

GROWING GARDENERS

GARDEN NEWSLETTER FOR MEDICINE HAT & AREA - MAY 2023

MAY IN THE GARDEN

BY GENEVIEVE (CFCA GARDEN PROGRAM COORDINATOR)

It feels like spring is off to a great start; bees and butterflies are making appearances, perennials are poking their heads up, seeds are sprouting and the sun is shining. As American naturalist Edwin Way Teale once said, "The world's favorite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May."

Many of us have started cleaning up our yards, preparing garden beds, dividing bulbs and pruning trees and shrubs. While endless possibilities can be exciting and inspiring, for some it may seem overwhelming and daunting to start. One way to set ourselves up for success this season is to adopt practices that improve how we weed, water and care for our plants. In this issue we take a closer look at mulch, why we love it, and share information about how to prepare indoor-grown or store-bought plants for the big move outdoors.

We want this to be a community-driven newsletter. If there is something you'd like us to include, or you have a burning gardening question, please reach out by email to cfcagarden@gmail.com.

SEEDY SUCCESS!

Last weekend was CFCA's 8th Annual Seed Exchange event (Seedy Sunday), this year in partnership with the Medicine Hat Public Library. Over 130 people joined us for an afternoon of garden presentations, hands-on demonstrations, displays by local organizations, prizes and of course, seeds! It takes a community to create an amazing event like this, and we are so grateful for all of the volunteers, guest speakers, organizations, and participants.



SHOP FOR MOM MARKET

Spring Plant SALE

WHERE: Irvine New Horizon Club

DATE: Saturday, May 6th & Sunday, May 7th

TIME: 11-3 pm

Seeds

Patio Pots

Perennial Fruits & Veggies

Annual Flowers & seedlings

Bath & Skin care gifts



Preorder your Perennials - see @coderreflowerfarm on f & i for catalogue

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GARDENING IN COMMUNITY - MULCH MATTERS

Nature can teach us gardeners many things, if we want to learn. When we look at the forest floor, for example, it is rare to find bare ground. Instead, the surface of the soil is covered with things like pine needles, dry leaves, fallen branches, etc. What can we learn from this observation? What purpose is this "debris" serving?

When leaves and needles fall and build up above the soil, this layer of organic matter plays an important role in maintaining the health of the forest. The benefits include protecting the soil, holding moisture, and recycling nutrients back into the growing plants nearby. The forest floor is covered in natural mulch!

In the gardens we tend, applying mulch can help us save time and money while also supporting the life in the soil. A thick layer of natural mulch (see below) can prevent weed seeds from germinating by blocking sunlight. Covering bare soils reduces the amount of water lost to evaporation, and the amount of soil lost to wind and runoff (erosion). Mulch also acts like a blanket that regulates the temperature of the soil, preventing soils from getting too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. Natural mulch breaks down over time and, in doing so, it adds organic matter to the soil which improves fertility and the soil's structure (we'll dive deeper into soil organic matter next month!).

WEED OF THE MONTH

FIELD BINDWEED

Convolvulus arvensis Provincial Designation Noxious



Field Bindweed is a member of the Convolvulaceae (Morning Glory) Family native to Africa, Asia and Europe. Also known as Devils Vine, and Wild Morning Glory. It was most likely introduced as a contaminant in a crop seed.

LIFE CYCLE Perennial vine.

CONCERN Can tolerate a wide range of conditions, often found on roadsides or growing on fence lines. It can outcompete native species, and may be mildly toxic to livestock.

CONTROL Herbicide, hand pick before flowering and seed set.

IDENTIFICATION

FLOWER 2.5cm in diameter, tubular or bell-shaped, and white to pinkish. Two bracts on stem below flower.

LEAVES Alternate, dark green, pointed tips, arrow head shaped with sharp pointed lobes at base, grow on one side of the stem.

STEMS Up to 3m long, growing horizontally or climbing, often has a twist, numerous shoots.

ROOT Deep taproot with lateral creeping roots.

SEED/FRUIT One plant can produce up to 500 seeds which can remain viable for up to 20-50 years.

Now that our soils are warming up, we can top-up existing mulch in the garden. For first-time mulchers, consider marking perennials that aren't up yet (to avoid losing them) and watering the bed before adding a thick layer (4"-6") of natural mulch. Mulch will settle and slowly break down over time and can be topped-up as needed.

TYPES OF MULCH

Mulch makes sense in our dry and windy climate. But what sort of mulch is best? The answer, unsurprisingly, also comes from nature: natural mulch.

