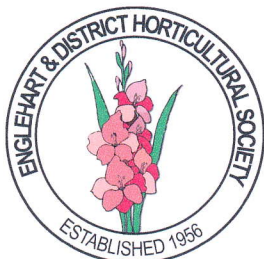


'Through The Garden Gate'

The monthly newsletter of the Englehart and District Horticultural Society
January 2020



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
- President: Jean. Bott
Bulletin Editor: E. Fisher
Website:
engleharthort.weebly.com

"How can those who do not garden, who have no lot in the great fraternity of those who watch the changing year as it affects the earth and its growth, how can they keep warm their hearts in winter?" (Francis King) Did you keep a journal last year or a gardening notebook? If not, you may consider starting one. I began using one years ago and although I am not as devoted to it as I should be, it is at this time of year that that I start flipping through it, dreaming of spring, and the spark of gardening plans begin to pop into my mind. I like to start looking at photos on my computer for reminders of things I want to change, plants I need to divide, plants I just must have, plants I promised to share with others. I love this old cartoon so much at this time of year that here it is again.



Mark It On Your Calendar

January 15: General Meeting
February 5: Director's Meeting (for Executive/Directors only)

Programme: January is the time for our Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper. Supper starts at 6:00 so come along and bring a friend and your favourite food to share. Len and I will be taking you on a virtual trip through our last year's events. Hope to see you all there.

A Word From The Editor

These wise words were shared by President Jean Bott at one of our Directors' meeting: "Some people are always grumbling that roses have thorns. I am thankful that thorns have roses." (Alphonse Kerr). Here in northern Ontario, it's important to remain positive and forward thinking in January. Our winters here are long and cold, but this allows us lots of time to dream and plan and anticipate what we will do in our gardens come spring. We can peruse seed catalogues, check out gardening websites, review our notes we kept about last year's gardens (if you're like me you have to write things down re. what worked/didn't work/ what needs to be moved, etc.). You could borrow a book about gardening from the selection available at our local library. Why not check out some gardening websites to get some new ideas? No computer to do so? Once again, visit your local library as they have computers you can use for free. Why not take a look for botanical gardens you might want to visit one day? Toronto has Allen Gardens (wonderful greenhouses) and Edwards Gardens (Toronto Botanical Gardens). These two are interesting and beautiful places to get inspiration and lift your spirits. So...think positively and stay warm!

District 12/OHA News

For those of you who are new members of the Society, here is a brief explanation. There are several hundred societies throughout the province and all belong to a parent group, the Ontario Horticultural Association. You can find information about the OHA online. Societies that are in the same general area are grouped together in 'Districts'. There are 19 Districts in Ontario. We are part of District 12, which encompasses societies from Kapuskasing down to Englehart- actually, to the area between Englehart and North Bay. You can check out the District 12 website (run by our own Rick Heaslip)...district12hort.weebly.com and the OHA at gardenontario.org .

Looking Back

We aren't looking back too far- just to November 27th, our Christmas Workshop. Our thanks go to Anna Regele and Carrie Anne Field, co-convenors, for all of their work and to those who helped put the kits together. Thanks also to Len Fisher for his donation of a birdhouse (won by Sharon Williams) and to the ladies who worked preparing and serving the delicious snacks.



Reports From Your Directors

Christmas Workshop: Convenor Carrie Anne Field, with assistant Anna Regele, reports that they are pleased with the results of our annual workshop. The original date had to be postponed and set for a later date due to inclement weather. Although there weren't 50 people in attendance, the kits were all sold and the evening was enjoyed by all, with many positive comments coming our way. Thank you so much to co-convenors Anna (one of our newest Directors) and to Carrie Anne. The committee wishes to thank everyone who helped out with the preparations for the workshop, those who donated food for the evening, those who helped put the kits together, and all who helped set and clean up the hall.

Membership: If you haven't renewed your membership yet, please contact Ginny Montminy asap. It only costs \$10.00 a year to belong. This enables you to attend meetings and other Horticultural Society events, to receive the monthly bulletin, as well as enjoying the fellowship of like-minded people. You can pay Ginny at a meeting or pop a cheque in the mail to the address given on the first page.

Social: The meeting this month being a potluck supper, please bring along a dish to share with others.... main course, dessert, or appetiser. We will eat at 6:00 and begin the business part of the meeting at 7:00.

Nominating: The Nominating committee, led by convenor, Carrie Anne Field, met earlier in the month and contacted people to stand for election for position as Executive members and Directors. There will also be a call for members from the floor to stand for positions, should they choose. Thank you to Carrie Anne and committee members. Please consider allowing your name to stand if you are nominated. All groups can grow stale when new people don't get involved in planning of activities. Please say "Yes." An organization like ours always benefits from fresh ideas from new people.

The Importance of Healthy Soil (cont. from November)

(This has been a long article but I hope it has been/will be helpful eventually!)

Air: Just like humans, plants need air, both above ground for photosynthesis and in the soil as well. Air in the soil holds atmospheric nitrogen that can be converted into a usable form for plants. Soil oxygen is also crucial to the survival of soil organisms that benefit plants. Good soil provides just the right space between its particles to hold air that plants will use. Silty and heavy clay soils have small particles that are close together. These dense soils have little air. Sandy soils have the opposite problem; their particles are too big and spaced out. The excessive amount of air in sandy soil leads to rapid decomposition of organic matter. Adding organic matter, especially compost, will help balance the air supply (the perfect soil is about 25% air). Also, try not to step in the beds or use heavy equipment that can compact the soil. Avoid working the soil if it is very wet.

