

The Garden Master News

Newsletter of the Atlantic Master Gardeners Association

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WINTER 2011

AMGA



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

AMGA News	1
NSAGC Convention 2011	2-3
Comfrey	4-5
Lasagne Gardening	6-7
Boboli Gardens	8-11
Winter Garden	12-14
Scattered Seeds	15

AMGA NEWS – what's Happening

CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDIT

Following are several courses that may be used for CEU's:

The British Garden

Course **HORT 2003** offered through NSAC (4 week)

<http://nsac.ca/reg/calendar/>

[calendar_descript_undergraduate.asp#description_HORT2003](http://nsac.ca/reg/calendar/calendar_descript_undergraduate.asp#description_HORT2003)

Location - England Time: April 28 - May 13, 2011

Instructor: Carol Goodwin: cgoodwin@nsac.ca

Woodlot Management Home Study Series

Free program of 15 easy-to-understand modules on topics relating to woodland stewardship.

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/education/nrec>

nrec@gov.ns.ca

902-384-3420



5th Annual Seedy Saturday Event

March 5th 2011, 10am—2pm
At the **MARC**

Municipal Activity and Recreation Centre
#33 Leary Fraser Rd, Dayspring
Just outside Bridgewater on hwy#3

Contact Rosmarie@helpingnatureheal.com
902-543-7416, for table & event details

The Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society's Annual Plant Sale

May 7, 2011, 1-3:30 pm

6141 Watt St., Halifax (Le

Marchant-St.Thomas School gym)
- rhodos, azaleas, companion plants, trees), 4" to 3-gallon pots

<http://www.atlanticrhodo.org>.

Contact D Evers (902) 835-2586

or devers@eastlink.ca

NSAGC Convention 2011

-by Brenda Hiltz, member AMGA
Director NSAGC District 6 South Shore

As we are imagining our gardens under banks of snow, the 2011 NSAGC (Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs) Convention plans are well underway. At Atlantica Hotel & Maria Oak Island on June 3, 4, 5, Chester Garden Club with District 6 Clubs will present "Seaside Spectacular"

You will recognize Master Gardeners, Sylvia McNeill, Christine Boardman & Brenda Hiltz, in the picture.



The Program will include keynote speakers: **Todd Boland**, Research Horticulturist from the Memorial University of Newfoundland Botanical Garden.

Walter Ostrom, a world famous ceramic artist who created a Spectacular Seaside Garden near Peggy's Cove.

Other concurrent session **speakers** include:

Peggy-Anne Pineau: Old and New Winter Hardy Roses.

Jenny Sandison: Garden Colour Design Through out the Year

Rosmarie Bradley Lohnes: Planting with the Moon Phases

Logie Cassells: Taking Risks on the South Shore

Cora Swinimer: Rhododendrons 201

Coral Kincaid: Daylilies: The Perfect Plant for the Maritimes

Heather Sanft: Living Fences and Willow Baskets

Gail Logan: Organic Perennials and Shrubs

Tours include:

1. **John Risley's** Greenhouse
2. Spectacular Seaside garden designed by **Walter Ostrom**.
3. One Sky Now organic garden and nursery designed, owned and operated by **Gail Logan**.

NSAGC Convention 2011



4. **Bill & Bonnie Gimby** gardens & property in Fox Point.

There will of course also be door prizes, raffles (like the wheelbarrow built by Greg Hiltz using wood from our windfalls and a bicycle wheel), photo contest, floral arrangements, entertainment and socializing as gardeners do.

A special invitation to attend is extended to members of the Atlantic Master Gardeners Association who are also members of NSAGC. For more information and the registration forms please go to:

<http://www.nsagc.com>



AMGA EXECUTIVE 2011

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Pests, Problems and Possibilities

Comfrey *aka Symphytum officianale*

- by Christine Boardman



A long time ago, when I was a brand new gardener, a kind neighbour gave me a plant she said was named Russian Comfort. Having recently been introduced by the Southern kind, and as it was (correctly) described as having pretty little blue and pink bells on the same stalks, I planted it with glee!



Clearly, I did not know enough to look it up first!

Over the years it has quietly rampaged through my garden. Suddenly, Comfrey clumps seemed to be everywhere.

