

Gardening 2025

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Couple’s garden escape is a labour of love—and imagination The Masthead News Staff

Cindi Palmer and Peter Koellerr's garden in Hammonds Plains is anything but ordinary. For example, a full-scale concrete pteranodon's wings form a gazebo, and she is about to pluck a concrete python from a concrete tree and feed it to her chick, who is just emerging from a giant egg in a bed of perennials.

In the woods by the lake, the 300-lb. “Mother of All Chimes” rings only when November gales move the pines. That piece, and the “Industrial Angel,” are made from discarded deep-sea oceanographic instruments that Koeller rescued from the dumpster at the Bedford Institute, where he worked as a research scientist.

Other prehistoric creatures, whimsical sculptures, and faux-bois garden furniture are scattered throughout the property.

Koeller learned the faux-bois technique, which uses sculpted concrete over a metal frame, in San Antonio, Texas, when the couple became frustrated with constantly having to replace rotting wooden structures.

“If done well, a faux-bois tree can fool the woodpeckers and last ten thousand years—theoretically,” he says.

The garden itself was started 25 years ago, when Palmer



Peter Koeller's sculptures and Cindi Palmer's gardens combine to create a magical space on the couple's Hammonds Plains property. Photo credit: Peter Koeller. Below left, Cindi Palmer and Peter Koeller.

outlined the beds with garden hose and began to plant and

create the garden’s hardscapes, which include a dry riverbed, two ponds, and pink, thyme-covered walkways throughout.

“The main concept at the beginning was just ‘no grass,’ and we developed it from there,” she says.

Palmer talked local excavators into dumping rocks exactly where she wanted them, free of charge. In fact, she says, the entire garden was created at minimal cost, with Palmer growing almost everything from donated slips or seeds, including magnolias, pawpaw trees and prickly pears.

“We don't do the garden tours,” she says, “But we love to see the occasional visitor's jaw drop when

they come through the arbour. Those moments add to the joy we have doing all this together.”

See a video of Palmer and Koeller's garden on our website: themastheadnews.ca.



Is our annual gardening issue now a perennial?

Welcome to *Gardening 2025*, our second annual special gardening issue. It will be in community locations from now until the end of September. And we'll continue to have stories about gardening and preserving in our regular issues of *The Masthead News* through to the end of autumn.

Our contributors to this issue are experienced gardeners or gardening experts who are

sharing stories about growing more of our own food, gardening with kids, using native plants, supporting birds and pollinating insects, lawn-free yards, and protecting ourselves from insect bites.

There are also stories about gardens as places of magic and inspiration, and listings for local community events for gardeners and garden lovers.

Thank you to our advertisers

for their support in bringing this year's special gardening issue to you.

Whether your gardening consists of watering a pot of flowering annuals on your porch, dedicating your property to growing much of your own food, or something in between, we hope the stories here will help you have a more successful and enjoyable gardening season.



Gardening with kids

Liam and his mother, Lori Ann Foley, volunteering in the Crossroads Educational Vegetable Garden in Upper Tantallon. Also, see story about helping kids learn to love gardening, page 3.



Volunteers with Transition Bay St Margarets, working in the Crossroad Educational Vegetable Garden in Upper Tantallon. Back row (from left): Robert Cervelli, Richard Learning, Dawn Smith, Dylan Smith, Suzanne McCarthy, Shayne White. Front row (from left): Liam Foley, Lori Ann Foley, Susan Williams. In addition to the garden, the yield from which is donated to the St. Margaret’s Bay Food Bank each year, Transition Bay St Margarets maintains a seed library and offers educational programs online and in person.

New Faerie Trails in Mahone Bay to provide three-season magic

The Masthead News Staff

Vicki Bardon, who owns Suttles and Seawinds in Mahone Bay, had a magical idea. She wanted a walking trail through the gardens and streets of Mahone Bay that would be dotted with little fairy houses. And she wanted the fairy houses to last for several years.

In January, her idea captured the imaginations of several other creative and industrious people in Mahone Bay: Jennah Barry, Karen Pinsent, Valerie Hearder, and Kate Cocks.

“We talked, we walked, we shared ideas, and we plotted out a plan,” says Cocks.

The result was the formation of the Faerie Trails of Mahone Bay Society, with the objective to create a permanent three-season attraction, consisting first of one trail and then expanding to additional trails. The goals were to reflect the magic of the community to Mahone Bay’s residents and visitors, and showcase the natural environment. The group chose the older spelling, faerie, to add to the sense of magic.

“Above all, we wanted to bring joy,” says Cocks, who is, officially, the Society’s president, though, she says, “We’re a very

cooperative and supportive working group.”

Cocks says the creation of the Faerie Trails has received widespread and enthusiastic support from town council, other nonprofit groups, businesses, and individuals.

“Faerie house construction is on schedule, with installation and landscaping to start within a couple of weeks,” she says.

