

GARDENING GEMS

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Iris versicolor –
Harriston emblem

If you're lucky enough to be Irish - you're lucky enough.

May you live as long as you want, and never want as long as you live.

May the wind always be at your back.

May you be at heaven's gates an hour before the devil knows you're dead



Did you ever hear your mother say “*you have to eat a peck of dirt before you die so you might as well start now*”. Not sure where it came from or why, but actually, whether she knew it or was just teasing - there was merit in what she said. Digging in dirt may actually play a part in lifting depression. Some microbes may actually make you smarter. Most dirt exposures are beneficial. Dirt helps boost our immune system - in small doses it learns what viruses or bacteria it needs to be able to fight off, and stores that information to help our bodies to fight off illnesses later in life: <https://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/blogs/how-playing-in-dirt-boosts-your-health>



Ferns like a bright spot, but not full sun.

When watering, completely moisten the potting mix, but don't get water on the fronds. Ensure that the growing mix is always at least slightly damp.

Ferns do well in a spot with high humidity like the kitchen or the bathroom.

Many people like to take their ferns (or any houseplant) outside for the summer. If you do, make sure you acclimatize it gradually or you'll sunburn the whole thing.

Have you noticed a sticky shiny substance on the leaves of some of your houseplants? It's called honeydew - a substance produced by various sucking insects.

Look up to the underside of the leaves above. Aphids, mealy bugs etc ingest enormous quantities of sugar rich sap and must reject the excess. It falls to the leaves below. This can appear at any time of the year but it's most prevalent in the early spring when days get longer and insects reawaken from their dormancy.

(excerpts from the Laidback Gardener's blog)

The 2019 Perennial Plant of the year is Stachys Monieri 'Hummelo'. Stachys are low maintenance plants which are disease and pest resistant. Long lasting blooms with continued interest crinkled foliage. Although related the woolly Lamb's Ears (Stachys byzantine), it has totally different habits. It's a clump grower rather than an aggressive spreader like Lamb's Ears. Dense clusters of rose/purple spikes emerge from tidy mounds and last several weeks. Adored by pollinators but snubbed by rabbits and deer.

Even if you can't find the new variety 'Hummelo', the old standard (Stachys officianilis, also known as Bettony) should be available in local nurseries and it's also a solid performer.



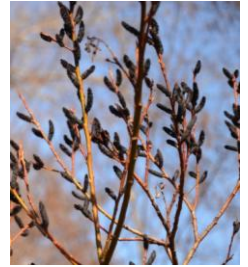
Between these weeds flowers grow

Remember folks, if you didn't attend the February meeting and pick up the Minto First forms, there's still a few days to get them from Sue. These must be handed in at our March 20th meeting so the certificates will be available in April. At the very least, bring your thinking cap, pen and cheque book to next week's meeting so you can quickly fill in the forms and leave your remittance.

It's almost Spring, which means soon Pussy Willow time. They show their coats as soon as the ground begins to thaw - and with all the rain we've been having off and on since January they should have an early start this year. There are several species with the inflorescence called a catkin. Unlike most flowers, catkins have no petals. Their covering of dense hair is designed to protect delicate flowers from the cold.

Willows are dioecious which means they have male and female flowers on separate plants. Males have the prettier catkin because they're larger and keep their oval shape. Female catkins droop and produce fluffy floating fuzz full of tiny seeds. Male flowers bear multiple yellow stamens that make the catkin glow.

Besides the wild swamp pussy willow you should be able to source out black, pink, red, blue streak, or corkscrew as well as the more unusual fantail willow. Any willow can be dried for arrangements - just cut branches when they reach the size you prefer and stand them in a vase without water. They will dry on their own and keep for years. The benefit for growing is just stick a live cutting in soil and water well. To control growth cut to ground after blooming.



Black Pussy Willow



Fantail Willow

It's a little early yet to be thinking about planting, but it's always fun to read tid-bits of information to see if you can remember for when the time comes. To start your **potato patch**, buy "certified" seed potatoes, these have been inspected to assure they are disease-free. Don't plant potatoes purchased from grocery stores as they have been sprayed to retard sprouting. Organic potatoes however would be fine. Pre-sprout seed potatoes before you put them in the ground. Exposing them to light encourages them to form nubs of growing shoots from the eyes (each eye is a dormant bud). Plants treated by "chitting," as this process is called, root quickly and mature earlier than those without sprouts. Chitting is simple: Just spread the potatoes in a sunny indoor place for two to three weeks before planting. Cutting removes the dominance of the eyes grouped at one end of the potato and encourages all of them to sprout. About a week before planting time, cut each large seed potato into pieces with one to two eyes each. Spread the pieces out in a single layer for a few days. The dried flesh is less likely to rot than raw cut surfaces.

Why not plant a whole potato? Because the many eyes on a large potato will grow into a multi-stemmed plant that only bears many small potatoes. Plant them cut-side down, so the eye will be uppermost, Then rake about three inches of fine loose soil over them. **The new crop of potatoes will form above, not below, the seed potatoes you planted.** Hilling up the row gives them an easily penetrated mound of soil to grow into and prevents greening from exposure to the sun. (Green potatoes are unfit to eat because they contain the toxic alkaloid solanine.)

