

The Garden Master News

Newsletter of the Atlantic Master Gardeners Association

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Master Gardener - A Poem

- by Lorraine Remer
Master Gardener, 2015
UCCE-Solano, California

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Got a question? Ask me now
You say your plants are dying
and you don't know how?
And the pests are flying and eating crops
and the leaves are curling and starting to drop?

Not to worry because
We've got answers, right here now
Here to help you we know how -
in the garden or in the yard or
in your pots, we've got answers for you now.

Be assured, MGs will set you right
And here's the best answer that is true-
"I'm not sure what the answer is to your plight
But I'll look it up and get back to you.
You might need organic - But I'll get back to you!!

So give us a call or stop on by-
because MGs have answers above the rest
MGs have answers that are the best!
MGs love to be put to the test!

- by Lorraine Remer
Master Gardener, 2015



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Notes from the Treehouse

- by **Lynn Brooks, AMGA President**

Here it is the height of summer already, and the garden has been transforming itself almost weekly.



Our association is also undergoing some changes. Heather Connors-Dunphy who has masterly guided us for the last three years has stepped down as president. Now the past president, we will still have her advice.

I am very lucky to have many of the same people willing to continue in their roles. Aileen Reid as Secretary, Anita Sulley as Volunteer Coordinator, and Johanne Robertson as Treasurer. Our new Vice President will be Janet Elsie, who is well known to many of you. As the Cape Breton member at large, she and her group has been very active, with many MG projects on the go. Anyone seeking help with organizing a community project should talk to Janet. I am also thrilled that Sue Stuart will continue to publish the newsletter. And lest you thought, oh no Carol Goodwin has not only retired from the

Agricultural College but she has abandoned us as well! Fear not, Carol is our new member-at-large for central Nova Scotia and Valley. Besides Carol we have added two new members-at large, Glen Nichols will represent New Brunswick and Jackie Feltham Newfoundland and Labrador. Jane Plant will thankfully continue to represent Halifax.

At the AGM the members endorsed the idea to have a Members afternoon as part of the annual conference. Geography prevents us from visiting each other's gardens, so we want you to bring your garden to Truro in pictures. We want to learn from each other what works and why, even tell us what isn't working. Maybe the group viewing your pictures can help. Or it could be on a garden that inspired you on your travels. So take lots of pictures this summer, there will be more on this at a later time.

At the evening graduation and certification the head of Environmental Studies, Lada Rajasekaren, took time from his busy schedule to do the graduate presentations. Afterwards Raj told us a little about how, destined by family and tradition to be a medical doctor, he instead took a unplanned turn into the world of environmental science. He stressed how important gardeners are for providing refuges for wildlife, and for our health. Studies are proving how time spent outdoors in a garden has powerful health benefits. What more motivation do we MGs need to work in our communities and help new gardeners get growing. There is no computer app that can replace the knowledge that we have gained over the years by trial and error.

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Notes from the Treehouse

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This was the second year that the AGM and MG graduation were events held within a conference-style format. It worked last year, and talking to people who attended the full 2 day workshop, was equally successful this year. To put on an event of this size takes a lot of planning and coordination. It couldn't have happened without Carol Goodwin, Heather Connors-Dunphy, Aileen Reid, and the many others who chipped in when needed. Your executive has every intention of keeping this as an annual event and get-together.

Enjoy the summer everyone.

Lynn



Right - President - Lynn Brooks

Left - Secretary: Aileen Reid



NAME THAT PLANT

Anita's Mystery Plant remains a Mystery!
Here is more information:



This amazing tree from Asia has an interesting history. Fossil records show it once grew in Europe as well as North America but vanished 1.8 million years ago during the Pleistocene epoch of glaciation. The good news is we can grow it again as an ornamental in our gardens.

The tree is fast growing when immature and suited for moist soil in full sun or part sun. It does well in acid to neutral soil. It takes a long time to reach its full height of 45 feet.

