

GROWING GARDENERS

GARDEN NEWSLETTER FOR MEDICINE HAT & AREA - SEPTEMBER 2023

SWEET SEPTEMBER

As the grapes are ripening on the vine and fresh apples abound, the days are slowly becoming mercifully cooler. It's an exciting time of the year as we delight in some of the delicious bounty from our gardens and hopefully preserve some to savour in the months to come. Fall is just around the corner and it's a great time to divide spring-blooming bulbs/corms, and plant perennials, trees and shrubs for future enjoyment.

This will be our last issue of the Growing Gardeners Newsletter for the 2023 growing season. In it, we wrap up our **In the Weeds** series by getting to the action with Part 4 which discusses methods for controlling those inevitable (and pesky!) unwanted plants. While some things are beginning to wind down for the season, it is time to get a head start on next year's garden by amending newly-vacant beds and planning to plant fall garlic. We've shared our favorite tips for growing **Glorious Garlic** on page 3.

There is still plenty to do around town for us gardeners. Whether you want to learn about houseplants at Police Point Park Nature Centre, explore the richness of our native areas with Grasslands Naturalists, or support the students at the Agriculture Discovery Centre, we've compiled a list of upcoming event for September on page 3.

We are excited for the September guest speaker for the Medicine Hat & District Horticultural Association. Jennifer Hoglin of Gooseberry Gardens will be giving a free talk about **Perennial Plants for Waterwise Gardening** on September 11th at 7:30pm at St. Johns Presbyterian Church (504 2 St SE).

We'd like to thank our readers for following along with our first season of the Growing Gardeners Newsletter. We hope that it's been helpful, entertaining and informative! Our goal is to support gardeners of all experience levels in Medicine Hat and area. We are pleased to announce that our Newsletter can now be delivered straight to your inbox each month during the growing season. To sign up for the mailing list for 2024, or share ideas, harvest recipes, suggestions, or inspiring garden photos to help us to grow, please reach out by email to cfcagarden@gmail.com.

Genevieve Mathieu
CFCFA Garden Program Coordinator

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GOOD FOOD CLUB

DO YOU LIKE FRESH, LOCAL, AFFORDABLE
FRUITS + VEGGIES? THEN YOU'LL LOVE
CFCA'S GOOD FOOD CLUB!

CHOOSE FROM 3 BOX SIZES FOR THIS
MONTHLY BULK PRODUCE BUYING CLUB,
WHICH SOURCES PRODUCE AS LOCALLY AS
POSSIBLE AT WHOLESALE PRICES.

PICK-UP IS THE 2ND THURSDAY OF EACH
MONTH AT ST BARNABAS CHURCH. ORDERS
MUST BE IN BY THE WEEK BEFORE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO
[HTTPS://FOODCONNECTIONS.CA/CLUB](https://foodconnections.ca/club)



IN THE WEEDS PART 4: CONTROL



It is easy to get stuck in the weeds when unwanted plants start popping up in our carefully planted gardens. A good weed strategy includes understanding, prevention, monitoring, and controlling weeds while protecting our health, the environment and our pocketbooks. The 4th and final part of this series builds on what we learned previously about weed management to determine the most appropriate weed control option for our site. Note: We have not included cultural control (crop rotation, weed barriers, etc) as it has been covered in depth in Part 2: Prevention from the July issue.

PHYSICAL/MECHANICAL

When gardeners bemoan weeding, we typically mean physically removing or damaging weeds. Ranked from most to least ecologically-responsible, common methods include hand pulling, digging, cutting (using shears, hoes, string-trimmers or mowers) and cultivation (using hand-held cultivator or rototiller). These options are typically affordable, but more costly in labour and time, and potentially impractical for larger spaces or for gardeners with physical limitations.

Flame weeding is used by market gardeners and involves burning young weeds using a gas powered torch. It works best in spaces when the weeds are not near desirable plants, like paths, between rows, or driveways. This method requires training, protective equipment and attention to wind to avoid injury or causing a fire.

