

The Garden Master News



Newsletter of the Atlantic Master Gardeners



ISSUE #12

VOLUME #1

WINTER 2020-2021



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Holiday Decor	1
President's Message	2-3
Gardener Profile	3-5
Book Review	6
Why Garden	7-8
Colours of Autumn	8-9
AMGA Event Calendar	10
2020 -2021 Executive	11



AMGA Member Holiday Creations
From Dec 7 Gardening Session

Happy Covid Holiday Season to All!





From the Front Porch

- by **Jim Sharpe**, AMGA President



View of Flowering Kale from home Front Porch, Halifax in December 2020

What a year 2020 has been! With the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic shutting everything down in the spring, we had to postpone our summer conference for the first time ever. We quickly pivoted to creative use of on-line Zoom meetings and have had greater involvement in AMGA activities than ever before. With the spring travel restrictions, I could not get to my cottage garden in New Brunswick until the end of June, though through a land swap I was able to plant a spring garden in Great Village, NS. Enclosed are photos of these two gardens from September as well as the view from my front porch this December.

The recommendation to “Stay the Blazes Home” has caused a great increase in interest in gardening with seed suppliers and nurseries selling out quickly this year. The focus is now on the local: growing local food, networking with local friends and building local community resilience. This year there is much more need than ever before for our work as Master Gardeners providing gardening information to new gardeners.

In April we started meeting weekly on-line using Zoom discussing our gardening issues. The weekly meetings continued until June, then every second week in the summer and the first Monday of each month in the Fall.

We have seen a steady increase in the number of participants so that by November over forty AMGA members and members in training were sharing their favorite gardening tools and strategies. In December we will discuss Christmas greenery and I look forward to our discussions in the New Year to help us plan our gardens.

For 2021 we are working on plans to present our conference “Designing Adaptive Gardens in Atlantic Canada” on-line. Our keynote speaker, Julie Moir Messervy from Vermont, has agreed to present on-line her keynote lecture “Seven Spatial Archetypes for Landscape Design” and her workshop on “Designing Home Outside.” The AMGA executive has established a committee chaired by Sandra Matchett, Vice President and Gigi Pelletier, Secretary, to work with Julie on the format for this virtual conference. Look for the notice of this event in the New Year.

Now that I’m officially retired from teaching at Mount Saint Vincent University, I have more time to devote to gardening associations and activities. I’m working with another AMGA member, Rebecca Lancaster, to organize the American Rhododendron Society Convention, June 3-6 2021 at the Old Orchard Inn in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia. With the COVID-19 travel restrictions we are planning a virtual on-line conference in addition to a in person meeting if the restrictions allow. The announcement of the conference is enclosed in this newsletter and further details are available on the convention website: ars2021.org.

Stay safe and happy gardening!

- Jim

From the Front Porch

(Continued from page 2)



**Cosmos, feathertop grass and sunflowers
in Cottage Garden, Murray Corner, NB**



**Mullein (Verbascum)
Great Village Garden, NS**

"Gardener" Profiles

The article beginning on the next page (page 4) is an article written by one of our Master Gardeners, Helen Cook, about Leah Murray, a unique gardener and fellow a member of the Yarmouth Garden Club.

Helen wrote this profile of Leah for the YGC Newsletter. This is to be one of numerous articles about their talented members. This article struck me as such a meaningful gesture of appreciation of individual Gardeners!

Perhaps you would like to submit an article for the Garden Master News profiling a fellow MG or another Gardener from whom you have gained gardening experience and would like to show your appreciation. Or perhaps you have had some personal gardening experiences you would like to share yourself.

If so, we could do a **Gardener Profile** with each Newsletter. So please tell us about your unique fellow Gardener or your own unique gardening experiences!

Send your profiles to:

suestuart@bellaliant.net

NOTE: Articles should be submitted as Microsoft word documents and photos as Jpegs.

Enjoy reading about Leah!

Spotlight on A Gardener: Leah Murray

-by Helen Cook



Forty years ago, Leah Murray returned from Boston with a 4-inch Sugar Maple in her purse! She “stuck it in the ground,” and today, it soars 70 feet above her panoramic hillside home of 50 years in Arcadia.



Yet this magnificent sentinel is only one of numerous trees Leah has grown from cuttings or seeds found in pits and ditches. Even a seed that flew into her apartment window in Halifax decades ago thrives now as a full-grown tree on her property, although unfortunately is a favourite of caterpillars.