My favorite is the Japanese variety. The leaves are multi-hued with heavy veins and tones of pink and green. In fall the heart-shaped leaves take on autumnal tones of gold, orange and red before they fall from the tree. It is hardy in zones 4b to 8.

Send your guess to:

suestuart@bellaliant.net

AMGA NOTES

2015 AMGA Conference Highlights

Atlantic Master Gardener Graduation 2015



Conference 2015

Hope Blooms - Halifax Community Garden Children's Program



Hope Blooms children with their Community produced Salad Dressing



Workshops, Tours



Constructing a living Wall



Touring an Organic Farm

Volunteering

Halifax Chapter AMGA



New plantings for IWK Children's Garden by Halifax Chapter members

Halifax Chapter Hypertufa Workshop



Lynn Brooks Demonstrating Hypertufa Project



Shaping Hypertufa pot



Completed Hypertufa Projects

Building a Living Willow Fence

- by Brenda Bailey

When I think of willow, many images come to mind. Billowy weeping willows (*Salix babylonica*). Pussy willows, the first harbingers of spring with their soft catkins (*Salix caprea*). Decorative multi - coloured Hakura Nishiki willow in landscapes (*Salix integra* 'Alba Maculata'). And of course the %&*@*^# \$ willow whose root system ruined my septic pipes. The thought of willow also takes me back to my university days where my newly decorated apartment was full of willow baskets (*Salix alba* 'Caerulea') used for display and storage.

Historically, willow had many practical uses. It's fast growing and pliable nature made it easy to work with in the crafting of baskets and furniture that were inexpensive and durable. Although the use of willow as raw material in mass produced products has waned with the introduction of modern plastics, it is still widely planted and used for its more decorative qualities in the garden. Bill Laws writes in his book "Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History" that the white willow (*Salix alba*), with pain relieving qualities, was the main ingredient in a new wonder drug released in 1899, Aspirin.

Willows in their many forms are native to Europe, China, Japan and North America, are a great choice for wet areas, and are highly adaptable. They have a shallow, spreading root system and are susceptible to borers, blights and cankers. I once saw a neighbour's lovely weeping willow devoured in 2 days by a plague of caterpillars. With that said, willows can be useful as a specimen planting, grown on slopes to reduce soil erosion or in fields as a wind break. There are many

to grafted standards to large trees, that will suit any location.

Nine years ago I went to a weekend of gardening workshops at the school where I had just started teaching. I was an avid gardener and the list of workshops and presentations were just what I needed to jumpstart my gardening season. Among the presenters was a farmer from Nova Scotia's south shore who would demonstrate how to build a living willow fence in the field. The living fence intrigued me. So out I went into the field.

The presenter had prepared the ground and brought a bundle of 50 or so willow whips to create this fence. We all got to help. After the workshop, the school purchased an extra bundle of whips, and the duty fell to me to build the second instalment on Monday after school. This is how I became the keeper of the fence at Dr. Arthur Hines Elementary School in Summerville, N.S. The fence is now in its 9th year and still growing strong. The maintenance is minimal and very forgiving. It is a work of art that has function and beauty. After ten years of teaching here, I now find myself leaving Dr. Arthur Hines School, and wanting to create a living willow fence in my own garden. If you're just as intrigued by a living fence, why don't you do the same...it's easy!

PROCEDURE

1. Procure some willow whips. These are long pliable wands, sometimes called osiers. English willow (*Salix alba* 'Caerulea') that are suitable for basket weaving are a good choice. On a drive along a

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Building a Living Willow Fence

