

Digging It!

March, 2013

The Times, they are 'A Changing'

The climate changes that we see in the garden are frequently water related. Less precipitation overall impacts our thirsty plants and slows general growth both in crops and in our gardens.

As the cost of water goes up and the cost of disposing of our waste water increases, irrigation through sprinkler systems becomes expensive and irresponsible.

Drought tolerant plants for the garden are the answer. Our grandparents were on the right path. Many of the plants that



were common to the old fashioned garden are drought tolerant. Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*), Shasta Daisies and Yarrow all grew next to the lavender in the sunshine. Many of the herbs are sun lovers as well, Oregano (*Origanum*), Ornamental sage (*Salvia*) and particularly Russian sage (*Perovsika*) will grow happily in sunny dry locations.

Daylilies have come a long way from the common orange ditch lily that many of us associate with old farm gardens. Day lilies come in a variety of sizes and in a vast variety of colours and combinations. Selecting the daylily to suit your garden area is as easy as reading the tag looking for finished size and time of bloom. Selecting day lilies that will bloom at different times

throughout the growing season will give the gardener dependable colour from spring to fall.

Gray plants are associated with drought conditions as well and can be a lovely tone that enhances brighter colours in the garden. Lambs ears (*Stachys*), Russian sage (*Perovsika*), Ornamental sage (*salvia*) and Artemisia will thrive in drier garden environments. Lavenders (*Lavandula*) of all sorts prefer the hotter and drier conditions that are fast becoming the norm.

Cone flowers (*Echinacea*) in all their rainbow of colours and variety of forms enjoy the heat and can take many days of dry conditions.

Stone crops (*Crassulaceae*) come in a rainbow of colours and sizes both in foliage and flower and will grow along with varieties of other succulents that hoard their own water supply. Most popular is Sedum Autumn Joy though the family is very large.

Google perennials, trees and shrubs for dry shade for more plants that will tolerate the coming climate change.

Mulching with organic matter at least three inches thick is the best defense against climate change in the garden. It will improve your soil structure and help to provide essential nutrients. This is how it is done:

- Help to conserve water in the earth
- Moderate soil temperature so that you don't have to water your plants as often.
- Mulches protect the soil from rain drops which can cause crusting.



- Mulches that are composed of decaying organic material such as grass, leaves, or wood chips can help add valuable organic matter to the soil as they decompose.
- Mulches made up of organic material can also promote the growth of beneficial soil organisms and worms.
- It can make a garden more aesthetically pleasing and reduce weed germination

Select bark mulch for a more aesthetically pleasing look and use rocks, brick chips, or marble chips for long lasting mulch.

Climate change information is in the news as the weather changes and our plant life struggles to accommodate. Keep informed as new solutions present themselves. Check out the Master Gardener Website, Canadian Gardening and Landscape Ontario for more information.

Cheryle Leechman,

Master Gardener

March To Do List

- Avoid walking on your lawn and garden as the ground starts to thaw. The soil is saturated with moisture and will compact very easily.
- Remove winter protection from trees and shrubs on an overcast, calm day.
- Start a few cool weather vegetables such as salad greens and onion sets in a sunny sheltered flower bed.
- Start hot weather crops such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplants under light to give them a heads-start before being transferred to the vegetable garden after the last risk of frost.
- Plan for a succession of plantings. For instance, plant beans every two weeks to stagger the harvest.
- Consider using floating row covers over cabbages, carrots and onions. If pests are unable to get to the crop to lay their eggs maggots will not be a problem later on. Securely weight down the edges to keep adult pests out.

Tip of the Month:

You can shred your leaves to make mulch by running over them repeatedly with a lawn mower, using a leaf shredder or placing them in a bucket and taking a weed wacker to them. They will break down faster this way and provide your plants with lots of excellent organic nutrients.

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Editor Cherin Harris-Tuck

To Subscribe/Unsubscribe please contact therealdirt@rogers.com

Master Gardeners of Simcoe County



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

Simcoe County Master Gardener Meeting, White Pine Board Room, Midhurst, 7:00 pm, March 21, 2013

Climate Change? Get your garden ready for spring by taking cues from Mother Nature instead of a calendar. Free Master Gardener presentations;

March 28, 2013
April 10, 2013
April 24, 2013
May 2, 2013

Bradford Public Library 7 - 8:30 pm.
Keswick Public Library 7 - 8:30pm
Holland Landing Public Library 7 - 8pm
Mount Albert Public Library 7 - 8:30pm

It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.

~Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

Ask a Master Gardener books containing answers to your most common gardening questions are available at any of these speaking engagements for only \$10 or Gardening Guides for only \$1. Valuable references for you or as gifts for a gardening friend!



For information on arranging a lecture for your group please contact Tracy Bosley at 705-435-2608 or email her at tvbosley@rogers.com. More information on the Simcoe County Master Gardeners can be found at simcoecountymastergardeners.mgoi.ca