



# GROWING GARDENERS

NEWSLETTER FOR SOUTH EASTERN ALBERTA



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Growing Gardeners +  
CFCA info

CFCA's Growing Gardeners Newsletter aims to support gardeners of all experience levels in Medicine Hat and area. To sign up for our mailing list, email [CFCAGarden@gmail.com](mailto:CFCAGarden@gmail.com).

# NATIVE PLANT OF THE MONTH

## SHOWY GOLDENROD *Solidago speciosa*

Showy Goldenrod is a fall favorite, with its feathery golden-yellow blooms. This easy-to-grow herbaceous perennial supports many beneficial insects and birds.

**Type:** Perennial

**Family:** Acanthus

**Height:** 30 - 120 cm

**Flower:** Yellow

**Bloom:** August, September

**Light:** Full sun, part shade

**Soil:** Dry

**Supports:**   

**Start From:** Seed (cold-stratification, optional) or division.

**Benefits:**

- Low-maintenance
- Clump forming
- Nectar source

**Note:** Rumors that goldenrod causes hayfever are untrue as it is insect pollinated. The pollen that causes allergies is from wind pollinated plants.



# WHAT IS CHOP + DROP?

*Put the garden to bed for winter while building healthy soil with the chop and drop method.*

## THE METHOD

Rather than pulling out all of the annual plants we've been tending this season, they can be cut and laid down on the beds. In spring, any remaining chunks can be added to the compost pile and soil can be loosened with a broadfork.

## THE REASON

Other than being easier on our backs, chop and drop has several benefits. Roots remaining in the soil will break down, **adding organic matter**. Root zones are typically where a lot of **soil life** resides, and yanking them out of the ground is disruptive. The leaves and stems dropped on the soil act as a mulch, **protecting the soil**, locking in **moisture** and supporting **beneficial insects**.

## THE EXCEPTIONS

There are a few situations where this method is not ideal. **Diseased** or **pest-infested** plants should be fully removed and disposed of to prevent transmission/increased pest pressure.

Plants with **mature seeds** attached may self-sow, which may or may not be desirable.

Plants that release **allelopathic chemicals** to deter other plants from growing nearby (ie. sunflowers) should be pulled out at the end of the season.



Reference: TWC Staff, MAC. (2023). *Solidago speciosa*. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.  
[https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=mofi](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=mofi)



# BUG SNUG

*Support beneficial insects in the yards this fall by building a Bug Snug with yard “waste” at the end of the growing season. This easy DIY project provides shelter to overwintering insects, so we want to create lots of nooks and crannies by layering dry plant parts, like stems, leaves, branches and even pinecones.*



Image Source: The Mariana H. Qubein Arboretum & Botanical Gardens.

## MATERIALS



**3 LONG STURDY BRANCHES**  
(1-1.5 METERS)



**DRY LEAVES**



**STRAW OR SIMILAR**  
HOLLOW-STEMMED THINGS



**TWINE**  
OR ROPE



**PRUNERS**



**TWIGS, DRY STEMS, ETC**

**PINE/  
SPRUCE  
CONES**



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Find a sheltered, out-of-the-way spot in the yard to build the bug snug. Once built, it is best left undisturbed until late spring.
2. Loosely tie the long branches together about 20cm from one end with the twine.
3. Spread the other ends out and poke them into the ground forming a tripod. Optional: use a hammer or mallet to pound them into the ground.
4. Use the twine to securely attach the tops, (re-tie the first knot or use more twine on top of it).
5. Start adding alternating layers of leaves, branches, stems, straw, etc. inside the tripod. Trim longer pieces with pruners as needed. Continue adding layers of materials until the tripod is full.



# IT'S A TRAP (PLANT)!

*Pest insects, like people, prefer some plants to others. This can be used to our advantage by including attractive trap plants to draw pests away from what we would like to keep for ourselves. As we begin to wrap up the gardens for this season, we can make pest management plans for the next one.*

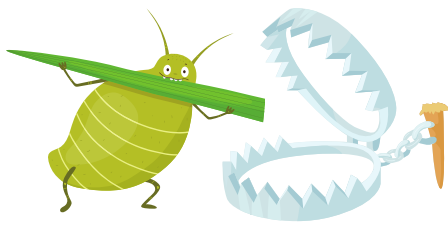
## IDENTIFY THE CULPRIT

First and foremost, it is important to **correctly identify** the insects that are causing trouble in the garden. Many insects produce **signature damage** to plants, like the numerous tiny holes on leaves chewed by Crucifer Flea Beetles resembling tiny shotgun fire. Look for the **insect itself**, frass (a fancy word for bug poop), and other signs. Once confirmed, it's time to learn the life cycle, habits and trap plant options for this pest.



## SET THE TRAP

Research which trap plant is effective for the identified pest and source seeds or seedlings. Ideally, trap plants **emerge before the crop** we are trying to protect by a week or so. Once the infestation has begun, it is usually too late for trap plants to be effective. The trap plant should be near but **not directly beside** the main crop. In larger gardens, a perimeter of the trap plants can be used to protect the main growing space. **Monitor plants** closely for the arrival of the pest insects, damage, eggs, etc. and be prepared to take action.



## TAKING ACTION

The trap plant is meant to be **sacrificed**, not consumed. Once the pests have shown up in force, the plant is treated to **destroy the pests**. What that looks like depends on the specific pest insect, and may include using a shop vac to suck up flea beetles from a trap of their favorite mustard greens, pac choi or nasturtium. For more on this, see Growing Gardeners June 2023 issue.



For larger insects that don't fly/jump, **squishing** is easy, effective, and, for some, satisfying. For other insects, **insecticidal soap** or another type of pesticide can be applied directly to the infested trap plant. This avoids spraying the plants we intend to eat, and limits negatively affecting beneficial insects in the garden. Always **follow application instructions**, and avoid spraying on windy days.



## DOING IT WRONG

1. Pest insect was **not properly identified**
2. Trap plant **less attractive** than main crop
3. Location of trap plant is **too close** to main crop
4. **Failed to deal with pests** on trap plant once they showed up
5. Pest **treatment not suitable** for type of insect



# GROWING GARDENERS EDUCATION PROGRAM

2024 will be our 3rd year offering Growing Gardeners Education Program, CFCA's free garden club. We are excited to continue to provide ecologically-responsible advice and hands-on learning to gardeners of all experience levels in Medicine Hat. We are grateful for our partnership with the Root Cellar Food and Wellness Hub and their lovely community access garden, which is the venue for Growing Gardeners Education Program. Follow us on social media to get up-to-date information about Garden Club, workshops and other local events. To get this newsletter sent directly to your inbox every month during the growing season, or to receive a copy of the 2024 Garden Planner, email [CFCAgarden@gmail.com](mailto:CFCAgarden@gmail.com).



**Growing Gardeners**  
Education Program



**WEEKLY WEDNESDAY Garden Club!**

Join us to learn garden skills while helping to grow food in the community access garden!  
Registration not required.  
Children are welcome if accompanied by an adult.

Location: In The Root Cellar Food & Wellness Hub garden, behind 440 Maple Ave. SE)



## 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 Education Program. To find out more, head over to our website, [FoodConnections.ca](http://FoodConnections.ca), or social media accounts:

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

  
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