Recommended Natural Mulch:

- dry crushed/shredded leaves
- arborist woodchips (the byproduct of tree care: bits of branches, trunks, leaves and bark)
- chopped hay/straw
- dry grass (in moderation)
- disease-free plant parts/crop residue

Not Recommended:

- landscape fabric
- rocks/gravel
- plastic sheets
- rubber

Notes:

- Some store-bought woodchips are made from pallets which may be treated with harmful pesticides. Arborist woodchips, sourced locally, are best.
- Straw and hay may contain seeds (their own or from weeds). Weed seeds can be a problem, but crop seeds, like wheat, can easily be pulled up.
- Avoid mulching with grass, hay or straw that has been sprayed with persistent herbicides.
- Do not mulch with freshly cut grass; it will form a slimy impenetrable stinky mat.
- Pine/spruce needles will not acidify the soil, but do take longer to break down than leaves.

Source: Wheatland County. (2017). Identification Guide for Alberta Invasive Plants. https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=pdf/weed_identification_book.pdf



HARDENING-OFF MADE EASY

The sun is out, days are warm, and the urge to be outside grows stronger every day. Many of us want our plants to enjoy the pleasant weather that has finally arrived as well. For seedlings that have been growing inside for weeks (or months for you keeners) the future is outside. But the road to getting there healthy and strong involves patience, planning, and a process known as "hardening-off".

Have you ever purchased a healthy seedling or bedding plant from a nursery or garden centre and plopped it in the garden only to find it looking half-dead (or worse) within a couple of days? The cause was likely that the plant was not adequately prepared for the elements of the outside world, which differ from the carefully controlled environment the plants were used to growing in. There are 4 main differences worth discussing: Temperature fluctuation, humidity, wind and sun. To appreciate why indoor-grown plants struggle when exposed to the outdoors, let's look a little closer at these 4 factors.

- The **temperature** in our homes and greenhouses vary by about 5 degrees Celsius between day and night. The forecast for the first week of May in Medicine Hat sees average daily temperature fluctuations of 16.4 degrees Celsius, 3 times greater than indoors.
- Vegetable greenhouses keep the **humidity** near 75-80%. We live in a semi-arid climate and rarely see any significant humidity outdoors.
- **Wind** only exists in indoor spaces if we use fans to encourage stockier growth, and even this does not compare to the wind outdoors. The average maximum wind gust we experienced last May was 48 km/hour. Wind can be harmful to tender plants by causing physical damage, like whiplash, and by increasing water loss from leaves (transpiration).
- **Direct sun** is a more intense light source than grow lights or sunlight filtered/diffused as it passes through glass or polycarbonate. Exposure to full sun for the first time can scorch leaves, similar to how we might get sunburned doing yardwork on the first warm sunny day.

Our tender plants need time to build up their tolerance for drastic temperature changes, less humidity, more wind and direct sun and the best way to do this is by hardening them off. The hardening process involves exposing tender plants to these elements enough for them to develop a tolerance without causing damage or death.

Hardening-off plants takes 10-14 days and starts with placing the plants in a sheltered shady area for 1-2 hours on the first day, then bringing them inside again overnight. The next day they can spend a bit more time outdoors out of direct sun, but with a little wind exposure, then back indoors. On the third day, give them an hour or two of gentle early-morning sun, then a couple of hours of bright shade and some wind exposure. Keep adding a little more sun and wind exposure day by day, keeping the plants adequately watered, until they are up to 10-12 hours outside. At this point if the overnight temperatures are mild, they can stay outside for a couple of days, and then be planted into the garden. Many gardeners aim to transplant heat-loving vegetables around May 20th, so start hardening-off in the first week or two of May!

SEEDS TO START IN MAY

Start Indoors:

- Basil
- Cauliflower
- Cucumbers
- Squash/Pumpkin (1st wk)
- Melon (1st wk)

Start Outdoors:

- Borage, Cilantro, Dill
- Mint, Oregano, Sage
- Parsley, Thyme
- Arugula, Corn salad, Lettuce
- Mustard, Pac choi, Choi sum
- Spinach, Swiss chard
- Beans, Carrots, Kale
- Peas
- Radish
- Squash/Pumpkin (2nd wk)
- Beets, Parsnips, Rutabaga (2nd wk)
- Cucumbers (4th wk)

“EVERYTHING THAT SLOWS US DOWN AND FORCES PATIENCE, EVERYTHING THAT SETS US BACK INTO THE SLOW CIRCLES OF NATURE, IS A HELP. GARDENING IS AN INSTRUMENT OF GRACE.”