The official opening of the Faerie Trails is on Saturday, June 28 at 2pm at the Aquatic Garden in Mahone Bay. There will be a calling of the faeries and ceremonial ribbon-cutting at the trail entrance. Attendees will be able to walk the trail and see the faerie houses. At 3pm, there will be a faerie tea party at Eli and Trix Cafe on Main Street.

“Faerie attire is encouraged but not required,” says Cocks. “And a special faerie house will be available for notes and wishes to be left for the faeries. At 8 pm, we hope the faeries will light up their houses for evening visitors as the sun sets on the trail.”

As the seasons change, the faeries’ houses will be decorated for the Scareceow Festival in September and the Father Christmas Festival in November.

Simple ways to increase our food security

Robert Cervelli

Ten years ago, the Bedford Historical Society had this quote on their sign: “Once upon a time, every family in Bedford grew some vegetables.” By contrast, this saying was recently posted on a sign at a local auto shop: “Most expensive vehicle to operate is a shopping cart.” Those signs illustrate the path to our current predicament with food security.

It’s clear that we live in an era of increasing supply-chain instability. Trade wars make our globalized economy fragile. This is an important issue for our food supply: about 85% of our food is imported over long distances, and prices keep increasing.

What can we do about this issue? It’s simple: think local and act local. That builds food resilience.

First, it’s a good idea to deepen your pantry. Have at least a two-week supply of canned goods or basic staples. Two months is even better.

Then, start a garden—even if it’s just a few vegetables in pots

on your deck. Learning how to grow food is a valuable life skill for everyone, especially the kids. A good-sized garden can significantly reduce your food budget, and you get the best freshness and nutrition. Remember that gardening is a lifelong learning curve. You will get better at it each year.

Next, support local farmers through farmers’ markets or similar local sources. We need those folks, and they need our business.

Robert Cervelli is part of the steering committee for Transition Bay St Margarets, a group dedicated to helping build community resilience. He manages a one-acre vegetable garden on his own property and is a regular contributor to The Masthead News. Transition Bay St Margarets manages the Crossroads Educational Vegetable Garden in Upper Tantallon.



The faerie houses are being made by three people, primarily from found materials. More than 50 houses, ranging in height from 6 to 24 inches, have already been created, with more on the way. Some of the houses are facades only, some are full exteriors, and some have detailed interiors. Photo credit: Vicki Bardon

Says Cocks, “The spring will bring more delights as the faeries wake up from their winter rest.”

Follow the progress of

the project on Instagram at faerietrailsofmahonebay. A website is also under development.



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Birds, bugs, and blossoms in beadwork at Lunenburg library

Norma Shephard

Throughout history, birds, bugs, and blossoms—harbingers of spring—have been represented in fashion through the artistry and craft of beading.

As a tribute to gardens in spring, the Mobile Millinery Museum is bringing the "Beauty and the Bead" presentation to the Lunenburg Public Library on June 3 at 3 pm. The free event will showcase the creativity, skill, and cultural significance of beaders, who, from early days, stimulated

trade, enhanced the beauty of apparel, and played a symbolic role in ceremonial observances.

Visitors to "Beauty and the Bead" will learn how a series of dreams played a part in the development of First Nations’ flapper-era jingle dresses, whose appliquéd metal cones were made from the rolled tinplate lids of tobacco cans.

The exhibit demonstrates the excessive application of beads in 1920s fashion on everything from

bridal coronets to Charleston dresses and flapper bags. In the Victorian era, even a single, well-placed bead—representing an eye—might be used to enhance the beauty of a taxidermized bird on a woman’s hat.

The Mobile Millinery Museum is partnering with Virginia Bell to present "Beauty and the Bead" on June 3 at 3pm at the Lunenburg Public Library. Admission is free. Norma Shephard is the director of the Mobile Millinery Museum.

How to help kids love gardening

Heather Boudreau



Sunny, harvesting lettuce for salad. Helping grow their own food is a valuable skill—and a lot of fun—for kids. Photo credit: Suzanne Sparks

I grew up gardening with my grandparents. I learned a lot and enjoyed myself because they were smart enough to

keep it fun. When I had kids of my own, I took the same approach, and both my kids now love to dig in the dirt—excuse me, soil—right along with me.

Here are some strategies to help young gardeners have fun.

- **Give them their own garden.** A corner of a bigger garden bed is fine. A planter or raised garden bed of their own is better. Rectangular is easier than round or square for shorter arms and smaller hands to manage.
- **Rightsize it.** Whether it’s a garden bed or a container, a kid’s garden of 2x3 feet is good for a rookie, while 3x4 feet works well for an older child.
- **You do the prep work.** Figuring out drainage, soil mix, and sun exposure is your job. Give them a little bit of information, but don’t overwhelm them. Kids will be more interested in the harvest, not the prep work, and that’s fine for newbies.
- **Use local seeds and transplants.**

Supporting local applies to gardens, too. Local seeds come from plants that like local growing conditions, and the same applies to local transplants.

