”!

**Laura Sarson, Editor**

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## WHS Roll Call

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## Did You Know?

There is often confusion over the difference between rhododendrons and azaleas. Each has specific traits: true rhododendrons have 10 or more stamens; azaleas generally have five stamens. In general, rhododendrons are larger plants with larger leaves. You may see the word *Rhododendron* on the plant tag of an azalea because it is part of the azalea's Latin botanical name – all azaleas are in the genus *Rhododendron*.

We may think that we are nurturing our gardens, but the truth is that our garden is nurturing us. ~ J. May

## Ask Dr. Fill



**Dear Dr. Fill**

There's so much talk now about how healthy **kale** is that I'd like to try to grow it this summer, but I'm not even sure if it will grow here. If it does, I'd appreciate any tips you have that might help me have a good crop. I'm one of those gardeners that tries a new plant once, and if it doesn't grow for me, I won't try it again!

**Sincerely**

**A One-Chance-To-Grow Gardener**



**Dear One Chance Gardener**

I have good news and better news. The good news is that you can certainly grow kale in our area. And the better news is that it's not just for the salad garden - kale is great cooked AND raw! And you're right about its health benefits. It's packed with fiber, iron, calcium, and vitamins K, A, and C.

Kale is grown as a "cut and come again vegetable", much like Swiss Chard, so a few plants may be all you need. Just 6 healthy plants can supply a family of four a nice weekly harvest. The more you harvest it, the more new leaves will appear. And you don't even need a backyard; kale grows great in containers, too. In fact, when it's in a container, you can move it to a shady area on days when the temperatures are getting too high. (Kale likes sun, but it also likes it cool). The plants can be quite ornamental in a container, with leaves that can be curly or flat and purple or many shades of green so many gardeners choose

that option, even if they have room in their gardens.

Most books about growing kale will stress that it's a **cool season crop**. This is because while kale will produce in warm weather, it has a tendency to become woody and bitter. And many gardeners will tell you it's at its best when there's been a light frost. So you have a choice. Some gardeners will grow a spring crop and then pull it in the heat of summer and then, later, replant a new crop for harvesting in the fall. Others will simply grow it where it has some afternoon shade in the summer, and use the leaves produced during that time in cooked recipes, rather than in salads.

While kale is tolerant of cold weather in the fall, it's different in the spring. If you buy transplants (or start seeds indoors) you will have to wait and plant them out **after all risk of frost** and not before soil temperature is at least 15°. Choose varieties that will mature in 30 - 40 days so that you can harvest the tender leaves before the really hot weather arrives.

Set plants out with about 40 cm spacing between plants. This gives them room to spread out and still allows for air circulation.

You can also plant kale **seeds directly in the garden** in the spring, as soon as the soil can be worked and the soil temperature is at least 7°.

In general, kale plants like to grow in a rich, well draining soil, high in

organic matter. You could side dress your soil with some compost just after the first leaves are harvested to feed the plants, or use fertilizer such as seaweed emulsion in weak solution once or twice. Despite the fact that it's a leafy green, do not be tempted to give your plants high nitrogen fertilizer. Kale does better with a balanced 10-10-10- and if it's in good, organic rich soil, it doesn't likely need any extra fertilizer at all.

Kale is shallow rooted, so use a **mulch** to keep the shallow roots cool and to conserve moisture, and your plants will thrive. It is crucial to keep your kale plants well watered. Along with cool temperatures, moist soil keeps kale leaves sweet and crisp. But never water so much that the soil gets soggy as that will be death to your plants. If we get a good rainfall once a week, you likely won't need to water by hand.

Kale does suffer from a lot of the same pests as its relatives, cabbage and broccoli, but it's much better at fighting back than they are. But it can be susceptible to club root as well as aphids, cabbage loopers, cabbageworm, cutworms, flea beetles and slugs. The best defense is to monitor the plants often, for signs of eggs or feeding. Be sure you know which pest is causing you a problem, and treat accordingly. And if slugs are an issue in your gardens, there are now varieties of kale that are bred to be more slug resistant so look for those! 'Red Russian' has smooth, tender leaves with purple veins and edges, and it is

said to be especially **slug resistant**.

It's **time to harvest** when the leaves are about the size of your hand. Pick them one by one, starting with the outermost leaves and working toward the center. Always leave a few of the small central leaves attached to encourage more new growth. In most cases, you'll be able to harvest from the same plant again in a week or so.