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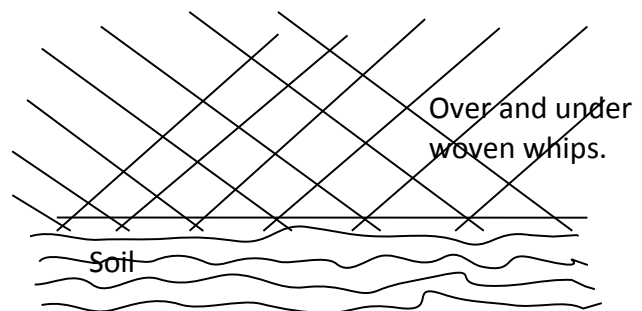
country road in the spring you will surely find some growing in a ditch or along a stream. The longer the whips are, the better. I try and harvest one - year growth in 8' lengths, approximately 1-2 inches in diameter. Harvesting is best done before the leaves are out, but willow is so forgiving that you can even harvest after the leaves show up. It is best to use the whips soon after they have been cut, but if you need to wait a few days, put the ends in a bucket of water in a shady spot. Always remember when you are cutting from property that is not your own, ask for permission from the owner.

2. Prepare the site. Willows thrive in moist areas and your fence will too. Dig a trench one foot deep by one foot wide. You can use the existing soil to back fill, but be sure to weed and amend it with some compost and peat. Plant two whips every foot, making sure you have counted enough whips for the planned length of your fence. If you're short, no problem. You can always add on next year.

3. It's time to plant and weave. Starting at the right end of the trench, push the first whip 8" into the trench at a 45 degree angle to the left. Move one foot to the left and push the next whip in the same way at a 45 degree angle to the right. They will cross each other at about 1' in the air. In the same area as whip #2, push in whip #3 leaning to the left at 45 degrees. They will cross each other at ground level. Continue to do step #2 for the length of your trench or until the whips run out. You will be creating a diamond pattern as you move along, like an espalier.

4. With the base of the fence now in, you are ready to weave. This seems like a simple task but you need to keep your wits about you to make sure that the whips alternate over and under in the weaving process. It is this weaving step that will give your fence strength. Some prefer to weave as they go, which might make it easier to keep track. Some

prefer to weave at certain length intervals. It's your choice. Experiment to see what works the best for you. Remember, the new plantings are extremely forgiving at this stage. As you move along, you may want to loosely fasten the points where the whips cross with a soft twine to keep everything stable. These can stay on the fence for the first season until the root system develops.



5. The tops of the whips can be bent over and woven into the top of the fence to bind the top together. This doesn't have to be exact as long as the tips are held down across the top. You may use some twine to hold bunches of ends down.

6. Water the soil. Water frequently for the first few weeks as the roots develop. Soon you will start to see leaves and you will know that your fence is indeed alive!

CARE and MAINTENANCE

The plantings will root and grow together to make a durable fence. When the fence starts to grow, it will look like it has an unruly brush cut on top. Prune out some of the thicker whips the next spring and weave the rest back down into the top of the fence. It will grow the brush cut again and the cycle will continue. After several seasons, you may choose to shear off the top growth and not weave

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Building a Living Willow Fence

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anything back into the fence. Willow is very forgiving

As for the diamond shapes that form the base of the fence, there are a few different options. First, I personally like to prune out any shoots that are produced so I can still clearly see the design. Second, you can weave these shoots back into the diamond design of the fence when they are long enough. And finally, you can let it turn into a wild, bushy shrub. No matter what base option you choose, you will still need to prune the top, or the new growth will become too top heavy for the base as it matures.



The fence before pruning with 2-year-old growth.



The fence after pruning with new growth.

EXPANSION

If you are keen to expand your fence and have exhausted your supply of willow whips, you could grow your own. Find a nice wet spot away from your main garden and plant a single willow cutting. It will root and leaf out. Snip away any side shoots during the first season to create a strong leader. The next spring cut it back to a 1' to 2' foot stub and it will send up new whips during the summer. The 3rd spring before the stem buds begin to swell, cut out half of the shoots around the stub and you will get new whips again. You can do this every year or cut them all off every second year. This technique is called pollarding. It may take a few years to get the desired length, but you will then have your own supply of willow whips.

So you see, it really is easy. A few simple steps and you will have your own work of living art. If you need some inspiration, search 'living willow fences' on Pinterest and you will be inspired by all sorts of living willow structures. Who knows which garden path your new skills will lead you down!