- **Let them grow what they like to eat.** If they hate arugula, it doesn’t matter that it grows easily and fast. Help them select crops they will eat from among things that are easier to grow, like carrots.
- **Have at least some quick-growing things.** It’s satisfying for kids to see seedlings emerging from the soil fairly quickly, even if the harvest is weeks away. Green onions, beans, peas, cucumbers and other veggies provide that.
- **Consider dwarf and bush varieties.** Dwarf and patio tomatoes are easier to grow and earlier to harvest. Bush beans, which don’t need supports, are easier than pole beans.
- **Help with the drudgery.** A kid’s garden is kind of like a family pet. It’s not realistic to expect kids to do all the work.



Ari checks out his family's crop of sunflowers. Photo credit: Suzanne Sparks

Help them weed—which also prevents accidentally pulling the crop. Remind them to water. When it’s time to thin, talk them through it, because it’s hard for kids to pull out healthy baby plants.

And if the kids want to grow flowers as well as veggies, you can’t beat the fun of sunflowers.

Creating a garden that’s for the birds

Laura MacKinnon

My mother-in-law, Ruth, who lived with us for the last few years of her life, was a passionate gardener and birder until health challenges intervened. Once she moved in with us, and supported by her knowledge and enthusiasm—and supplemented by additional research—my husband and I decided to transform our nothing-but-lawn yard into a bird-friendly garden.

Ruth has been gone for years, her room transformed into a teen space for visiting grandkids. But thanks to her, our yard continues to be a haven for birds, and we enjoy maintaining it for their benefit, our pleasure, and in Ruth’s honour.

Below, I offer a few suggestions to get a bird-friendly garden started.

of planting them too close to your house. Match your soil and sun conditions with picks from among pines, firs, and spruces native to Nova Scotia. I especially like the White Spruce, which tolerates a variety of soil types.

Plant trees that produce berries: Birds love berries. There are several serviceberry tree species in the province, and I’m especially fond of the Downy Serviceberry. It has white flowers for a short time in spring, reddish-purple berries in the summer, and colourful fall foliage. At maturity, the tree is 4.5-9m (15-30’) in height, with a slightly wider spread. Birds that love serviceberries include Cedar Waxwing, Northern Cardinal, Rose-



A young Purple Finch male, just getting his adult plumage. Planting coniferous trees in your yard can attract this species. Photo credit: Sharon Jessup Joyce

pollinators, while various bird species, including the equally bright American Goldfinch, enjoy the seeds.

Provide water: Birds will love a pond with recirculating water, but if that’s beyond your budget, a simple birdbath will be appreciated. Clean it weekly in mild weather and every two to three days during hotter summer weather.

Bird safety

- If you choose to use fertilizers, make sure they don’t contain pesticides or insecticides, since many such products are toxic to birds and pollinators.
- Hang mobiles or reflectors or place removable stickers in windows to help prevent bird strikes.
- Locate birdbaths near trees or tall shrubbery so the birds have a quick escape route if a predator shows up.
- Keep cats indoors.



A birdbath off the ground and near a tree or tall shrubbery helps protect birds from predators, though the birdbath may need to be cleaned of plant material more often.



A Northern Parula male. This migratory warbler eats insects, including caterpillars. Photo credit: Sharon Jessup Joyce

Plant evergreen bushes and trees: These provide birds with nesting sites, nutrition for cone- and insect-eaters, and year-round shelter from weather and predators. Some evergreens get big, in both width and height, so do your homework to avoid the common mistake

breasted Grosbeak, and others. **Plant native flowers:** There are lots to choose from. Recently, I’ve been enjoying the Cut-leaved Coneflower, which is happiest in full sun and well-drained soil. The bright yellow flowers are long-lasting and attract bees, butterflies and other

Resources for creating a bird-friendly garden

Laura MacKinnon

Here are some of my favourite resources for creating a garden that will attract and support birds.

Great place to start: A Birds Canada website called birdgardens.ca offers specific plant-selection advice for every gardening zone in Canada, along with information about birds you may see in your garden.

Help with plant selection: The Nova Scotia Invasive Species Council has information on invasive plants to avoid and native species to

consider (see "Guide helps gardeners avoid invasives and embrace native species," page 4).

Preventing window strikes: Having more birds in your garden increases the risk of window strikes. These happen when birds fly into windows, either because they don’t see the window or are confused by what’s reflected in it. Learn more here: naturens.ca/haligonians-protecting-birds-from-window-strikes

Starting from seeds: I like the Halifax Seed company’s website for a variety of tips and product information, including some starter tips for a bird-friendly garden: halifaxseed.ca.

Books by Nova Scotia gardening experts: I own books by Niki Jabbour (see reviews of two of her books on page 4), Marjorie Willison, and Elizabeth Peirce, among others. A good bird-friendly garden is, first, a healthy garden, and these Nova Scotia

experts can help you achieve that.

A book or two to inspire you: *Planting for Garden Birds*, one in a series of books by UK author Jane Moore, has a lot of garden and bird information. While geared to a UK audience, much of the information in this beautiful book will also apply to a Canadian garden. Moore’s series includes *Planting for Garden Birds*, *Planting for Butterflies*, *Planting for Wildlife*, and *Planting for Honeybees*. An independent local bookseller can order the books for you.