If we have a really hot summer, and you notice the leaves are woody and bitter, you might decide to pull the plants up and plant a 2<sup>nd</sup> crop later in the summer. You'll want to be sure that you choose a fast maturing variety for both your spring crop and your fall crop. Kale can tolerate late fall temperatures down to -4 to -6 and on hot summer days, it can tolerate up to 26° - any hotter than that and you'll find it starts getting too bitter for salads. Plant the second fall crop 6 to 8 weeks before the first expected frost— remember that you can keep harvesting even after a light frost or two.

There are many varieties of kale to choose from, so you'll want to try a few and decide which type you prefer, but it's hard to find a bad tasting kale. The curly-leaved varieties tend to hang on longer in cold weather, but can be slower to get established than the flat-leaved types. Thanks for the question. Enjoy your kale crop and invite me over for a salad!

**Sincerely  
Dr. Fill**

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Growing your own tomatoes is the best way to devote three months of your life to saving you \$4.57. ~R.Roland

## Winning the War on Weeds



Everyone who grows a vegetable garden knows how important it is to keep it weeded. The weeds compete (and often win the fight) for nutrients and water. There are perennial and annual weeds in most gardens. The perennial weeds, such as dandelions, creeping buttercup, and bladder campion, come up every spring, usually before you even get into the garden to plant. To control perennial weeds you need to dig them out — root and all. But it's different with annual weeds. They can't come back from the root — they reappear each year from seeds in the soil. There are literally thousands of weed seeds in most garden soils. And you are possibly bringing in even more in your compost and manure (horse manure is extremely high in weed seed content). Some soil additives such as the product sold as "black earth" are often filled with weed seeds.

When you disturb the soil to plant your veggies, you are bringing existing seeds up to the surface where they get light and warmth — the two things they've been waiting for in order to germinate. So to control annual weeds like oxeye daisy, purslane, black medick, chickweed and crabgrass you need several strategies! Here are a few tips to control these very determined little plants.

**1.** When weeding, try not to dig deeper than a few cm into the soil to avoid bringing weed seeds that were deep down in the soil (where they couldn't germinate) up to the surface (where they are sure to germinate).

**2. Don't Till!** Some gardeners till their gardens each spring before planting, and some use a rototiller to weed between rows. Increasing your weed population is just one more reason not to till! The more you till, the more weed seeds are brought to the soil surface to germinate. Save your rototiller for when you need to turn a new garden in an area that is currently turf — although keep in mind that even in this instance — there are better "no-dig" alternatives.

**3. Avoid** adding partially decomposed manures to your garden. Some can contain a **lot** of weed seed (as well as causing other problems!)

**4. Weed Early** — If you weed early in the season, you'll have fewer problems later. Remove annual weeds before they reach 7cm tall. Preferably on a sunny day, using a sharp-edged hoe, gently slice the weeds just below the soil surface to kill them. A loop hoe is the perfect tool for this. The sun will help kill the weeds so they don't re-sprout. Slicing the weeds less than 5 cm below the surface will avoid bringing more weed seeds to the surface.

**5.** Consider what vegetables you are growing **and decide how "weed free" you need to be.** Some vegetables compete better with weeds than others and once established, will be able to smother annual weeds. Tomatoes, squash, melons, potatoes, cabbage, and beans grow quickly in warm soils and can often outgrow the weeds. Plus, they are large enough to shade out weeds growing later in the season. Vegetables such as lettuce, carrots, onions and radishes don't compete nearly as well with weeds and your yields will be reduced if you don't weed well early and often.

**6. Mulch!** Once you've weeded a few times and your veggie seeds have germinated and are growing vigorously, consider adding an organic mulch. Organic mulches such as straw, bark mulch, grass clippings from untreated lawns, and chopped leaves will keep the soil cool, moist, and less weedy while adding organic matter to the soil as they break down. Add a 5- to 8 cm thick layer of mulch around established plants. Organic mulches are best used on cool season vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, and peas. If you are going to use them on warm season vegetables such as tomatoes, melons, peppers, and beans, wait until the soil temperature has warmed into the mid teens before applying the mulch.