For larger spaces, weeds can be smothered or solarized. Smothering involves covering the weedy soil with a tarp, cardboard, wood or opaque plastic for 4-5 weeks, then taking it off to allow remaining weed seeds to germinate before covering again and repeating the cycle. This process takes between 2 months and 2 years depending on the type of weeds present. Solarizing is a similar strategy, but uses clear plastic to heat up and kills weed seeds in the soil. This can take 6 months to be effective but the heat can be harmful to organisms in the soil.

BIOLOGICAL

Biological management involves using living things, like insects or animals, to consume weeds. Remember the herd of goats helping to control leafy spurge at Police Point Park in past years? This is a perfect example of biological control. Unfortunately few of us have access to chickens or goats in town so biological options are limited.

CHEMICAL

Herbicides, either “natural” or synthetic, are a last resort for managing weeds in the garden, and for good reasons.

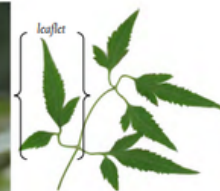
While they can be quick and easy to apply, they are costly for the environment by harming desirable plants and beneficial organisms in our yards and watershed, and leaving problematic residues/salts in the soil. This also applies to organic and home-made herbicides(ex. vinegar, dish soap) which are not tested like commercial products and do not have instructions for safe application.

The best weed control method is the one that is effective, economical and safe. Responsible gardeners consider the other living things we share space with and how the method we've selected, time of day, weather, and action will affect their health and wellbeing.

WEED OF THE MONTH

YELLOW CLEMATIS

Clematis tangutica Provincial Designation Noxious



Yellow Clematis is a member of the Ranunculaceae (Buttercup/Crowfoot) family and was introduced as an ornamental from Asia. It is also known as Golden Clematis, Virgins Bower or Helios. It is often found in urban areas growing on fences, parks, railway lines, and roadside ditches.

CONCERN Very aggressive and is tolerant of a wide range of conditions. Potential Fire hazard. Buyer be aware - may available as an ornamental plant.

LIFE CYCLE Perennial vine. It reproduces both by seed and creeping roots.

CONTROL Repeated hand pulling, or herbicide before flowering.

IDENTIFICATION

FLOWER Yellow, 4 petals, nodding, bell shaped. Flowers occur at the ends of stems or in leaf axils.

LEAVES Opposite, finely toothed margin, 5-7 leaflets, may be lobed, leaf tips are pointed and edges are coarsely toothed, slightly hairy on the underside. Deciduous.

STEMS Branched, 3 to 4 m long, leaves will grow on new and old woody stems.

ROOT Creeping root.

SEED/FRUITS Numerous seeds, long silky tail (5-6cm long), showy seed head.

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



GLORIOUS GARLIC



Garlic makes (almost) everything better AND is one of the easiest things to grow! Here are some tips to enjoy beautiful home-grown garlic year after year.

Know Your Neck

Garlic can be divided into two groups depending on the type of “neck” (aka flower stalk) that eventually forms as garlic plants mature. **Hardneck** garlic (*Allium sativum* var. *ophioscorodon*) develops a rigid stalk that forms an edible curled scape mid-summer. This type of garlic is what most of us grow here because it is hardier. While easier to peel, it is difficult to braid, and has a shorter shelf life (4-6 months). **Softneck** garlic (*Allium sativum* var. *sativum*) does not form a scape, which makes it easier to braid, stores better (6-8 months) and has a stronger flavor but is less hardy. This garlic is typically what is available at grocery stores and is grown in warmer climates.

Fall for the Win

Why do we plant garlic in the fall? In our climate (zone 3-4), tucking cloves into the soil in October gives them a chance to start developing roots before the chill of winter sets in, leading to larger bulbs. These patient buddies will have a head start come spring, popping green leaves up once the soil thaws and days get longer. Planting earlier runs the risk of leaves sprouting up before winter only to get killed by cold temperatures. Cloves planted later than this will likely not develop roots in the frozen soil, delaying growth and possibly resulting in rot. Why not plant in spring? Garlic needs 6-8 weeks of cold exposure to induce bulbing. In a pinch, this could be mimicked by keeping seed garlic in a fridge, but the plants would still be less established than fall-planted garlic.

Sourcing “Seed”

If you grew garlic last year, you can replant those cloves this fall. Studies show that larger cloves become larger bulbs, so select the best of the best. Seed garlic can also be purchased from nurseries, farmers markets and seed vendors. Grocery store garlic is most often softneck and may not do well in our cold climate. These are often treated with sprout inhibitors that may affect growth and development.

