



'Through The Garden Gate'

The monthly newsletter of the Englehart and District Horticultural Society
February 2022



**Englehart and District
Horticultural Society was
formed in 1956.**

General meetings:

3rd Wednesday of most months
at 7:00 p.m. in the
St. Paul's Emmanuel
Community Church

- *Speakers, workshops,
demonstrations
- *Civic Improvement
- *Youth Involvement
- *Displays and Competitions
- *Environmental Stewardship

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Gardening and Mental Health

We all know that gardening is good for our bodies...fresh air, exercise, and the joy of producing beautiful blossoms and healthy food are all such positive aspects of being a gardener. However, there is more to gardening than this. I have come across the following article that seems to prove how gardening can actually change lives. (I apologise that I cannot give credit to the author of the article below as I have lost it.)

"Tailored gardening programs have been shown to increase quality of life for people with chronic mental illnesses, including anxiety and depression. Another study on the use of therapeutic horticulture for patients with clinical depression sought to understand why gardening programs were effective in lessening patient experience of depression. They found that structured gardening activities gave patients existential purpose. Put simply, it gave their lives meaning. In jails and corrective programs, horticultural therapy programs have been used to give inmates positive, purposeful activities that lessen aggression and hostility during and after incarceration. In one detailed study from a San Francisco program, involvement in therapeutic horticulture was particularly effective in improving psychosocial functioning across prison populations. Gardening has been shown to help improve the lives of military veterans and homeless people. Various therapeutic horticulture programs have been used to help people with learning difficulties, asylum seekers, refugees and victims of torture. I have enjoyed my houseplants and gardens so much during the current pandemic...I bet many of us have!

Gardening with Clay Soil

Aren't we lucky to live in the 'Little Clay Belt'? That's a term I remember from my childhood, although, to listen to my mother, you'd think she didn't believe she was lucky. Mom was used to the loose, friable soils of southern England and found working in our heavy, dense clay soil extremely difficult. However, she was thrilled with the plants it could produce. Soil comes in a wide variety of types. The basic categories are clay, sand, silt, and loam, with constant variations within each of these classes. So...let's start with clay. Clay's particles are smaller compared to sand and silty soils and it has good water retention qualities. Clay soils are more fertile than many other soil types because each tiny clay particle is packed with places to hold on to water and nutrients. The downside is the fact that clay soil could become very compacted and dense when too wet. It is also poorly aerated, because of the tight bonding of clay particles and becomes extremely hard in dry weather. A highly compacted clay soil would need lots of work and amending before it can be any good for growing. Clay soil isn't ideal gardening material but it is fertile. It can store important plant nutrients, a good foundation to build on when conditioning clay soil. The important part in preparing clay soil is to improve its structure. Many gardeners imagine that the proper way to improve a dense, clay soil is to add the opposite kind of material...sand. After all, loamy soils, which are (viewed as ideal garden soil), are a mixture of sand and clay. (continued on pg. 3.)

Renewing your membership for 2022: Please make out the cheque for \$10.00 to **the Englehart & District Horticultural Society**. You may also use an Etransfer sent to our Treasurer at nessa@ontera.net. Include your name, mailing address and email address, if you have one.

Tough Plants for Challenging Spots

You imagine having a gorgeous garden but you have some challenges ...a steep slope....clay soil which drains slowlyblazing sun and heat exposure to high winds. The quick and easy answer is that there are many plants available now that are tough as nails.

Exposed Sunny and Windy Locations: Stonecrop (sedum) and Hens and Chicks (sempervivum): We plant green rooves with these for a reason: they can take the heat and drought, plus our forgetfulness that they're there, until they bloom in early summer to fall (depending on the species and variety) when everyone notices them. Choose from the ground-hugging sempervivums that flower in early summer to the 60 cm tall Autumn, Joy sedums which flower for up to 10 weeks. All attract pollinators.

Russian Sage (Perovskia): Tall and handsome, and a prolific bloomer from midsummer through early fall in blue and purple tones, Russian Sage is one of those plants that you can ignore all summer while you're off doing other things. It'll grow to a metre in height and is a must have for the pollinators' garden.

Purple Coneflower (Echinacea): This is a prairie native and that is about all you need to know. Indestructible in hot, dry, windy locations, it will reach about a metre high with long blooming purple/mauve flowers and is another pollinator in the winners' circle.

Lamb's Ears: (Stachys): A sprawling pale creamy green plant that you will likely recognize the moment you see /feel it, it matures to 50 cm wide and tall, with lavender coloured flowers in early-to-midsummer. Lamb's Ears feel like their namesake when you touch the leaves...smooth and velvety without the lamb smell. We note that most plants with hairy leaves tend to require less water than average, as the hair itself provides insulation during hot, dry weather. A list of plants that fit this carefree category includes Geranium (both annual and perennial), all members of the Mint family, Yarrow, Shasta daisies, Artemisia, and Rudbeckia.

In the Shade: Ferns: Many of the ferns mentioned in the article are mentioned as growing in southern Ontario. However, Christmas fern, leatherwood fern, ostrich fern, royal, and fiddlehead fern are all native ferns, are reasonably tolerant of dry shade and are hardy to zone 3. Choose your favourites and keep in mind that they do not like clay soil (hard for us!) but prefer the sort of loamy, humus rich soil found on the forest floor.