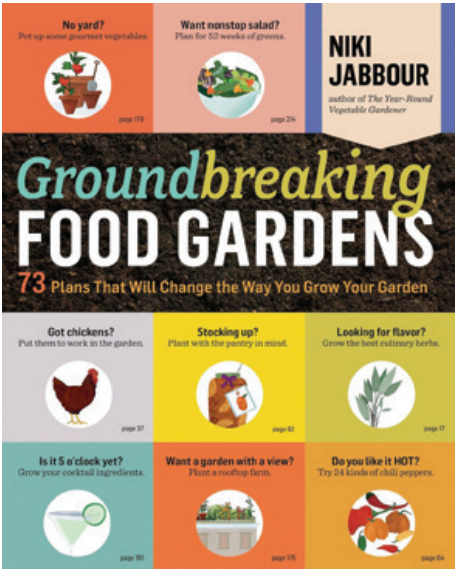
Inspiration and information from gardening guru Niki Jabbour

Heather Boudreau

We're lucky in Nova Scotia to have many gardening experts sharing their knowledge through books, magazine and

Groundbreaking Food Gardens

By Niki Jabbour
Reviewed by Heather Boudreau



newspaper articles, websites, blog posts, radio, TV and webinar appearances, and in-person presentations.

One expert whose works I turn to again

Niki Jabbour's 2014 *Groundbreaking Food Gardens* walks readers through over 70 garden designs, or plans. Many of the plans address a specific gardening reality, such as small space, limited sunlight or a sloping property. Other plans are intended to support goals like attracting wildlife or creating a classic cutting garden. Some of the plans celebrate historic garden types, like victory or knot gardens.

Every page is bursting with information to aid gardening success. Like all Jabbour's books, the tone is friendly and knowledgeable.

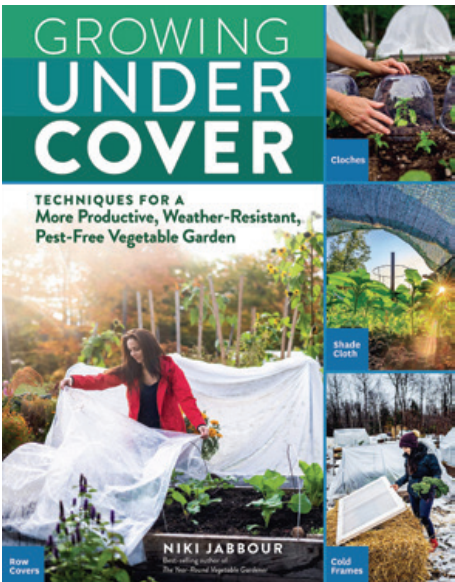
Anne Smith's illustrations throughout the book explain the layout of each plan. The illustrations are also absolutely charming, and add to the pleasure of reading this helpful book.

Whether you're starting out with a blank canvas or are ready to take the next steps to get more from your existing garden, *Groundbreaking Food Gardens* is full of idea to help you have a garden that is both productive and pretty.

and again is Niki Jabbour, Halifax-based gardener and writer. Any book by Jabbour will be crammed with both practical advice and next-step ideas.

Growing Under Cover

By Niki Jabbour
Reviewed by Heather Boudreau



Here are reviews of two of her books, which are widely available to buy.

Canadian gardeners are often looking for ways to extend the growing season. This book by Nova Scotia gardening expert Niki Jabbour offers lots of ways to grow under cover—with greenhouses, polytunnels, domes, and other shelters.

Do you have limited space and an even smaller budget? Jabbour has suggestions for you. Are you interested in specific crops? She can help you meet that goal, too.

As with all Jabbour's books, every page has practical advice and options that, depending on your gardening goals and realities, will give you knowledge you can put into practice.

The book includes a calendar that describes what you can grow when, a mulch chart to help you pick the mulch that will work best for you, how to deter pests and attract pollinators when you're growing under cover, and much more.

Heather Boudreau is a lifelong gardener who is working toward growing at least half of her family's food. She's a dedicated reader and collector of gardening books.

Guide helps gardeners avoid invasives and embrace native species

Julianna Davies

As gardeners, we may not always realize that many of the trees, bushes, and plants that we associate with traditional East Coast gardening — such as the wild roses we see along sandy coastal areas and the postcard-perfect lupines along the roadsides — are actually non-native, invasive species.

So how do we master the art of a vibrant, diverse garden while preventing the spread of invasive plants that impact our environment? The Nova Scotia Invasive Species Council has a guide called *Grow Me Instead* that suggests alternatives for some of the more common — and not so common — invasive species. Many

of these are still found for sale in local gardening centres, so we can be forgiven for naively planting them in our gardens.

The Norway Maple, for example, is a popular choice among gardeners. But did you know that these trees release toxic chemicals from their roots that are detrimental to the growth of other plant species? A better choice is the Sugar Maple, which is native to Nova Scotia. A beautiful shade tree that reaches over 20m (65') tall, with spectacular yellow-orange fall colours, this tree prefers rich, well-drained soils and tolerates full sun to full shade. An added bonus? Sugar maples lead to maple syrup.