The little bells attract bees who work hard at fertilizing them, and the resulting seeds spread enthusiastically.*

I tried to get rid of it in everyway I could think of. With help, I started with trying to dig it out. We did get rid of one clump, by digging most of the way to China in an area nearly as large as the Atlantic, but when I next looked up, more Comfrey clumps had developed..

My first attempt to eliminate it was not only much too much like hard work, but also very slow work, not to mention it all being unsuccessful! The roots really do go down very deep! Not much other gardening got done that year, and local analgesic sales went up!

For years I tried to treat it as just another weed, and kept it more or less at bay.

THEN!!! I started the MG course!

You will remember a section on making Comfrey Tea? I tried it that summer.

Cont'd on page 5

Pests, Problems and Possibilities

(Cont'd from page 4)

Following the instructions in the course material I made a large batch and left it to steep for what was probably rather longer than instructed!

PHEW!!!. The smell in the area the batch sat was absolutely disgusting! I used it, of course, but in an area far from the house and where I had no intention of working for several weeks! I hoped the smell would at least discourage the deer ... it didn't!

The following summer I sat down with the largest, most senior Comfrey clump, and we came to an agreement!

I would pick off the seed heads as they developed (hah!) and put them in the green bin.** I would then cut each clump down to the ground and put leaves and stalks into my compost.

That is what I did last year. I have no idea if the Comfrey really did speed up the composting process as I did not keep a control batch, but I did have a lot, (never enough) of compost for the Fall! I wait to see if the de-flowering before the seeds set was successful in developing

fewer new Comfrey plants.

If anyone has a less arduous solution to the Comfrey Dilemma, please write to Sue so she can put it into the next Issue!

*Yes, I am aware of herbal benefits, but am also aware that Comfrey is said to be carcinogenic, so have been too chicken to try any remedial possibilities.

A lot of info is available on Google, especially Wikipedia regarding this.

** This is not wicked as the municipal compost heaps become much hotter than mine and so the seed becomes no longer viable!



"Gardening"



LASAGNA ^ ANYONE ?

-by Sue Stuart

The words "Lasagna" and "Gardening" don't really seem to belong together in the same sentence - at least not initially!

Sure - many of the ingredients in a Lasagna come from a garden....?

The term kept popping up in gardening topics, so I decided to find out more.

Aha - a common denominator - layers!

I had been struggling with the clay soil in my vegetable gardens for years and had decided to try raised beds. Might garden "Lasagna layers" be beneficial too?



Lasagna Garden Layers



I located the book 'Lasagna Gardening' by Patricia Lantz. Her definition of Lasagna gardening states: "a non-traditional, organic, layering method for creating better soil while keeping your gardens neat and attractive". She says: It is... "an easy, time-saving way to install and maintain a garden without removing the sod, digging or tilling. Close planting and generous mulching greatly reduce the time needed for watering and weeding.... Lasagna gardening is for busy people ..., people who are 'power-tool-challenged'.,

anyone who is not able to garden traditionally because of age or physical limitations, new gardeners, the environmentally conscious and... those of us stressed and overworked".

(Hmm- I think I fit some of those categories).

Where to begin:

"Decide 'what' you want to grow and 'where'. Gather available organic materials (mulch) for the layers. The first layer should be thick layers of wet Newspapers. Suggestions of other materials for the 'mulch' layers are:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| -animal manures | -peat moss |
| -compost | -salt hay |
| -corn cobs *
(chopped) | - sawdust |
| -grass clippings | -seaweed/kelp |
| -hay | -stalks (chopped) |
| -leaves (chopped) | -straw |
| | -wood ashes |

While the term "Lasagna" may be unique for this type of gardening, the concept has been around for a long while known as 'Sheet composting'. It is also referred to as a "No - Dig" method. I decided to give Lasagna gardening a try with 2 beds prepared in the Fall of 2009.



Raised bed to be prepared as Lasagna garden

Cont'd on page 7



LASAGNA GARDENING



(Cont'd from page 6)

Layers of wet newspaper went down over the soil. Then layers of straw, peat moss, compost, seaweed, leaves and manure were added. Patricia Lantz suggested the beds be 18"-24" high. Mine were probably not quite that height, but I would recommend that they be at least 18".

**Initial layer:
wet newspaper**



The beds were left over the winter to 'cook'. In the spring/summer the gardens were planted with tomatoes, potatoes, squash, broccoli, carrots, beets, peas, beans, corn, lettuce, melons, etc.