Water: All forms of life, including plants and soil organisms, need water, but not too much or too little. Healthy soil should be about 25% water. In soils with too much pore space (sandy soils), water quickly drains through and cannot be used by plants. In dense, silt or clay soils, the soil gets waterlogged as all the pore space is filled with water. This will suffocate plant roots and soil organisms. The best soils have both small and large pore spaces. Adding organic matter (see below) is the best way to improve the structure of your soil through the formation of aggregates. Additionally, organic matter holds water so that plants can use it when they need it.

Soil Life: A healthy organism population is essential to healthy soil. These little critters make nutrients available to plants and bind soil particles into aggregates that make the soil loose and fluffy. Soil organisms include earthworms, nematodes, springtails, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, mites and many others. Some of these organisms can be purchased and added to the soil, but unless the environment is suitable for them, they will languish. Better to create an ideal habitat by providing the food (organic matter), air and water they need and let them thrive on their own.

Organic Matter: Adding compost will improve almost any soil. The texture of silty and clay soils, not to mention their nutrient levels, are radically improved from initially having the compost mixed in. All soils get better with annual applications on top. Organic compost can be purchased by the bag or by the yard, or you can make it yourself at home. Compost and other organic materials hold soil particles together in aggregates and help to retain moisture. They also absorb and store nutrients that are then available to plants, and compost is a food source for beneficial microorganisms. Making your own compost can be as easy as piling brown layers (straw, leaves), and green layers (grass clippings, livestock manure, food waste) on top of one another. Keep the pile moist and turn it often. If a pile is too messy, or you are concerned about rodents and other animals getting into your pile, there are all kinds of composters and bins available for purchase to contain your vegetable scraps and make turning a cinch. (to be continued)

Going Green...Hints and Tips

*When watering, try to water deeply and thoroughly. Frequent, shallow waterings train your plants to keep their roots near the surface, making them less hardy and more likely to suffer when deprived of water. (This applies to house as well as garden plants-just be sure to drain the saucers.)

*Cornell Spray: This organic spray acts as both an insecticide and a fungicide.... Mix 3-4 tsp. baking soda per gallon of water; 3-4 tsp. vegetable oil; 1 tsp. insecticidal soap. Spray both sides of the leaves. It may require several applications to be fully effective.

*Make an excellent soil scoop by repurposing a plastic bleach bottle. Rinse it well, replace the cap, and use scissors to cut off the bottom and then cut on an angle towards the handle. Shape it as you choose and you have a handy scoop for free.

Plant of the Month

Pencil Cactus

This 'cactus' is a succulent but not a cactus...it is a Euphorbia as evidenced by its milky sap. It can be grown in a pot indoors and can reach a height of 6'. This plant got its nickname 'Sticks on Fire' because its numerous slender stems, resembling small pencils or sticks, which grow from the base, and during the cooler months they turn vivid shades of pink, orange, and yellow when grown in bright sun. They're so attractive that you can forget the warnings that the sap can burn skin! The Pencil cactus is easy to grow if three things are provided: high light, low water, and gritty, fast draining soil. Fertilising is not essential but a shot of a balanced fertiliser once a year in spring can help. Be careful when pruning or removing stems to avoid contact with sap. This plant is perfect for travelers or people who sometimes forget they have houseplants.



An Old Favourite: Christmas Cactus or Schlumbergera

Some of us may have received a 'Christmas Cactus' as a gift at Christmas time. Easy to grow or hard to grow. ... for some people, Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera*) grow like a backyard weed. For others, it's a disappointing, frustrating challenge. Here are a few helpful hints borrowed from Harriston & District Horticultural Society's newsletter...

Moisture: It seems that the biggest issue is watering - too much or too little will send the leaves into a wilting faint, cause buds to drop or leaf segments to break off. Christmas cactus likes humidity (it comes from Brazil) but it hates wet roots, which can cause root rot and fungal diseases to set in. It prefers evenly moist soil, but you should allow top one inch to dry out between watering. It also likes humidity, so set it on a tray of moist pebbles. Mist occasionally. Water as often as every two or three days when it is warm and sunny, but only once a week or less when it is cool and humid. Stop watering it in October but resume light watering in mid-November. Water normally until the blooms are finished, then reduce water to give it a rest for about six weeks. Add fertilizer (20-20-20) two to four times a year but stop in September, a month before buds set, and resume in February when days get longer.

Light: Oooh... The light hurts my eyes.... Schlumbergera are photosensitive, meaning their blossoms are triggered by the shortening of the days and by a drop in temperature (50 F to 60 F or 10 C to 12 C). Start withdrawing light for 12 hours (usually in September and October), about six to eight weeks before you want bloom. Bring into a brighter area when buds start to form. If buds drop, move to an even brighter location (not direct sunlight) and add a little fertilizer.

(To be continued next month)

Poetry and Prose

The Darkling Thrush

*I leant upon a coppice gate,
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs
made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems
scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that
haunted nigh
Had sought
their household fires.*

Thomas Hardy

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