Get Cracking

Cracking (breaking a bulb into cloves) should be done just before planting. Firmly knock the stem of an upside-down bulb against a hard surface to crack. Avoid planting cloves with damaged/missing basal plate (the flat bottom part where the roots will grow from) or split “skin” as these may develop poorly or succumb to rot.

Site + Soil

Like many vegetables, garlic does best in a spot that gets full sun and has loose, well-draining soil with adequate fertility. Garlic is considered to be a heavy feeder, but since it won't be doing much growing over winter, slow-release sources of fertility like compost or aged manure are great choices for top-dressing at planting time. Growers typically do not plant garlic or other alliums (leeks, onions, shallots, etc) in the same place year after year to avoid problems like onion maggots. It's easy to give up on watering the garden once the main season crops are done, but garlic needs the soil to be adequately moist right up until it freezes in winter.

Get Planting

When it's time to plant, space cloves 4-5" from each other in rows 8" apart. The cloves should be about 3" deep with the “pointy” side facing up. If the soil is soft, cloves can be gently pushed in to the appropriate depth. For heavier soils, dig a wee hole or a trench to prevent damaging the cloves. Backfill with soil, water the area well, and add 3-6" of organic mulch (shredded dry leaves, straw, etc) to help regulate the soil temperature over winter and help retain moisture.

EVENTS

HORTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION MONTHLY MEETING

SEPT 11, 7:30 PM
ST JOHN'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
504 2 ST SE

HOUSEPLANTS 101

3 WORKSHOPS (\$5 / EACH)
NATURE CENTRE
(SEE P. 4 FOR DETAILS)

AG DISCOVERY CENTRE FALL GATHER AND PRODUCTION SALE

SEPT 30, TIME TBD
IRVINE SCHOOL

GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS NATURE WALKS

SEPT 20 + 27, 9 AM
CONTACT NATURE CENTRE FOR INFO

POP-UP FEST

SEPT 22, 12 - 6 PM
OPTIMIST PARK
630 WOOD STREET SE

FARMER'S MARKET

SEPTEMBER 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
9 AM -1 PM @ CYPRESS CENTRE

“TO BE INTERESTED IN THE CHANGING SEASONS IS A HAPPIER STATE OF MIND THAN TO BE HOPELESSLY IN LOVE WITH SPRING.”

GEORGE SANTAYANA



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, follow us on social media or email CFCAGarden@gmail.com.

SEPTEMBER GARDEN CLUB TOPICS

<p>SEPT 6 COMPANION PLANTING</p>	<p>How and why to grow different things together for support/protection, improved yields, and pests and disease prevention.</p>
<p>SEPT 13 SEED SAVING W AMBER CODERRE</p>	<p>Learn about seeds with guest host Amber Coderre (Coderre Flower Farm)! Techniques, tools and timing for collecting, preparing and storing seeds. Note: This session will run from 5 - 8 pm.</p>
<p>SEPT 20 SEASON EXTENSION + FALL GARDEN PREP</p>	<p>Cleaning up garden beds. Amending soil. Protecting perennials. Pruning. How to overwinter plants/bulbs indoors.</p>
<p>SEPT 27 FALL GARLIC + TOMATO TASTING</p>	<p>Best practices for growing big beautiful garlic. Softneck vs hardneck. When and how to plant. Bring some home-grown tomatoes to share!</p>

HOUSEPLANTS 101!

"How do I get rid of my black thumb?"



Stop by the Police Point Park Nature Centre for 3 workshops designed to teach you everything you need to know about houseplants!

Sept 30th, 1-2pm
Water and Pots.

October Date TBD
Sun, Temperature, and Humidity.

October Date TBD
Common Pests and Disease.




Visit the Nature Centre or call 403-529-6225 to register!
\$5 fee per workshop.

ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION (CFCA)

Community Food Connections Association is a 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, FoodConnections.ca, or social media accounts:

[@COMMUNITYFOODCONNECTIONS](https://www.facebook.com/COMMUNITYFOODCONNECTIONS) 

[@CFCA_MH](https://www.instagram.com/CFCA_MH)  + 