Rugosa roses are dense bushes found along sandy coastal areas and ditches. This species spreads primarily by root suckers. Once established, native species can't compete with it. The Virginia rose is a beautiful native alternative that tolerates drought and salt. It has similar pink flowers and excellent fall colours, with fragrant flowers that attract native bee species—the rosehips can even be made into jams and teas.

A lesser-known invasive flowering plant is the Yellow Flag Iris.

“This species is planted in gardens for its showy yellow flowers and can appear tame in gardens but it quickly forms dense clumps when it escapes into a more favourable

habitat, such as lakeshores or wetlands,” says Hughstin Grimshaw-Surette, terrestrial project coordinator with the Nova Scotia Invasive Species Council. “This species produces dense rhizomes that form a mat, altering water flow and outcompeting native plants.”

A beautiful native alternative is the Blue Flag Iris, which is low maintenance and thrives in sunny locations around ponds or other moist areas.

The *Grow Me Instead* guide can be downloaded from nsinvasives.ca/grow-me-instead, on the Nova Scotia Invasive Species Council's website. The website contains other helpful information for gardeners.

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Enjoying a garden oasis in a lawn-free yard

Suzanne Bourque Pelham



The author's garden in spring. "It's the best time to see the bones of the garden, including the paths," she says. Photo credit: Suzanne Bourque Pelham

After the structure of our new house in the St. Margaret's Bay area was finished, we found ourselves with an empty patch of ground that resembled a

wasteland.

We decided to opt for a no-lawn garden, realizing it would require work and time before becoming the space we envisioned.

Right, a greenhouse is being constructed from materials that include century-old windows salvaged from a previous property owned by the author and her husband. Photo credit: Suzanne Bourque Pelham.



What is a tiered garden?

A tiered garden is a garden plan that includes tall, medium-height and low plantings to create a layered and visually fuller garden. Tiered gardens may be created on a level area, a slope, or actual tiers created through retaining walls and paths that may include either steps or gradual slopes.

Biochar: What if carbon wasn't a problem, but a solution?

Anneke Santilli

Imagine capturing carbon and putting it to work in helpful ways, from supercharging your garden's soil to creating greener, more sustainable materials in construction.

It turns out that carbon can be locked away safely in the ground for hundreds, even thousands of years. It sounds a bit like magic, but there are no semesters in Herbology at Hogwarts required.

Biochar, which has been popping up as the latest trend, is actually an ancient solution with modern applications.

Thousands of years ago, communities in the Amazon burned organic waste under low-oxygen conditions. The result, layered with compost, was rich, dark soil—called terra preta,

or "black earth." It was soil so fertile it's famous even now.

In a process called pyrolysis, organic material—like wood chips, crop residue, or even food waste—is heated at high temperatures in a limited-oxygen environment. This "roasting" prevents the material from combusting, allowing the biomass to retain its carbon in solid form. The end material is a highly porous product that looks a lot like crushed charcoal.

When added to the soil, at about 10-15% of the volume of your soil or compost, biochar becomes a powerful soil amender. Assisting with the exchange of nutrients, it strengthens plant roots, improves water retention, balances pH levels and stores difficult-to-retain nutrients like nitrogen

and phosphorus, reducing the need for fertilizers. Additionally, because biochar is porous, it has a high surface area that can house beneficial microbes in the soil.

Unlike most things we produce, which are either carbon positive or neutral, biochar is considered carbon negative because it locks carbon away. That means less carbon is released into the atmosphere and more carbon is stashed in our soil.

Biochar also offers a natural remedy for soils stressed by chemical fertilizers, and a means to help your garden flourish.

Anneke Santilli is a marketing specialist with RDA Atlantic Inc., a local company that produces and markets biochar.




and they, too, have had to be banished. We are currently faced with the thought of removing the large maple that we grew to love—but it now creates too much shade.

On the positive side, a viburnum that we found at the back of my daughter's property and moved to ours has become an outstanding example of the value of having native species in your garden. That viburnum now

holds an iconic spot in the garden and is the first to bloom in early June.

Our garden is in its tenth year. It's an ongoing adventure, and, in spite of the yearly dandelion onslaught, we now enjoy months of a variety of colours, textures and scents.

And when I hear the neighbours mowing their lawns, I have to smile. It's another reason to appreciate our no-lawn garden.