I can't say that the gardens were a complete success. This was not due to the gardening method, but rather the deer, crows, slugs and other 'pests' that thought the gardens were planted for their benefit!. The time has come to think about fencing! I definitely will continue using the "Lasagna" method of gardening. It really seems to appeal to my environmentally conscious side! I now see uses for more and more of the organic yard 'waste'. I even had some success with using some piles of pruning 'clippings', etc that had been piled for burning (possibility of burning was ended by changes in fire ordinances). I decided to cover this pile of partially composted 'sticks' and weeds with layers of wet newspaper and cardboard, grass clippings, compost, straw, peat moss, leaves, etc. - another Lasagna bed was born! Instead of leaving this bed to 'cook',

I immediately planted some 'surplus' grape, raspberry and currant bushes. These have flourished in their first growing season! The simplicity and function of the system has inspired me to make other beds using many different materials for layers.

**Basic Lasagna bed
ready for planting**



A storm surge in January, 2010 washed plant debris (along with a large metal raft, two sets of stairs, a deck and many other odds & ends!) onto my cottage lawn. Cleaning up the debris provided another interesting 'mulch' that became the bottom layer of a few Lasagna beds.

It's a little early to give a true assessment of my Lasagna experiments, but they will continue. By using this method I hope to be able to eliminate disposal of much of the organic material in my yard currently going into the city organics pick-up!

Some changes I will make next season include:

- 1) Add layers until the bed is at least 18" high.
- 2) Add a layer of weed-free mulch such as "cooked" compost, peat moss or bark mulch (if possible) around the top of the plants to avoid germination of weed seeds in the mulch.

Why not try your own Lasagna Garden Recipe!

* I might hesitate to use corn cobs as a layer for a vegetable garden bed in which you will be sowing seed. Corn gluten is used as a herbicide by preventing germination of seeds

The Boboli Gardens

Florence, Italy

... a walking tour in pictures

- By Heather Connors-Dunphy

In September of 2010 my husband and I spent three weeks in Tuscany and Lombardy. One of the "must see" items when we were planning our trip was the Boboli Gardens in Florence. Florence was the cradle of the Renaissance and magnificent artwork, cathedrals and statuary abound. The museums of the Academia and Uffizi hold many famous works of art ie. Michelangelo's "David" in the Gallery of the Academia, Bronzino's portraits of the Medici family in the Uffizi. Another museum complex consists of the Pitti Palace and the Boboli Garden which is on the hillside behind the palace.

Italy was only unified in the 1860's. During the time of the Renaissance, Italy was composed of a group of city states. During the Renaissance, the leading family of Florence was the Medici. This family controlled the commerce and were great patrons of the arts. They commissioned many of the works of art that we all recognize today by artists such as Leonardo daVinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, and goldsmith/architect Brunelleschi.

In 1550 Duke Cosimo I de Medici and his wife Eleonora of Toledo acquired the palace and the "garden-orchard" from the Pitti family. Eleonora set about having the garden designed by Niccolo Pericoli, known as 'Il Tribolo'. Many designers and overseers

came after Il Tribolo but much of what currently exists is faithful to the original plan.

Boboli is a garden in the high Italianate style. As people during the Renaissance rediscovered Roman and Greek culture; so they wanted to emulate the gardens of those classic periods. The Boboli is a virtual outdoor museum featuring many statues, water features, mature trees and shrubs. There is no natural water source in Boboli, so an aquaduct was constructed to the nearby Arno River.

We entered the Boboli through the entrance by the Roman Gate (Porta Romana) at the far end of the Garden and took a path heading toward the Island Pond.



Map of Boboli Garden.

The Boboli Gardens

(Cont'd from page8)

Along the walkways we passed through the Meadow of the Columns, featuring twelve busts, some original Greek and Roman works, other copies. There are many holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) in the garden.



On the path to the Island pond we passed the famous statues of the "Owl Game", a copy of a Roman work, created between 1617 and 1621.



"Owl Game"

The Island Pond, in Island Square, was created to display both roses and citrus plants, of which the Medici were fond. The entrance columns feature capricorn statues (the motto of the Medici family). The pond is large, featuring fountains, statues and when we were there, many potted citrus trees. The pond is a large oval basin with an island in the centre. The chief artwork is the Island Fountain, the original was finished in 1576 and moved to its current location in 1636.