RESOURCES

Halpin, Anne. *Sunset Northeastern Garden Book*. Melno Park, California: Sunset Books, 2001.

Hole, Lois. *Lois Hole's Favorite Trees and Shrubs*. Edmonton, Alberta: Lone Pine Publishing, 1997.

Laws, Bill. *Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books Ltd., 2011

The Healing Herb Garden

PART ONE

- by Diana Smith

“An herb is as an herb does – utility is of the essence” (Lima, 1986).

Introduction

I am on my third garden now, and in whatever outdoor space I find myself it's always the herb garden that draws me in with its power to both heal and delight. My first collection of these useful plants consisted of a pot garden on a shady balcony and although it clearly lacked optimal growing conditions I loved it all the same, as I spread an Ikea rug on the cold concrete so I could sit and meditate amongst the fabulous scents.

Herbs have a rich history dating back thousands of years, one that includes their use in medicine, fragrance, disinfectants, seasoning, currency, and even sorcery – their versatility offers us both beauty and practicality. They've been used for medicinal purposes long before recorded history and researchers have even found that people in diverse parts of the world tended to use the same or similar herbs for identical purposes. Ancient Egyptian and Chinese papyrus writings depict using plants as medicine as far back as 3,000 Before Common Era (BCE), and aboriginal cultures in Africa and North America were also known to have used herbs in their healing rituals. In addition, practices such as Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) developed entire traditional medical systems around the utilization of herbal therapies.

The first recorded use of herbs in England was

during the Roman invasion of Britain during 50 Common Era (CE) as they brought with them herbal knowledge from the great civilizations of Greece and Egypt; troops began the sowing and cultivation of many herbs throughout England during this time. Simultaneously, the native Celts, along with their intellectual leaders the Druids, also possessed great knowledge of herbalism but according to Roman records, transcription of such wisdom was culturally forbidden so instead they committed to memory all their healing plants as well as the many surgical procedures they performed. The Romans of course were threatened by the Celts and killed many Druids; the control of Britain remained in Roman hands until they left in 450 CE. During the Dark Ages that followed nothing was recorded, although the healing knowledge of plants remained somewhere in the collective human consciousness. Around 700 CE monks began building hospitals to care for the sick, which meant they had to grow herbs thus the first “Physick” gardens started to appear. As Larson notes, “Herbal gardens were of great significance since it was here that knowledge was collected, stored and dispensed. Religious devotees who chose a life of peace and protection offered their diligence as gardeners and reaped the beauty of nature and the calm happiness that a peaceful, quiet life symbolized.”

Herbalism has a long tradition of use outside of “conventional” medicine, and the use of herbs as home remedies has also historically served to empower people. For example, the famous 16th-century herbalist Nicholas Culpeper opposed the “closed shop” of medicine enforced by the English College of

The Healing Herb Garden

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Physicians. He found a fortuitous time during the English civil war, when doctors were unable to enforce their ban on medical texts, to publish a book that would allow the average person to create their own herbal remedies instead of paying top dollar for them from the authorities. Culpeper also published his translations of medical and herbal texts such as the “London Pharmacopoeia” in the vernacular (English, *versus* Latin) so the poor could make use of his self-help medical guides.

When chemical analysis first became available in the early 19th century, scientists started to extract and modify the active ingredients found in herbs and would progress towards the creation of their own version of phyto-compounds. Over time, the use of herbal medicines fell out of favour and was replaced by manufactured medication; it is said that a quarter of pharmaceuticals today are derived from botanicals. Today, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 80% of people worldwide rely on herbal medicines as some part of their primary health care. In Germany, approximately 600 to 700 plant-based medicines are prescribed by 70% of German doctors. In the United States, public dissatisfaction with the cost of prescription medication (not unlike that in Culpepper’s day) combined with an interest in returning to a more simplified, preventative, and natural way of living has led to the increased use of herbal remedies in recent years.