(excerpts from Dayton Ohio Nursery blog)

When you purchase your seeds this year why not go organic and obtain them from Hawthorne Farm Organic Seeds. It's family owned and friendly, with fast shipping. Just because it's R.R.#3, 5961 5th Line Minto, remember It is a working farm so don't expect to drive out and pick up seeds from a store front. If you want to visit, order seeds with the notation you would like to pick-up, and make an appointment. As with many independent seed companies, Hawthorne Farms started on the kitchen table and through the years has developed into growing, selecting, and saving organic seeds. For more information on our closest seed company check the website to familiarize yourself. Owner Kim Delaney will be our featured presenter at the June meeting: <https://hawthornfarm.ca>



We all know about conserving water, but did you know there was a proper way to drink your eight (or whatever) glasses of H₂O per day? Sipping is the correct way of drinking water. Our mouth produces saliva which is alkaline, and since we have hydrochloric acid in our belly,



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our saliva stabilizes the acid. When you chug your water, especially if you are drinking from a plastic bottle, you do not hold that water and swish in your mouth. You just swallow it, so very little saliva reaches the stomach. Hence the atmosphere remains acidic. Sipping, rather than chugging, eases the entire digestive process. When water that is at room temperature or warmer touches the lips, it gives you a feeling of satisfaction, and signals the body about water intake. If you are chugging ice-cold water, it first shocks the senses, and when it gets to the stomach it just gets all the bacteria to go on a snow holiday. Having cold water with a meal is toxic to your digestion.

Our body is a miracle in itself! Sip your water for optimum digestion.



From Tree to Table: The Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association will be hosting the fourth annual "Maple Weekend" to be held the first weekend of April.

Local participants in Maple Weekend are Ron & Lillian Grubb 8936 County Road 5, Palmerston. To see what they have available for 2019 check: <https://mapleweekend.ca/list-of-local-sugar-producers/waterloo-wellington-area-sugarbushes/golden-treats-r-lil-maple-sweets>

An interesting note - this family is related to member Rita Heffernan. It was in memory of Rita's mother Irene Fudger that our Silver Trowel Award was initiated.

The next **Seedy Saturday** will be **March 23** - Erin United Church, 115 Main Street, Erin Free Admission from 11am - 3pm Learn about Gardening, Vegetable & Flower Seed/Exchange, and vendors - for more information MARTINRUDD93666@GMAIL.COM

Mark your calendars for Wednesday, April 17th. That's the date our neighbors the Howick Bloomers are having a Spring Fling to celebrate their 10th Anniversary.

Program is at 7:00 p.m. at the Howick Community Centre. Guest speaker will be Kim Delaney with a talk on the "Importance of Heritage Seeds".

The more we avail ourselves to the functions of other groups, the more they'll be likely to join us - and in turn increases the attendance for both (not only that, it keeps you up-to-date on how other venues function and what they're doing.)

Whether we believe Warton Willie, or the March lion and the lamb, you can be sure winter isn't over yet, nor the snow - so there's still going to be time to grab your cameras and take some "white stuff" shots for the 2019 photo competition. You might be able to incorporate a winter scene into any one of the seven topics:

1. Abandoned Building;
2. Tranquility (your interpretation)
3. Rows of Things
4. A Frosty Day
5. Creepy Vines
6. Winter White
7. Country Lane (or road)



Keep in mind that the District 7 Annual General Meeting will be Saturday, April 13th at the Mount Forest United Church. It's always another fun and informative time and a good way to cultivate new friendships.

In Gardening, Failure IS an option

The upcoming equinox and full moon on March 20th heralds the first day of spring - whoopee!! The first flowers we see, and often peeking through the snow, are crocus, snowdrops, and hellebores. **Hellebores** are poisonous, as are many plants in the garden. The sap and seeds, if handled a lot, will turn skin black and lead to tingling and numbness.

Daffodils are the flower to give on a couple's 10th anniversary - but give ten, presenting just one is a sign of bad luck.

Pulsatilla, the floral emblem of Manitoba, has an interesting way of planting its own seeds. The seeds are elongated with a hairy tail. The hairs on the tail are designed to hold different amounts of water so that, as they dry out and refill with moisture, they kind of corkscrew down toward the soil.

Scilla is a pretty little blue and white flower with, surprisingly enough, blue pollen. This is quite rare. Most pollen is in the white to yellow/orange range. Other flowers with blue pollen include Oriental poppies and borage. *This is something we must all be on the lookout, and take note of, this year.*

(excerpts from Shauna Dobbie's "Ten Neat Things")



This year's Volunteer Appreciation Dinner will be held Monday, Apr. 8th at the Harriston Community Centre.

Although many of us serve with several organizations - if you're getting this notice tell President Jean Anderson (519-505-514)

jeanurse1@gmail.com) or let her know at the March 20th meeting. As the Horticultural contact person she must RSVP with our attendee numbers by March 29th.

On Tuesday, April 9th at 7:30 p.m. "Before The Plate" will be shown at the Palmerston Norgan Theatre. This movie showcases 10 ingredients from planting to cooking and everything in between, to help better connect the modern consumer with their food. The film challenges modern myths about farming and reveals the obstacles the industry faces as it moves forward. The film stars John Horne, executive chef of the downtown Toronto restaurant Canoe.

Don't Forget!



Next Harriston Horticultural Meeting will be Wednesday, March 20th, 7:30 p.m. at the Seniors' Centre (Train Station)

Have your "Think Minto" forms ready to hand in.

Think forward to what to donate for the April Silent Auction
Slide presentation will be "Garden Art"

Bring a friend



The **Gardening Gems Newsletter** is published monthly by the Harriston and District Horticultural Society. Established in 1952 we now have 212 members.
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Secretary/Newsletter editor: Willa Wick Treasurer: Joanna Steckle
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