**Always** mulch your pathways; there's no reason to be weeding the spaces between your rows. And it is NOT a good practice to leave the weeds there, thinking that they aren't close enough to the vegetables you are growing to do them any harm. Pathways between rows of crops can be mulched at planting time with any material that will prevent weed growth. You can use old cardboard, old pieces of carpet, or layers of moist newspaper — whatever you have — or use bark mulch or straw to stop weed growth. Of course, some of the heavier materials, such as cardboard and old rugs, will not break down quickly and may need to be removed come fall. And they won't add the nutrients to the soil that organic mulches will.

**7.** Some gardeners invest in the new "**inorganic mulch**" products that are now available. You can purchase special black, green, or red plastic "mulch" that you lay down on the beds before planting. These inorganic mulches warm the soil by several degrees and by poking holes and planting right into the mulch, the roots can take advantage of the warm soil and the plants are supposed to grow faster.

They also are supposed to keep weeds from germinating. If you go this route, you need a soaker hose or drip **Cont'd page 4**

## War on Weeds



irrigation line under the plastic mulch to keep the plants well watered. Most plastic mulches are advertised to be capable of being reused for 2 to 3 years if you're careful when pulling them up in fall.

**8.** One of the most effective strategies is likely one of the easiest – **NEVER let annual weeds go to seed.** Weed plants can reproduce prolifically. For example, one plant of pigweed can produce more than 100,000 seeds in one season. If you get behind in your weeding, at least cut off their flowers or seed stalks to keep seeds from forming.

**9.** If you have a large garden, consider planting **winter rye** in the fall, then turning it under in spring. The residue has been known to reduce annual weed seed germination rates by 75%.

**10.** And if you really want to get your revenge in the battle of the weeds – you could always **eat them!** Many weeds are edible and taste great. Apparently you can harvest lamb's quarters, purslane, and pigweed when they are young and add them to salads. Mixing chickweed in with basil and parsley is said to make a great pesto.

**Editor's Note:** If you would like to learn more about identifying the weeds that you have in your gardens, a site that I use quite frequently is the Nova Scotia Dept. of Agriculture

weed site. It has good colour photos of hundreds of common weeds in our area at all stages of their growth. Their site is:

[novascotia.ca/agri/documents/weed-identification-guide.pdf](http://novascotia.ca/agri/documents/weed-identification-guide.pdf)

## Cold Frames



If you are thinking you'd like to get your salad greens off to an early start this spring, you'll be glad to know that building a cold frame is pretty easy. And it's not too late to start building one to use this spring! A cold frame is simply a bottomless box with a skyward-facing window. Like a miniature greenhouse, a cold frame lengthens the gardening season by protecting plants and seeds from the cold temperatures of late fall and early spring. You can even make a small cold frame for your deck or patio to grow plants in pots. As long as you can keep the temperature above 4°, many salad greens will thrive!

Since a cold frame is nothing more than four walls to trap heat and shelter plants, and a transparent lid that admits light, you can make the walls from any sturdy material. An old window works perfectly as a lid, but you can also use Plexiglas or plastic sheeting tacked to a frame. You will often see old windows put out for garbage pick-up, so if you're thinking there might be a cold frame in

your future, keep an eye out for them!

The simplest cold frame is just six bales of hay arranged in a rectangle on the southern side of the house and topped with an old storm window. Plant your seeds for crops such as lettuce in a flat and place it in the center of the bales underneath the glass. But if you have an old storm window and some planks or scrap lumber, you can put together a cold frame pretty easily without much "skill". Nail the wood together to fit under the storm window. You can buy metal "corners" to build the box (available at a good hardware store, or from a company like Lee Valley). You can even skip the hinges for the windows. On hot days, just slide the window to the side to let heat out; on cold nights, put the window back over the top of the frame and cover it with an old blanket. In the summer when you don't need it, your little frame is easy to store. Get it out again in the fall and try growing winter-type lettuces that are bred to grow under low-light conditions late into the fall.

If you plan to build a wooden frame, its shape and size will be what fits the windows that you plan to use. But you'll likely want it to be larger than 2 by 4 feet to make it worth your while; you don't want it much larger than 3 by 6 feet, so that you can reach all the plants inside. If you're building a wooden frame, and have any experience

at all with a hammer, **it's best to build the back higher than the front** to maximize the amount of light that reaches the plants inside and to allow water or melting snow to drain off the slanted glass top easily. You can find lots of plans on the internet to show you how to saw the boards to make this type of box. But if your carpentry skills are limited to building a square frame that is the same height all the way around, that can still work!