A Healing Garden

When we are sick, in whatever manner, we often look to the natural world for comfort and the very garden of our own creation to pull us in. As garden writer Marjorie Harris notes, “As we step away from the rigid concrete to the silent forest, perhaps the atavistic past lurking in our genes tells us we’ve come home... We need nature near us in one form or another partly because our attachment is primordial. We evolved along

with plants and we are, in many senses, one with them.” Gardens also have the power to be enchanting and can be imagined and remembered through the body. For example, our organ of smell, the olfactory bulb, is very much linked to the brain’s amygdala and limbic system (associated with memory and feeling) and the hippocampus (responsible for associative learning). Therefore, smell has the ability to bring up powerful memories and responses to it are almost instant, imbuing the herb garden with some of its power in the form of pleasant associations. As Lopez notes, the interior landscape is responsive to the exterior, meaning that the shape of the mind is as affected by the land as much as by its genetic code.

Whether or not herbs have “proven” efficacy in the scientific community or credibility with the general public is immaterial – after all, healing of both body and mind is complex and human beings, being of a variable nature, do not lend themselves to prediction and control. Nevertheless, some 21st-century herbalists continue to try for partnership with their counterparts in Western medicine and with education; professionals working in health care now feel safer to explore their patients’ use of herbal and natural supplements as never before through the creation of policies, procedures, and reference materials, all designed with patient safety in mind.

Herb Garden Essentials

In 1969, Eleanor Sinclair Rhode wrote, “Even those of us with the smallest suburban plots can make a delightful herb garden and, no matter how tiny, it is a perpetual joy. Herbs ask so little yet give so much. All the majority of the common herbs want

The Healing Herb Garden

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is fairly poor soil (the poorer the better for aromatic herbs) and plenty of sunlight.”

Herb gardens can be created in any form, be they classic and formal, or non-traditional and informal, depending on the gardener’s preference. Herbs are sometimes even incorporated into the ornamental garden as companion plantings, although some such as basil or those in the mint family lend themselves better to growing in pots due to insect and/or disease issues for the former, and uncontrolled spreading for the latter. Raised beds give one the advantage of being able to have more control over the soil’s structure and fertility and are easier to work in for gardeners of differing abilities. Growing herbs in containers also gives the gardener control over the plants chosen, their cultural requirements (which are ideally compatible) and also over the most important element, light, as pots on wheels can be moved about quite easily to suit any sun exposure.



Knowing a plant’s local habitat, e.g. sun or shade, dry or moist soil, is important, as the gardener should situate each plant based on its natural requirements. In addition, basic knowledge of one’s plant community includes whether each herb is hardy or tender, annual, perennial, or

biennial. Most herbs, which are native to the Mediterranean, prefer full sun, good air circulation, and well-drained soil. When designing an herb garden from scratch, the gardener should be knowledgeable about the habits and characteristics of all the plants, i.e. tall, short, spreading, in need of staking, etc. Also, for aesthetic purposes, it is crucial to be aware of when flowers appear and the duration of their bloom time. Although frequently labeled as “drought tolerant”, herbs, especially those grown in containers, still require a thorough watering with a drying-out period between. In general, annual herbs need more soil moisture than do perennials.

With regards to nutrients, a balanced feeding system with a light fertilizer applied to perennials in spring is best. For herbs in particular, over-fertilization and rapid growth can actually serve to dilute the concentration of essential oils that give this class of plants their customary smell and taste. Good growth can be achieved with $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the nitrogen recommended for local area vegetables. Sequential harvests of annual herbs can also be facilitated by light applications of fertilizer after each heavy harvest. On the other hand, not applying *any* fertilizer or compost reduces overall plant vigour and can lead to insect and disease issues, and can even make tender annual herbs more prone to frost injury.

Although essential oils found in herbs act as something of an insect deterrent, aphids, slugs, and spider mites can still be problematic. Most insect issues can be solved with preventive cultural management such as good air circulation, adequate watering, raising plants off the ground (raised beds, containers, pot feet), sanitation, removal of weak/infested growth, and regular pruning, which should be accomplished naturally by harvesting on a regular basis.