MAY SARTON

EVENTS

GARDEN CLUB STARTS
MAY 3RD (SEE NEXT PAGE)

MOTHER'S DAY PLANT SALE

MAY 6+7, 11-3 PM
IRVINE NEW HORIZON CLUB

HORT ASSOCIATION MONTHLY MEETING

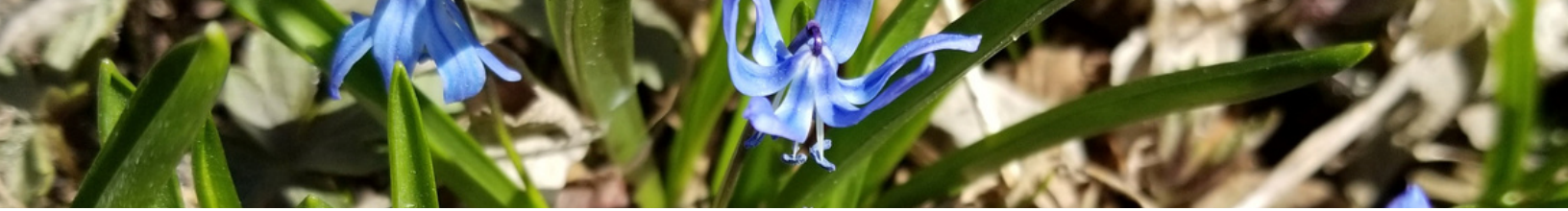
MAY 8TH, 7:30 PM
504 2ND STREET SE

FARMERS MARKET SEASON OPENING

MAY 20, 9-1 PM
CYPRESS CENTRE

HORT ASSOCIATION ANNUAL PLANT SALE

MAY 27, 10-3 PM
EWART DUGGAN HOUSE



GROWING GARDENERS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Did you know that there is a free weekly garden club in Medicine Hat? Starting in May, join us in the community garden behind the Root Cellar (440 Maple Ave SE) every Wednesday at 7pm for Growing Gardeners Education Program. Each session covers a different garden-related topic while incorporating hands-on garden learning. Registration is not required and children are welcome so long as they are accompanied by an adult guardian. Watch our social media pages to get updates about topics and information about what to bring (when needed). As we meet outside, adverse weather may force us to cancel or move sessions around. For more information, email CFCAGarden@gmail.com.

MAY GARDEN CLUB TOPICS

MAY 3 GETTING STARTED IN THE GARDEN	What to know before you grow. We will talk about charts, tools and other garden resources in this first meet-up of the season.
MAY 10 SEEDS + TRANSPLANTS	A look at potting mix, moisture, seed treatment, pests, and light. Germination testing. Preparing seedlings for the big move outdoors.
MAY 17 THE LAY OF THE LAND	Learn how existing factors like sun/shade, soil type, and other limitations can help you pick the right plant for the right place.
MAY 24 CONTAINER GARDENING	No garden space? No problem! Growing in containers can be fun, easy and produce delicious food year round.
MAY 31 ALL ABOUT WEEDS	We will look at some common local weeds. How to identify, when to worry, which ones can be eaten and best practices for removal.

WANTED

SEEDS

THE PERMANENT SEED EXCHANGE LOCATED IN THE MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC LIBRARY IS GAINING POPULARITY! IN ORDER FOR THIS PROJECT TO BE SUSTAINABLE, WE NEED SEED DONATIONS.

★ STORE-BOUGHT SEEDS ★
★ LEFTOVER SEEDS ★
★ SAVED SEEDS ★

IF YOU HAVE SEEDS TO SHARE, PLEASE SPLIT LARGE QUANTITIES INTO SMALL ENVELOPES / ZIPTOP BAGS WITH ENOUGH FOR A HOUSEHOLD TO GROW THIS SEASON. FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR TO VOLUNTEER WITH THE SEED EXCHANGE, EMAIL CFCAGARDEN@GMAIL.COM.

medicine hat public library | COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION

ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION (CFCA)

Community Food Connections Association is non-profit organization based in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Launched in 2003, we have been working to support food security in the community through education, programming, partnerships and policy support for improvements in food, nutrition, health and local agriculture.

Our programs include the Good Food Club, Community Kitchens, the Local Food & Producers Directory, Medicine Hat Community Gardens, and Growing Gardeners Weekly Garden Club. To find out more, head over to our website or social media accounts.



@CFCA_MH