**The best site** for your cold frame is a south-facing, sunny spot with good drainage and some protection from the wind. Ideally, the site should get full sun from mid-morning to mid-afternoon. You can set up a cold frame permanently in your garden, or make one that you put away when you're not using it.

You can grow cold frame plants in pots, flats, or, if you're growing plants such as salad greens that love cool soil, you can plant them right in the ground. Before you set up a cold frame in a permanent spot, dig out the top 10 cm or so of soil inside the frame and replace it with a layer of coarse gravel. Then put 15 cm of a good topsoil mix back. This will ensure good drainage.

**The key to using a cold frame successfully** is paying attention to the temperature—and the trick is in keeping it cool (**cont'd. page 5**)

## Cold Frames



rather than warm. The temperature inside the cold frame should stay below 15°C for plants that we normally grow in spring and fall. The way to keep temperatures cool inside a cold frame is to lift the lid.

Gardeners who use cold frames say the most important thing is to **resist the urge** to fill up your new cold frame right away. A new cold frame demands a lot of attention and there is a learning curve. You'll need to be watchful of the weather, deciding early in the day whether to crack the lid a bit or keep it closed. And you'll have to be religious about covering the cold frame at night if the temperature is going to drop below freezing. You want to get a good sense of how hot it gets during the day inside the cold frame, and how cold it gets at night before you start trusting it to keep your plants healthy.

Many gardeners recommend an electronic remote thermometer. These devices, which cost around \$50, have a sensor you can put in the frame, and a remote read-out that you keep inside. Most have functions that let you review the high and low temperature over any time period.

However, if you don't have this gadget, here's a good rule of thumb: When outdoor temperatures are above 4 degrees, prop open the lid about 15 cm; when the outdoor temps clear

10 degrees, remove the lid. Be sure to restore the lid in late afternoon to trap the heat inside for the cool night. (If you want to make this a more permanent structure, you can also buy automatic venting devices in some gardening catalogs).

On frigid nights, the plants inside the cold frame may need a little extra protection to keep from freezing. Most heat escapes through the glass, so pile insulation on top. You can use old blankets, straw, newspaper or whatever is handy. And believe it or not, snow insulates well, too!

In the spring, having a cold frame lets you harden off your seedlings that you've been growing without lugging them back in the house each night. A cold frame is an ideal place to gradually acclimate tomato or pepper seedlings grown indoors to conditions outside. Open the top of the cold frame during the day, and put the glass roof back on at night. You can leave your seedlings in there for a week or two to harden off.

Once you get to know your cold frame, you can start using it to grow just about anything you'd grow in a greenhouse -- provided it fits under the lid. By far, the best role for your cold frame is to give you an extra-early head start on growing plants for the coming gardening season. With a simple cold frame, you can easily extend your season by a month or more on either end. And

what gardener doesn't love that!



## Cornhill Seminars

Once again this year, Cornhill Nursery is offering their free seminars and this year's lineup looks fabulous, so you might want to mark some dates on your calendar. Seminars are held from 10:00 to 12:00 on a Saturday. Seminars are free but pre-registration is strongly advised as they limit their audience size to 50 people.

### April 28 Pruning Seminar

Pruning is often confusing or even terrifying for some. They will demonstrate techniques of pruning as well as offer advice on the timing of pruning for different plant types.

### May 5 Spring Perennials

Most gardeners know the common spring perennials such as peonies and bleeding hearts. You will learn about these, but also perennials that may be unfamiliar to you but deserve a place in your garden.

### May 19 The Acadian Forest

Join them for

a walk through their wooded area, which is a typical Acadian forest system. They will point out things that are growing there that you might not have ever noticed before, and discuss how our forests are changing.

### June 2 Honey Blossom Festival

This event will run from 10am-4pm. Enjoy a sweet walk through their apple and pear orchard which will be at the end of their blossoms. There will be talks on raising bees, our most important pollinators, and vendors who will be offering their beeswax and honey creations. Bring the kids so they can be amazed at a glass enclosed bee hive where you can watch the bees at work.

### Saturday, June 9 Floral arranging

After a short discussion of some basic principles used in arranging, you create your own masterpieces. They will provide all the materials. You provide the artistry. If you have pruning shears, gloves, etc. they do ask you to please bring them along.