The Boboli Gardens

(Cont'd from page9)

Continuing on, we began to climb the Cypress Walk (Il Viottolone) . This is a steady up hill climb, not for the faint of heart. The cypresses lining the way are magnificent. The original cypress planting began in 1612. There are many sculptures lining the walk. Some of the original labyrinths remain. These are of holm-oak pruned to form a continuous tunnel.



Cypress Walk

After a long up hill walk we arrived at the Knight's Garden. From this site a panoramic view of Florence emerges. The original ramparts were designed by Michelangelo in 1529. The Knight's Lodge now houses the Porcelain Museum.



Continuing on we began to descend the hill. From here we could see the Pitti Palace with Florence as a backdrop. There is an imposing statue of Plenty, moved to Boboli in 1636 to embody the prosperity of Tuscany. She has a cornucopia in one hand and bronze sheaves of wheat in the other. Planted near the statue are plane-trees, *Platanus acerifolia*, pruned in the form of candelabra.



Plenty

The trip down hill is punctuated by many other works. Chief among these is the Forcone Basin, containing the Neptune Fountain. The original basin was the repository of the water brought from the Arno River for the garden.

Parterre of the Knight's Garden with the Porcelain Museum (former Knight's Lodge) in the background

The Boboli Gardens

(Cont'd from page10)



Neptune Fountain in Forcone Basin

From the Forcone basin it is a short walk to the Amphitheatre. This part of the garden has seen much change from the original to the mid 1850's. In the centre of the Amphitheatre stands the Egyptian Obelisk, placed there in 1790 and an ancient granite basin, placed in 1840.



Egyptian Obelisk in Amphitheatre

Our tour continued with the Medici Treasures Museum in the Pitti Palace. We enjoyed the garden, as example of Renaissance thinking and art and as a living museum.

Florence is a jewel of a city, with a storied past and a vibrant present. Consider visiting it!

NOTE:

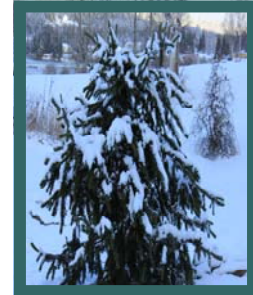
If you have any articles, event notices, pertinent MG information, etc. to be placed in a Newsletter , please e-mail to:

Sue Stuart: suestuart@accesswave.ca



THE WINTER GARDEN

- By Janet Elsie



Many people look out at the garden during this time of year and see only dead refuse, sticks and browns, yearning for warmer weather and the bright colors of spring. Like most gardeners the first blooms are exciting and renewing, but for now I'm content with the stillness, restfulness and peace of the winter garden. I certainly don't hibernate but I enjoy the break from all of the physical tasks of gardening.

Even at this time of year I can look out my window and appreciate the gardens beauty. Shape and form become the focal points of the garden. What could be more beautiful than the snow on the contorted shapes of the corkscrew hazel (*Corylus avellana* 'Conrorta') or lying quietly on the evergreens beautifully contrasting the green and white. The barks on many of the trees also show off their beauty during the winter. Being naked of their canopies allows us another perspective to enjoy. The birch in my garden, which can be messy, dropping their brittle branches in heavy winds, are luminous under the winter moonlight.

The hydrangea in my opinion does not have a season where it is not beautiful. From the lushness of the summer garden to it's monochromatic beauty in the winter garden, it's all good.



Hydrangea 'Annabelle'

Other examples of trees or shrubs that provide special winter interest are the Paperbark maple with it's unusual bark taking center stage. The smooth gray's of the magnolia's bark attract attention as well. The beech retaining their golden tan leaves are lovely backlit with the winter sunshine.

The weeping trees become beautiful sculptural features laden with snow. The boxwood and hollies provide lovely green foliage and berries to brighten up the grey days of winter. The many evergreens each provide their unique interest to the winter landscape as well,

(Cont'd on page 13)



THE WINTER GARDEN

(Cont'd from page 12)



especially after a fresh snowfall. One feels like one is about to step into the magical land of 'Narnia'. This is when the gardeners efforts to provide good bones for their spaces pays dividends.

