Greely Gardeners Group
Newsletter

August 2009

WE'RE BACK!

OK, so Summer isn't officially over for a few more weeks, but we all know where we're headed once August is over! But the good news is that the Greely Gardeners monthly meetings are on again, the first Wednesday of the month, and we've got a great program lined up for the rest of 2009 and well into 2010. Our next meeting is definitely one you won't want to miss. We've got a great speaker, we'll be inviting your nominations for vacancies on the executive for the coming year, and as always there will be great treats to go with the coffee.

2009 CALENDAR

Wednesday, September 2:
Greely Community Centre, 7:00 p.m. Topic: "Invitation to the Wild Mushroom" Guest Speaker: Expert Michel Corbeil will show you which ones are edible and other interesting facts"

Wednesday, October 7:
Greely Community Centre, 7:00 p.m. Topic: A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE. Guest speaker: John McKenzie.

Wednesday, November 4:
Greely Community Centre, 7:00 p.m. NEW AND UNDERUSED PERENNIALS. Guest speaker, the always popular and very knowledgeable Suzanne Patry of Whitehouse Perennials.

Wednesday, December 2:
Greely Community Centre, 7:00 p.m. ANNUAL CHRISTMAS POT-LUCK DINNER, where our members show that they are not just great gardeners but great cooks too. Don't miss it!

2010 CALENDAR

Thursday, January 7: Topic: VERMICOMPOSTING. Guest speaker, Andrew Aitkens. That's a fancy word for composting with worms. Not as yukky as you're probably thinking, as Andrew will explain.

Thursday, February 4: Topic: WEEDS – IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM, EAT THEM! "Guest" speaker, Bob Stanley. This presentation (complete with recipes) will make you think about weeds in a whole new way.

Thursday, March 4: Topic: JAPANESE FLOWER ARRANGING. Guest speaker, Wendy Batson of the Ohara School of Ikebana.

OTHER GARDENING EVENTS

Osgoode Garden Club meets on the third Wednesday of the month, 7:00 p.m. at the Osgoode Library on Main Street. For information call Louise Boudreau 826-0385.

Russell and District Horticultural Society meets on the third Monday of the month, 7:00 p.m. at the Legion Hall, corner of First Street and Legion Lane.

Manotick Horticultural Society meets on the second Monday of the month in the RCMP Club House off Nicholl's Island Road. For information contact Mary Kealey at 823-1658.

TIP OF THE MONTH...

WEEDS CAN TELL YOU A LOT ABOUT SOIL QUALITY. Of course if you've spent most of the summer on your hands and knees trying to get rid of the darned things, the notion that weeds may have some good, even desirable, qualities is pretty hard to accept. For most of us gardeners "weed" is a bad, bad four-letter word! But just take a deep breath for a moment and consider what a weed actually is, and what it does. Weeds are highly adaptable plants, colonizers of disturbed ground, their prodigious growth protects soil and provides a home for insects, including the beneficial ones. In short, you might say that weeds are the earth's way of looking after itself. Still not convinced? Read on…

One of the more interesting attributes of weeds is what they reveal about the condition of your soil: whether it's acid or alkaline, how well drained it is, how fertile it is. Whole colonies of weeds indicate a severe soil problem. Deep-rooted weeds such as mullein, Queen Anne's lace and dandelions thrive where soil fertility is poor. Shallow-rooted weeds, chickweed, chicory, common groundsel, common horehound and lamb's quarters are found in fertile soil. After improving soil fertility with compost or manure you should notice a change in weed composition.

Silvery cinquefoil, hop and rabbit foot clover, coltsfoot, dock, knapweed, mullein, horehound, sorrel, wild radishes and wild strawberries are found in soil with a pH of six or less. Weeds that prefer an alkaline soil (pH of eight or more) include mustard, thistles, chamomile, wild carrot, goldenrod, saltbush and creeping bellflower. You can change the pH of your garden by adding lots of humus. Organic matter neutralizes the pH. Most plants prefer a neutral soil with a pH of seven.

Weeds can also indicate soil composition. For example, goldenrod and bindweed are more often found in sandy soils, while plantain, chicory, chamomile and horse nettle grow in the hardpan of clay. Lots of leguminous weeds such as clover and vetch indicate that the soil is low in nitrogen. The presence of sedge indicates a salty soil. Marsh nettles, perennial sow thistle and dock grow in soggy soil where drainage is inadequate. Chamomile, pennycress and peppergrass prefer soil with high limestone content. Communities of weeds rather than lone specimens are the best indicators of soil condition. To correct conditions, prodigious amounts of compost and manure will not only give substance to sandy soils but also help to lighten clay and hardpan soil.

The long taproots of dandelions and docks not only break up hardpan but bring nutrients up to the soil surface. Clover adds nitrogen to the soil, chickweed is rich in copper, couch grass contains potassium, and lamb's quarters have a lot of iron. The last are all good plants to add to a compost pile. In general the presence of weeds indicates declining soil fertility. Many weeds thrive only when soil conditions are not optimum ? mineral content is unbalanced, there's too much of one nutrient or another, or the texture is too thick (clay) or two thin (sand).

Well maintained garden soil is rich, crumbly and dark, reminiscent of the best chocolate cake! After a rain it does not form clods or pack together. Plants grow better, their root systems crowd out those weeds, their abundant vegetative growth casts a deep shade, suppressing weed growth and weed seed germination. A soil rich in organic matter has a thriving bacterial population. Weed seeds lose their viability quicker and tend to rot.

So next time you go out to weed your garden, rejoice in the knowledge that all the chickweed indicates that the soil is rich and fertile!