PART 2 - NEXT ISSUE

Book Review

The Climate Conscious Gardener

Brooklyn Botanic Garden Guides For A Greener Planet

- Editor: Janet Marinelli

Handbook #195 Copyright 2010

Having worked with Environment Canada at the time when global warming and climate change were entering the daily vocabulary, the thought of significant environmental changes in 50 to 100 years seemed beyond our imagination. To bring some reality to energize citizens toward behavioural change that would slow what seemed to be inevitable, the scientists spoke of more frequent and severe weather events. Last summer's floods and droughts, the pests and plant disease accompanying Hurricane Arthur and the frozen north we experienced in Nova Scotia this past winter led me to readings on the effects that climate change will have on our gardens, and yes, in our lifetime.

The Climate Conscious Gardener is 112 pages of information that describes the impact of climate change within the framework of understandable science. The author recognizes the intimate role that even home gardeners can have on greenhouse gas emissions, from eliminating the use of power tools to reducing emissions of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane by appropriate plantings and placement of shrubs and trees.

An easy read, this book covers the creep northward of the hardiness zone map. At first blush, you think: wow we can introduce some new specimens to our gardens, but not so fast! With such a shift, our native plants migrate slowly northward, if they survive, and have to compete with inwardly migrating species that could become invasive in their new territory where natural controls may not have yet made the big move. We face higher winds, heavy rains and periods of drought in between. These climatic conditions will not bode well for iris that do not like soggy soil in winter or delphinium and phlox, mainstays for the English-style garden that will not withstand the pummeling.

While the book is not presented as a doomsday read, it does challenge us gardeners to consider some adaptations in our own spaces that would lead us to carbon neutral or even developing mini-carbon sinks. It offers a checklist for garden construction and renovation, rethinking the lawn and mimicking natural forests with vertical layers of plants from the canopy to understory through to shrub and ground cover. Advice is offered on landscaping to improve energy efficiency including taking advantage of tree placement to shade in summer and cut winds in winter.

The discussion on the climate footprint associated with home grown foods is a bit discouraging. I have always thought that buying local is positive and growing it outside your kitchen door is even better. Beyond the freshness and supporting our local entrepreneurs, the idea being that the greenhouse gas emissions linked to transportation would all but be eliminated. However, heating and cooling of greenhouses and storage facilities, manufacture and transport of fertilizers/commercial composts and pesticides and the use of fossil fuel burning farm or garden equipment....you get the picture. Evidently, there is no calculator available for the gardener as there is for industry trying to reduce their greenhouse gas footprint. Nonetheless, the book does make suggestions to assist us in making good decisions. These range from minimizing the use of power equipment, avoiding store-bought fertilizers, companion planting to control pests (planting marigolds to discourage nematodes in the cabbage patch), building soil health through local composting, conserving water and growing from seed to avoid the plastic trays used by commercial suppliers.

The Climate Conscious Gardener

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For the truly adventurous, particularly if you are planning a new garden territory or undertaking a major renovation, the book provides tips to maximize the carbon storage capacity within your space and thereby sequestering carbon in your plants. Woody varieties have the greatest impact. If you are looking to simplify the maintenance of your landscaping over the long term, this seems to be a good approach – trees and shrubs as opposed to the more labour intensive herbaceous perennials.

The book closes with information on citizen projects underway, seed exchanges, and gardening resource sites for further study. While most are USA based, they offer insight into sustainable projects that could be undertaken and in the very least, provide us with much “food” for thought.

The book is listed for \$16.95 Canadian and is available through the Halifax Regional Library.

- by Diane Giffin-Boudreau

AMGA Dates to Remember

October 4, 1:00pm - AMGA Executive meeting

Please contact one of the Executive members listed on the last page to add items to the Agenda.

October 23 - Deadline for submission of articles for Fall Newsletter. Remember that writing an article can be credited toward your Volunteer hours. Send articles to:

- suestuart@bellaliant.net

If you haven't renewed your membership and submitted your volunteer hours please contact Anita Sulley:

- anitasulley@gmail.com

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