Another wonderful feature of the winter garden are the grasses left standing with their blossoming seed heads waving in the winds. Not all will stand the heavy onslaughts of later winter but many (*Miscanthus purpurascens* and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder') with their feathery blossoms stand up well.



Miscanthus

Many of the seed heads of the perennials also provide their own quirky interest.



Rudbeckia seed heads

Sometimes in our overzealous efforts to clean up the garden in the fall, we are removing it's winter interest. One way to really appreciate the grasses and seed heads particularly is to go out with your camera and take some close-up shots.

At times I've just gone out and snapped away at these not thinking there was anything special but once in, with the images up on the computer screen, you are treated to an OMG moment "that is so beautiful" with their detail and intricacies. The same can be said of emptying out all containers. Why not leave the material in one and let the snow transform it. That is as long as it is not a pot that will split wide open when left out in the winter.



I also love all of the man-made structural elements that provide another dimension to the winter garden. These can take on a haunting beauty only seen in the winter. The snow laden benches, obelisks, arbors, gates, even vegetable garden boxes and any other feature brave enough to withstand the elements are amazing in their silent beauty. The garden art provides another aspect of it's interest as well. Anything from a simple little birdhouse to a unique piece of statuary can still work it's magic in the winter garden.



THE WINTER GARDEN

(Cont'd from page 13)



Antique farm machinery in veggie garden

So enjoy this period of armchair gardening, planning and well deserved rest, but don't forget to go out, take your camera and look for the beauty in your winter garden even if you have to put on the high top boots or the snowshoes to get there. It's all right there just waiting to amaze right now as well as when it bursts to life in a few short months. I suspect that it may give you a new appreciation of all your hard work.

I came upon a wonderful book that might be of interest for your armchair reading by the fire or your favorite sunny window. It's a book about trees, the forests and their interconnection with all living things. "The Global Forest" by Diana Beresford-Kroeger. The info on the jacket cover states that she is a botanist and medical biochemist who

is an expert on the medicinal, environmental and nutritional properties of trees. She lives in Ontario, surrounded by her sprawling research gardens filled with rare and endangered species.

Each chapter in the book is a separate essay. I found that it was written in a way that was enjoyable to read while imparting amazing information about the spectacular complexity of trees and the forests. Each chapter can be read independently and not even necessarily in sequence. An enjoyable and informative read.



Voilà Spring!



Scattered Seeds

- By Carol Goodwin

THE WINTER THAT IS

Several people have described this as an old fashioned winter. I have to agree! As a kid I recall my father wondering where he would put the next snowfall as he shoveled. I wondered the same thing myself by mid February! I've been careful to keep my bird feeders topped up - anything with any seed on it is well buried in my garden. I know there's some controversy about the feeding of birds and whether they become dependent on the feeder as a food source. I don't know the answer, really, but there has been research in the UK that verifies the importance of gardens to the survival of a wide range of birds and insects. That helped me resolve to carry on as I always have - leave seed heads on my plants going into winter (yes, I have to weed more, later), put out feeders (and keep them clean), and avoid applying anything that wasn't once plant material to the garden.

The days are noticeably longer, and the sun is much stronger. I find I've had to start watering the plants in the window more, and the cat is firmly rooted to the one empty spot where she can soak up the sun. As the snow shrinks, I've seen some pruning emerge that will be dealt with in the spring. My lovely *Fargesia* bamboo was flattened this winter, and I don't know if

the stalks will right themselves or if I'll have to stool it. Some research is required - any thoughts from other bamboo growers?

The canker on the branches of my Bloodgood Japanese maple is spreading, so some severe pruning will have to happen this spring. The tree was a gift from Ross Godfrey and I'll really grieve if I lose it.

Some exciting new seed catalogues have come through the mail slot, including a new seed company in Nictaux, Nova Scotia, Annapolis Seeds <http://www.annapolisseed.com/>

That should help reduce the carbon footprint!

I've been hearing exciting things from Master Gardeners regarding their plans for summer activities and projects. Please contact us to post information on your project on the web site. There are Master Gardeners out there who would love to help or learn from you as they embark on projects of their own!



I just thought I'd leave you with a small reminder of what we have to look forward to - thank goodness!

Carol Goodwin
Associate Professor
Environmental Sciences
N. S. Agricultural College
President AMGA