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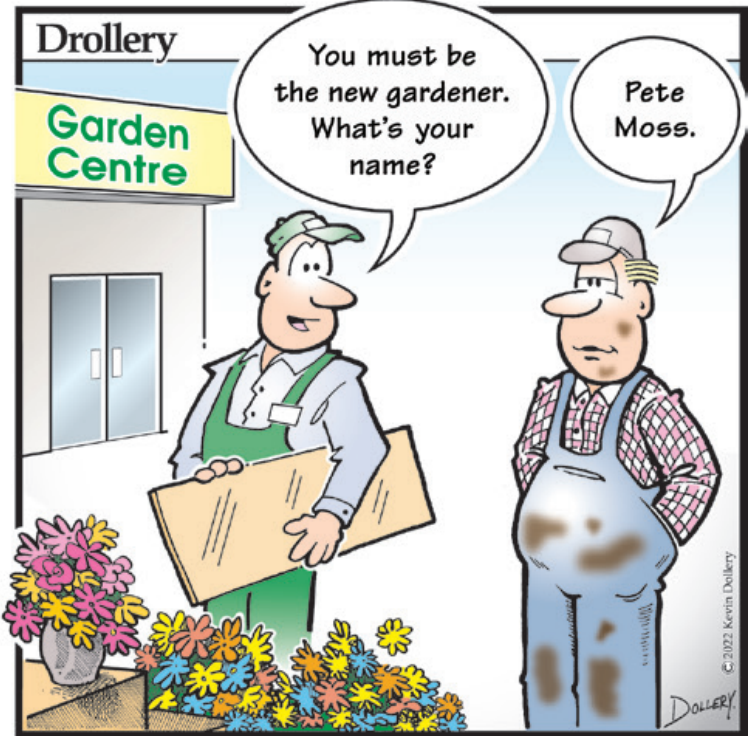
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You must be the new gardener. What's your name?

Pete Moss.





A grocery store in your backyard

Robert Cervelli

Having a vegetable garden gives you the security of your own “backyard grocery store.” Learning gardening is a life skill that pays back countless times with fresh, nutritious, and delicious produce, while reducing your food bills. Get the kids involved and teach them as well.

Start by thinking about growing what you like the most, and what will store well going into winter.

An easy way to get a garden going is to buy transplants from garden centres—things like tomatoes, peppers, kale, chard, cabbage, lettuce, parsley, celery, and herbs. When you’re just starting out as a gardener, transplants can be an easier way than starting plants from seed.

Onion sets are also a quick crop to start. When planting, make sure the pointy leaf end is facing up. You can harvest all your onions in late summer and spread them out on several warm sunny days to dry further before storing them.

Carrots, parsnips, turnips and beets are easy to grow. You do have to grow these from seed, placing the seeds in the soil about a half-inch deep and an inch apart. Carrot and parsnip seedlings will take up to two weeks for the feathery tops to start to emerge.

Keep your seedlings moist in the first few weeks. As they grow, thin them to 3 to 4 inches apart to give each one plenty of room to get big. Be vigilant: deer love the tops of carrot, parsnip and beet, so put these plants in a spot you can protect with netting.

Get the kids involved in harvesting: pulling carrots out of the ground is always a fun surprise.

Potatoes are another great beginner crop, and most garden places sell seed potatoes.

Find the little “eyes” on the potato skin, which are the buds that will grow out into new plants. You can cut up your seed potatoes to have more to plant, but make sure there is at least one eye on each piece. Plant each potato piece about 12 to 15 inches apart. In early fall, get kids involved in digging up potatoes—it’s a true treasure hunt!

Gardening is a continuous learning experience, even for the most seasoned growers. With each year’s lessons, you become more experienced and have more harvests.

Don’t get discouraged if deer, groundhogs, rabbits, slugs or other pests set your harvest back. Consider it a teaching event to learn from and adapt accordingly. Remember that a good portion of gardening effort involves pest control. There are ways to prevent any kind of pest (see "Nontoxic pest control" on this page), and you can implement these as you plan ahead for future growing seasons.

Finally, as you harvest what you’ve grown throughout the gardening season, think about the price of those vegetables if they had gone through a grocery-store checkout. You are your own grocery store, and instead of paying in cash, you are paying with good exercise, fresh air, sunshine, and garden therapy.

Look into gardening groups, presentations, and other resources to build your skills—and share skills as you become more knowledgeable and experienced. Building gardening skills across our community builds a strong community, and we can all learn from each other.

Robert Cervelli is a member of the steering committee for Transition Bay St Margarets. Visit transitionbay.ca for information on upcoming gardening and food-related events the group offers.

Nontoxic pest control

Robert Cervelli

While most gardeners don’t mind giving up a little of their harvest to garden pests, it can quickly get out of control. Planning ahead and spending some money on pest control will pay off significantly over time. And don’t get discouraged – even the most experienced gardeners learn something new every year.

Here are some nontoxic ways to deter specific pests.

Deer

We have lots of deer, and they love gardens. Their preferred vegetables are peas, beans, beet greens, carrot tops, and chard. As the months get colder, they will begin to eat many other things, including cucumber, squash, zucchini, kale, broccoli, and even onions and leeks.

Physical barriers seem to work best. If you don’t want to invest in an 8- to 10-foot stockade fence around the garden, consider an electric fence, which can be moved to different parts of the garden each year. Plastic netting can be hung around garden beds, and laid right over the top of some crops.

Groundhogs and hares

These smaller creatures can have a real love for your parsley, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, and other greens. They can also be hard to catch. A 2-foot wire mesh fence works the best to physically keep them out.