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Our newsletter is printed by our friends at InColor, located at 30 Desbrisay Avenue, Moncton.



It is not graceful, and it makes one hot and sweaty, but gardening is a blessed sort of work.~ Elizabeth von Arnim

## Waste of Time?



Many gardeners complain that there simply aren't enough hours in the day to do all of the chores that they think need to be done. But have you ever stopped to ask yourself if the chores that you are doing are necessary? Here are a few things that you may be able to stop doing to give yourself more time for just for relaxing.

### 1. Stop fighting Mother Nature.

Many of us spend a lot of time trying to change every speck of soil we have. We could save a lot of back breaking work if we decided to grow MOSTLY what is happy in the soil we have, and build up REALLY good soil in just a few areas where needed. If we have a low, boggy area – grow plants that thrive in THAT soil rather than tending sickly ones that are always too wet. If you've got a rocky area, find plants that would be right at home with a thin or almost non-existent layer of topsoil. Why spend a fortune and hours of your precious time trying to turn that area into prime gardening soil. Rock garden plants will THRIVE there with little attention. We can add lots of amendments to fluff up our clay soil, but if we stop adding them, or don't double dig the area, it will eventually settle and create a sinkhole that holds water. Seek out clay loving plants that will thrive there. We can use what nature has given us – or consider building

raised beds and creating the soil that we need. This might allow us to spend a bit more time and money on "fixing" the soil in a few beds for particular types of plants that we insist on having, and stop wasting time on caring for unhappy, unhealthy plants.

**2. Tilling** the garden each spring is an age-old gardening practice that was thought to be good to remove weeds, aerate the soil, and mix in compost and other additives. But it has been found to be a time-wasting exercise in most situations. Tilling brings weed seeds that have been waiting to be exposed to light up to the surface. Tilling wet soil breaks down the soil structure, causing it to become cloddy and hard. The negative impact of tilling wet soil may last for years. (If you must till, you can tell if your soil is dry enough by taking a handful and squeezing it tightly into a ball. If the ball breaks into granular pieces when pressed lightly between your fingers, the soil is ready to work. If the ball remains intact and feels sticky when you squeeze it, wait a few days before tilling). Tilling destroys over 90% of your earthworm population – the very creatures that are nature's gift to gardeners. They add large amounts of nutrients, they aerate the soil, they buffer pH levels... the list goes on and on. Look at the gorgeous rich soil in a forest – it is created by leaves falling on the surface and slowly

breaking down. No one is tilling them into the ground! Follow Mother Nature, and let earthworms and other soil dwellers take care of the rest.

**3.** In many cases, a thorough **fall clean up** of a veggie patch is important, but there's really no need to pull up each and every crop. Remove the top growth to get rid of diseased leaves and overwintering insect eggs, but you can leave smaller roots to decompose in the soil. They help keep the soil aerated and may even enrich it with some nutrients.

**4. Watering** the garden can be a highly therapeutic activity. But overwatering can result in extensive vegetative growth at the expense of yield. It promotes weed growth and depletes the nutrients in the soil. And if you feel you must water, you are wasting your time if you water lightly each day. A long, deep watering once in a while is the ONLY effective way to water. Watering for a few minutes with your garden hose may make you feel good, but if you stick your finger deep down in the soil where the roots are, you are going to see that your water has not arrived where it needs to be – deep down in the soil at root level.

**5. Stop over-fertilizing.** Soil enriched with compost and other organic matter often has all the nutrients plants need. An occasional feeding might be appreciated by a few

special plants, but heavy and frequent fertilization increases salt buildup, which can burn the plant tissues. It causes new growth which attracts aphids and other leaf sucking insects. Look out for specific nutrient deficiencies and fertilize accordingly, rather than waste time and money on routine feeding that is likely doing more harm than good. Most perennials prefer lean soil.

### 6. Put plants where they want to be.

Most gardeners suffer zone envy, but pampering plants that do well in warmer zones is often a waste of time and effort. Invest the same time and money on plants guaranteed to thrive in your area. At least be sure that MOST of your plants are suited to your growing conditions, and leave yourself the time to REALLY pamper the "fussy" ones that you can't resist. If you have garden beds in areas where tree roots are competing for water, realize that the tree roots are always going to win. Don't spend hours caring for sickly looking plants that are dying of thirst. Find them a new home where they'll have a chance to find some water during a dry spell.