Barrenwort (Epimedium): is one of Mark Cullen's favourite shade plants (and mine, too- I have had an Epimedium growing well for several years. It grows well under trees, will grow to 30 cm tall and blooms in the spring. Mine has pink flowers but it can be yellow, mauve, or white and

Hosta: With more than 7000 varieties to choose from, the hardest part is choosing a favourite. It is recommended that you peruse the selection in your local garden retailer for the varieties which best suit you and keep in mind that the solid green types are the most shade tolerant. There are other plants that are tough but they are not recommended as they are aggressive or invasive. The 'no-grow' list includes sumac, periwinkle, pachysandra, vinca, lily of the valley. Some of these plants may actually be native but that does not mean that they are suitable for a home garden. (info from the Toronto Star) Some descriptive words that may be used that are hints would be: aggressive, spreader, dominant, vigorous, clumping.

Gardening on Clay Soil (cont. from page 1)

Unfortunately, when sand is added directly to clay, the result is something that more accurately resembles concrete. The reason loamy soils are great for plants is that they have a large amount of organic material in them, as a foundation for the sand and clay. Clay soils are best improved with the addition of compost and other organic materials only. Organic material will occasionally need to be added to prevent your garden from returning to its heavy clay state. Fortunately, this becomes a self-fulfilling process as garden plant material breaks down and works its way into the soil. Rather than cleaning your garden down to the soil line each fall, it's a good idea to allow leaves and other plant material to decay naturally and become part of the ongoing ecosystem of a good garden soil. You'll need to turn it into a looser, more crumbly or granular growing medium by mixing in large amounts of organic matter into the clay soil. Organic matter stabilizes the aggregation of soil particles in the top soil, to reduce crusting, improve water handling and nutrient storage, and lessen erosion and runoff. The good news is, once you've created a good soil structure, you won't need to keep amending clay soil yearly as you would with sandy soil. One material you can use is compost, integrated regularly and deeply into the soil. "Green" composting materials that rot quickly (like young leaves) are best. "Brown" or slow-decaying materials like old straw, peat moss, shredded barks, or sawdust won't be as practical. For one, "browns" don't encourage aggregation as well as "greens". For another, they also feed on the nitrogen that plants feed on so you'll need additional inputs, too. Organic fertilizers like blood meal, kelp extracts, cottonseed meal and fish emulsion would also improve clay soil structure. Here's one more tip: humic acids also work wonders on clay soil as do inoculating plant roots with mycorrhizae, especially at the time of planting. (to be continued in March)



I came upon a very interesting article about vegetables while doing some research for another topic online. I found myself muttering "I didn't know that" so often so I thought it might be an interesting article for the Bulletin. It was a fairly long piece, so it will be spread over several upcoming newsletters. Vegetables are an important part of world cuisine that enabled us to survive through millennia, following us through the age of early civilizations, rise and fall of many cultures over the last four thousand years, and finally reaching the modern popularity that they have today. No matter where you live, eating vegetables represents an important part of our daily diet that provides our bodies with important nutrients. Because of their versatility in terms of cooking (we can eat them raw, boiled, cooked, and dried), wide array of cultivation techniques, untold ways they can help us in daily problems that don't require us eating them, and high nutritional values, vegetables represented an extremely important commodity for humankind. During some periods of our growth from early to modern civilization, certain types of vegetables were regarded as extremely important, often being valued more than money, gold or any other commodity that we owned. During the last five hundred years, many vegetables that were confined to their ancient breeding grounds suddenly become trading commodities of ever-expanding European countries. During the "Age of Sail" that lasted between the 1500s and 1800s, modern vegetables were finally able to reach the four corners of the earth, providing better nutrition and medicinal help to everyone. However, not everybody accepted all of the vegetables on their dining table. For the longest time Americans thought potato to be suitable for horses and they were often ignored by people because their stems and leaves were toxic. Some vegetables were ignored because of religious beliefs. Buddhists did not like garlic between 1st and 10th century AD; Europeans disliked the potato because it was not mentioned in the bible, etc. (to be continued next month)

Plant of the Month

Maidenhair Fern

The botanical name of this, my favourite houseplant, is Adiantum. Ferns are tricky to grow in our homes because of our long, dry winters, as most of them like a high humidity atmosphere, which is difficult to maintain in our homes during our long winters. The Maidenhair fern likes indirect light and thrives in a well-draining potting soil. I love the daintiness of this fern, which doesn't really have fronds, like most ferns have. It has dainty, wispy leaves on arching stems. These leaves start out as a pinky colour, turning to a pale green as they unfurl. Our biggest challenge is providing it with enough humidity. It helps to group it together with other humidity-loving plants, and to use a humidifying tray underneath the plant to increase moisture in the air. If that's still not enough humidity, try growing small specimens in a closed terrarium or in your bathroom.



Spring is Coming!



It's true...the days are getting longer! I check the Weather Channel several times a week just to prove it's true. Are you planning on starting some seeds soon? There is nothing like the smell of damp earth, the feeling of good clean soil on our hands, the sense of anticipation as we wait for seeds to germinate and those first green leaves to appear. One hint that I have found helpful when starting seeds indoors... make sure you use good soil. I prefer a 'potting mix' composed of earth, peatmoss, and either vermiculite or perlite to ensure good drainage. I also lay a light layer of plastic over top of the container to help ensure a moist (but not wet) environment. Above all, follow the instructions on the seed package re exposure to light.

Waiting in the Wings

*Sunlight weaves in between
twigs of skeletal trees
And a web of shadows dances
with each feisty breeze.
A silver sky shimmers
like cheap carnival glass.
And yet, this fickle sun's too
weak for blades of grass.
Snow accumulates on branches
that almost break,
And bow low to the ground
with the weight of each flake.
Sugar maple sap waits,
not even one sweet drip.
And snowmen aren't melting,
frozen in winter's grip.
Spring's not on stage, quite yet,
She's waiting in the wings.
But I can almost smell the
Flowers that she brings.
(Emile Pinet)*

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