You can also use a live trap. Groundhogs like overripe cantaloupe or honeydew melon, but other treats work.

You can protect young plants of broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts and other crops is by spraying with hot sauce. The hot sauce will wash off in plenty of time before you harvest.

Slugs

Slugs love Asian greens like bok choy, but will also mow down young carrots and other seedlings. Slugs are mostly night feeders that hide in dark cool places during the day. Because of their poor eyesight, they follow their slime trail back to the same plants night after night. Stir up the soil around plants being attacked to destroy their trail, or go out at night and catch them in the act.

For more serious control, create a copper mesh “fence” around affected area. Lee Valley has long rolls, but you can also unwind copper scouring pads purchased at the grocery store. Bury one edge slightly into the soil so slugs can’t crawl under it.

Caterpillars

Those white moths flying around the cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and kale are laying eggs, which turn into those troublesome tiny green caterpillars. The most effective treatment is a weekly spray of BTK, which is an organic spray specific for any type of caterpillar, available at most garden centres. BTK is a natural soil bacteria, harmless to us and most other creatures, but not good for caterpillars. Add a few drops of dish soap to each spray batch to help the spray stay on the leaves better.

Tomato blight

Tomato blight is a fungal infection, common in our area, showing up as browning and dying leaves late in the summer on tomatoes and potatoes. Spray plants weekly with seaweed extracts or other liquid nutrients—even milk works. The sprays build up beneficial microbes on the leaves, helping to stave off the fungi.

GARDEN EVENTS

Friday, May 30 and Saturday, May 31

Yard Sale and Plant Sale, St. Timothy's Anglican Church, 2320 Prospect Road, Hatchet Lake, 8:30am-1pm both days. Yard sale along with a plant sale. Free admission.

Saturday, May 31

Mahone Bay Garden Club Plant Sale, St. James Anglican Church, 14 Parish Street, Mahone Bay, 9am. (See more information in "All the dirt on the Mahone Bay Garden Club," page 7.)

Lunenburg and Area Garden Club Plant Sale, Lunenburg Community Centre, 15 Green Street, Lunenburg, 8-11am. Please join us, rain or shine, at the spring plant sale. Sale proceeds will continue work on gardens at Fishermen’s Memorial Hospital.

Saturday, June 7

Plant Sale, St. Peter's Anglican Church, 10030 Peggy’s Cove Road, Hackett’s Cove, 9am-noon. Plant sale held rain or shine. Free coffee or tea available. Book Worm Haven will be open. No admission cost.

Saturday, June 7 and Sunday, June 8

Mahone Bay Home and Garden Tour, Mahone Bay, 10am-5pm. Get inspired by the creativity and beauty of historic architecture and landscaping in Mahone Bay. Tickets are \$30, available at mahonebaymuseum.com/hgtour or at Kinburn Pharmasave (522 Main Street). Included with your tour ticket: various

workshops and a visit with knowledgeable gardeners at work. Pick up your tour guide maps/tickets starting at noon on Friday, June 6 at the Mahone Bay Visitors Information Centre (165 Edgewater Street) or Mahone Bay Museum (578 Main Street). See mahonebaymuseum.com/hgtour for more information.

Saturday, June 14

Prospect Area Garden Club Plant Sale, Prospect Road Elementary School, 2199 Prospect Road, Hatchet Lake, 9-11:30am. Different plants at various prices. Rain date June 15. Funds raised support the club. For updates, check The Prospect Area Garden Club Facebook page.

Sunday, June 15

Annual Silver Garden Tour, 283 Brennans Road, Prospect Bay, 10am-4pm. Enjoy 8 acres, over 400 plant species, paths, ponds, and bridges, and an artisan show and sale and live music. Admission: non-perishable food or monetary donation to Feed Nova Scotia.

Saturday, June 28

Faerie Trails Official Opening, Aquatic Garden, Mahone Bay, 2pm. (See story page 2.)

St. Luke's Huge Indoor Yard, Bake, and Plant Sale, St. Luke's Anglican Parish Hall, 10 Shore Club Road, Hubbards, 9am-1pm. Yard, bake, and plant sale. Cash only. Please bring your own shopping bags. No admission cost but donations welcome. No earlybirds, please. Proceeds to St. Luke's ACW.

Eat favourites all season with succession planting

Succession planting—harvesting one crop and then planting another in the same place during the same growing season—helps increase the amount and duration of your harvest.

Faster-growing veggie choices for succession planting include lettuce, arugula, spinach, kale, radishes, carrots, bush beans, peas, and green onions. Dill, cilantro, chive, and basil are good

herb choices.

Once one early-harvest crop is finished, remove the remaining plants, top-dress the soil with some aged manure, and plant with seeds (for fast-growing plants) or transplants. Because you're planting in summer heat, keep an eye on water needs.

For a continuous supply of baby salad greens, plant seeds every 10-14 days.

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What’s the buzz? Wild bee populations are declining *Tam Hill*

In Canada, the decline in the populations of domestic honey bee colonies has been slowed, but their honey production is still declining. Wild bee numbers have dropped significantly in Canada, including Nova Scotia.