**7.** Don't make the mistake of planting a shrub that wants to be large, and waste hours **pruning** to keep it small. Look for naturally compact shrubs and small or slow growing trees. Often your over pruning actually makes them grow even faster.

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Your mind is a garden, your thoughts are the seeds, The harvest can be either flowers or weeds.~ British Proverb

## Perennial of the Month



This month's perennial is a shrub rather than a flower. The popular trend of including more "care free" shrubs in our gardens may have many of us shopping for new shrubs this spring, and this plant deserves a spot in many of our gardens. It is **holly**. We tend to think more about holly at Christmas time, but of course, you can't plant it then! So if you don't have holly, you might want to put it on your shopping list this spring for a LOT of reasons!

Adding holly to our flower beds often provides more year round interest than perennial flowers can do. Holly can add structure and a splash of color in the winter and a lush, glossy green backdrop for other flowers in the summer.

The best time for planting holly bushes is in the spring. The relatively low temperatures of spring combined with higher chance of rainfall will make settling into the new location much less stressful for the holly bush. The best location for planting holly is in well-drained but not dry, slightly acidic soil (pH between 5.0 and 6.0) in full sun. That being said, most hollies are very tolerant of less than ideal locations and will grow well in part shade or dry or even quite wet soil. This is just one more reason holly deserves to be our plant of the month.

Another reason is that they are so easy to care

for – but regular pruning is needed. Pruning your holly bushes will ensure that they keep a nice compact form rather than becoming leggy and scraggly.

When shopping for holly, be sure you buy varieties that are hardy in our area – some "national chain stores" may have hollies shipped in that would do fine in warmer parts of Canada, but that won't grow here. Avoid buying Chinese, English and Japanese holly shrubs as they are not hardy to Zone 5, and iffy even in Zone 6. For our area, consider American holly, a native plant, and the plants known as the "blue hollies", also known as the Meserve hollies, named for the woman who created these hybrids. They have leathery dark blue-green leaves with spines like English holly leaves. Varieties that do well here are the blue holly cultivars 'Blue Prince' and 'Blue Princess.' They are the most cold hardy of the series. Other "blue" hybrids that do well here are *China Boy* and *China Girl*. Don't expect rapid growth when you are planting blue hollies. They can grow quite tall in time if you let them, but it will take them quite a few years.

### Insider Information

For more info on this shrub, I turned to one of our members for some "Insider Information". WHS member **Honey Kelly** graciously agreed to share her expertise. I knew that she loved her holly shrubs and they always looked very healthy and beautiful when I visited her

gardens. I asked why she had to have holly in her gardens, and if she would share a few of her tips from her personal experience growing them, and here is her response.

"I love my hollies! They are really easy to grow, low maintenance and beautiful most of the year. I also love that as a bonus, when I trim them I get free holiday decorations! My family waits every November for the pruning!

If you are shopping for holly bushes, you need at least one male per 10 females in order to pollinate the female to produce the glorious bright red berries.

I have mine planted in full sun at the bottom of a sloping garden in a bit of a sheltered spot. This keeps them watered but not waterlogged! I give them a little fertilizer in the spring, and cut off any broken or severely damaged branches. They are well mulched and I have never needed to water them. Both male and female plants bloom with very tiny, unremarkable flowers, but the bees love them! And I love the bees! Win! Win!

That's almost it. Sit back and let Mother Nature do her thing! Watch the green berries turn red very quickly and enjoy. In November, I prune to shape and harvest for Christmas. I also do tie them up to protect their branches from heavy snowfall.

The only problem I have ever experienced is a bit of leaf drop, due (I think)

to rapidly changing conditions in late winter/early spring. The holly seems to recover quickly. Last year was the only year that it was severe (so was the winter) and it was so bad I thought the deer had eaten it. For the most part, I think the deer leave it alone. I almost ripped the female up, but decided to wait and lo and behold, she made a resounding come back, bigger and greener than before, producing tons of berries. So if you experience this, don't panic! Be patient!

Due to a summer renovation at our home, however Mr. "*Blue Prince*" had to go and I have since (in the late fall) cordially introduced *Ms. Blue Princess* to a new young stud. Lord only knows what shenanigans have been going on under the warm blanket of snow! I made the introductions and now the rest is up to them. I anxiously await to see what "develops" between them!