A wild bee species that is experiencing the greatest decline in numbers in Nova Scotia is the Yellow-banded Bumble Bee. This species is classified as "vulnerable," under the Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act of 2017.

The decrease in the wild bee population is a result of:

- Loss of habitat
- Pesticide use
- Pathogens from managed bee colonies
- Competition from domestic bees
- Climate change

In accordance with the Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act of 2017, a management plan was created in 2024 by the province for the Yellow-banded

Bumble Bee. Other less vulnerable wild bee species in Nova Scotia also need management to reverse their decline. Wild bee management techniques include protection and management of habitat, reduction in pesticide use, and planting native trees and flowers that attract bees.

A partial list of plant species that attract bees includes Black Cherry tree, Eastern Redbud tree, Red Maple tree, marigolds, daffodils, Black-eyed Susan, Swamp Milkweed, Eastern Purple Coneflower, beebalms, sea lavenders, Canada Goldenrod, Fireweed, New England Aster, and Joe Pye weeds.

Wild bee populations are essential for pollination of both native species of plants and agricultural crops. They are also an essential part of the natural ecosystem and biodiversity. Slowing the decline of wild bees in Nova Scotia will help maintain these benefits.



A bumble bee (probably not a Yellow-banded Bumble Bee) gathers nectar and pollen from a wildflower growing in the author’s driveway. Photo credit: Tam Hill

Reducing the risk of bug bites

Jenna Li

It comes with the territory—literally. To garden is to be exposed to the risk of bites or stings from a variety of insects. And ideas for how to protect yourself are almost as numerous as the blackflies on a still and humid day in June.

There are over 100 species of blackflies in Canada, with Nova Scotia reported to have the fewest species, at just 13. But anyone who spends time outside here during blackfly season knows those insects make up in numbers what they may lack in variety.

The Government of Canada website has a comprehensive discussion of personal insect repellents, defined as repellents we apply directly on ourselves or wear on clothing and clip-ons.

The site says insect repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) are safe if used according to label directions and based on recommended concentrations by age. That means a solution of 30% for those aged 12 years to adult, applied up to three times a day, and 10% for children aged 6 months to 12 years, applied only once per day. DEET products should not

be used for babies under 6 months of age.

Icaridin and permethrin products will also work to repel specific insects. Again, check age restrictions listed on product labels.

In addition to insect repellents applied directly to the skin, permethrin-treated clothing and metofluthrin-containing clip-on devices are available. Children under 16 should not wear the treated clothing, but there are no age restrictions for the clip-on devices. However, only adults should change the disks in these products.

Soybean oil repels blackflies and mosquitoes and has no age restriction on its use. Mixtures of essential oils, including lemon, eucalyptus, pine needle, geranium and camphor, may also repel mosquitoes. The site cautions against using such products for children under 2 years of age.

The government website also contains information on products that don’t work as repellents, including bug zappers—which mostly kill helpful insect-eating creatures—citrosa plants, and more

See the website for more information: canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/about-pesticides/insect-repellents.

Beyond repellents: Other tips for avoiding bites

Time of year: The saying “from Mother’s Day to Father’s Day” is roughly accurate when it comes to blackfly season in Nova Scotia. Mosquitoes are a factor from May to September. Stinging insects are around from spring to fall, but their activity usually peaks from late August to mid-September, when their populations are largest.

Time of day: Blackflies are most active around 9-11am and 4-7pm, while mosquitoes are most active near dawn and dusk.

Weather conditions: Insects will show up in larger numbers when it’s cloudy, humid and still. A day with sustained wind speeds of 10km/hour or higher translates to fewer mosquitoes and blackflies, because they can’t fly on windier days.

Clothing suggestions: Long-sleeved pants tucked into socks, long-sleeved shirts buttoned to the neck, a hat, and gardening gloves are recommended to reduce bite exposure. Gardening clothes made of net and nets over the head and neck are also helpful when the insect count is high. Choose light-coloured clothing.

Avoid scents: Scented and plant-based personal-care products attract insects and should be avoided.

Vinegar traps not recommended: Yes, insects are attracted to vinegar. But the problem with vinegar traps is they will end up attracting more insects, increasing your risk of being bitten as the insect is on its way to the trap.

All the dirt on the Mahone Bay Garden Club



Spring cleaning: Shown above, members of the Mahone Bay Garden Club, cleaning up the town’s Aquatic Garden on April 30. From left: Dominique Chapman, Linda Wieser, Sharon Barrett Ewing, Jenny Sandison, Jennifer Smith and Jacque Avery. Photo credit: Kelly Munroe.

Plant sale: The Mahone Bay Garden Club’s plant sale is happening on Saturday, May 31, starting at 9am in the

St. James Anglican Church parking lot at 14 Parish Street in Mahone Bay. Plants from members’ gardens will be for sale. Customers are advised to come early, as plants sell out fast.

New members always welcome: Check out the club’s Facebook page or email mahonebaygardenclub@gmail.com to learn more about coming events or membership.

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