When looking for a spot to plant your new holly plants, I have no research to back this up, but my instincts tell me that they prefer to be out of the wind - cold winter winds in particular."

Having seen Honey's gardens many times, I would certainly trust her instinct! She concluded, "Generally these plants are easy peasy and I highly recommend them. While mine are in more sun, I think they would do ok in part shade too. If you have room to plant holly, do it! I don't think you'll regret it."

## Society News



Hats off to **Gerry Gillcash** for his wonderful presentation at our March meeting on starting plants from seed. And thanks to his generosity, many members went home with some of his seedlings and baby plants.

Hats off to **Elaine McCullough** for hosting us to pot up our canna lilies for the Millennium Garden, and hats off to all the members who showed up to help out.

Hats off to this month's Insider Information contributor, **Honey Kelly**, who graciously shared her experience with growing holly. I am hoping that other members will be willing to share their wisdom in upcoming editions of the newsletter. Please see me at a meeting, or send me an email if you are willing to share your experience with a particular plant, whether it's a flower, a vegetable, a tree or shrub. Remember that all I'm asking for is a tip or 2 that you can share with those who might be interested in growing that plant. Advice from a local gardener is always more helpful than something from a book written by someone living in Toronto or Vancouver.

Mark Saturday, **June 9th and Saturday, June 16th** on your calendar and plan to join us at the Millennium Gardens to clean up and plant annuals. It's a great way to get to know other members and to help

make our community more beautiful.

Members who will be bringing plants to our **May plant auction** are reminded to pot them up in such a way that we avoid making a muddy mess in the Rotary Lodge. Bare root plants are discouraged, and plants in grocery bags filled with soil can tip over and spill out. Any type of container can be used to hold the soil - ice cream tubs, yogurt containers, etc. Also remember that if you are bringing in plants that can be invasive, they need to be labelled as such. We've all dealt with the nightmare of trying to rid our gardens of "plant thugs", and we don't want to have any unsuspecting gardener plant them. Of course, there are situations where plants that spread rapidly are desirable - it's just good to know what we are dealing with when we plant them.

### Important Note to all Members

We are updating our membership contact list and are asking for your help to be sure all of our information is correct. We've been finding some emails and phone numbers appear to have changed, and we're seeing that some members have not yet renewed memberships for 2018. We want to be sure we aren't bothering those who aren't members any more with meeting reminders, so are deleting those names from our list, but we don't want to delete anyone who has just forgotten to renew last fall. Please take a moment to check in with Doris and confirm that your membership is up to

date and that we have your proper contact info. You can speak to her at a meeting or email her at: [happynester65@bellaliant.com](mailto:happynester65@bellaliant.com)

Thanks so much for helping out with this important task. Doris works very hard to keep our membership list current and I know she'll appreciate your help!



### Grow Snapdragons!

With all of the new hybrids of annuals available at nurseries these days, we sometimes overlook the ones that have been around for generations. But the fact that they have been popular for that long should tell us that they might still deserve a spot in our shopping cart!

We are all familiar with their tall spikes of brightly colored flowers that bloom so profusely. Most are intensely colored and real standouts in the garden, and in a vase. Snapdragon flowers start blooming at the bottom of the stalk and work their way up, making for a long period of bloom.

Snapdragons are at their best in cool weather, and seem to bloom even more profusely toward the end of the season, but they do repeat bloom throughout the season if they're happy with where they are growing.

Deadheading can increase the amount of buds that are set, but since the flower stalks begin blooming from the bottom up, they have a fairly long bloom duration anyway. To deadhead, simply find the spent flowers on each spike, where the petals have begun to wilt or have fallen off completely and the plant has begun to form seed pods. Pinch off the entire flower from the spike, including the swollen seed-producing section at the base. If this is left in place, deadheading will not prolong blooming.

New varieties are constantly being introduced. You can find varieties in bright vibrant colours or in soft pale pastel shades, and also for every height you need. There are tall varieties and dwarf varieties and just about everything in between. They are stunning in your garden, and also make great cut flowers! Add a few to your shopping cart this spring!

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A man once said, "You cannot live solely on vegetables, for they cannot make you strong"; and then he watched a farmer walking behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerked him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle. ~Henry D. Thoreau