Next to the Sugar Maple is a 30-foot Linden, one of two, that came from the lawn of a relative in Kentville. Then there's the Quaking Aspen, equally tall, grown from a seed found in a pit in Bear River, a Hemlock tree rescued from a ditch in Clyde River, another lofty Sugar Maple that began life as a seed in Lawrencetown, and a Balm of Gilead seed found in Carleton. While Leah insists that she just “stuck them in the ground,” surely there must be something more required to turn seed or cuttings into a giant tree. Whatever it is, she has it! Oaks she grew from acorns and later moved to different places on the property; Black Spruce and Pine thriving side by side in a copse below the house, with Cedar, Poplar and Birch nearby; Silver and Red Maples; a Katsura; and a giant Locust all testify to Leah's “green thumb.”

Pits from a plum and peach and a seed from a pear first enjoyed in the eating were put in pots and later transplanted, today providing Leah and her guests with delicious fresh fruit in season. An apple seed she picked up off the ground years ago is now about to produce its annual crop. And these are just the trees.

Leah's success did not come from studying gardening books, following careful planting instructions or plying the soil with compost, rooting compound or fertilizer. She's just a natural.

Growing up in Woods Harbour, Leah remembers digging up, without hesitation, and transplanting a tree at age 10, perhaps her first revelation that she had an instinctive understanding of and - *more importantly* - a delight in all growing things.

Shortly after Leah and Tom moved into their Kinney Hill home, neighbour Emmy Comeau crossed the road with gifts of plants, including a branch from a Dawn Redwood, which Emmy had ordered from Calgary. “Stuck in the ground,” the cutting thrived to generate further cuttings for friends, including one recently for Emmy's daughter. Another neighbour, Olive Purdy, contributed plants to Leah's increasingly diverse collection. In fact, it was Olive who first encouraged Leah to enter competitions, starting with beans at the Western Nova Scotia Exhibition, which promptly won a prize, and leading to repeated prize-winning themed arrangements at the Yarmouth Garden Club's semi-annual Flower Show & Tea.

In her garden's shaded areas, massive Blue Angel and Variegated Hosta make up for her other varieties lost to roaming deer.

(Continued on Page 5)

Spotlight on A Gardener

(Continued from Page 4)

A sprawling Plume Poppy, side by side with a Hydrangea in full bloom, surround one of Leah's garden sheds, while bordering the house, Morning Glory buzzes with bees, a sturdy Hollyhock is loaded with seeds, a bed of Hens and Chicks continues to multiply, and English and German Ivy relentlessly climb walls, railings and even a hanging wreath. Smooth Sumac, loaded with clusters of deep red berries, spread out along the back border of her property, adding yet another variety of plant to admire. Like all gardeners, Leah has her favourite plants: the Van Fleet and Westerland roses and a Porcelain Berry Vine, possibly because its flower is a dainty pink, her favourite colour.

Especially dear to her heart, however, is an oak gifted to her as a branch by her then five-year-old nephew, whose sudden fatal heart attack as a young man still is a source of deep sadness even as she derives particular joy from the healthy tree the oak has become.

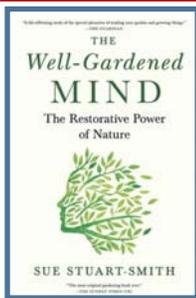
Leah's consistent success as a gardener makes it natural to ask her for advice. One enthusiastic recommendation is peat moss, which she has used extensively over the years, always making sure she wets it well and doesn't let it dry out before applying.

As abundant as Leah's garden is, many trees and plants have preceded those that now thrive, as evidenced by the remnants of a vast vegetable garden and a two-foot-wide tree stump nearby. Strawberry plants, an apple tree, a Mock Orange and a Beauty Bush are some of plants that added fragrance and bounty at one time over the last five decades.

Whatever the season, Leah never has to wonder how to spend her days. Whether inside with her Christmas Cactus, African Violets, or "rescued" Orchid, or outside with her plants, trees, flowers and vines, each is the focus of her attention at any one time, whether to encourage, water, prune, harvest or just enjoy and admire.



Admiration is a fitting word to describe what people feel for Leah Murray, a delightful person who through her own joy of gardening is a constant example to visitors, fellow gardeners, and the friends and neighbours to whom she generously passes on cuttings and plants.



Book Review by Jim Sharpe

“The Well-Gardened Mind: The Restorative Power of Nature,”

Written by **Sue Stuart-Smith**, (Scribner, NY, 2020)

When the COVID-19 shut down started last winter the seed companies suddenly experienced huge increases in seed orders from a new gardeners. Why the sudden turn to gardening? Sue Stuart-Smith, an English psychiatrist and partner of landscape designer Tom Stuart-Smith, provides the answer in her new book. Although she first considered gardening “outdoor housework,” just another chore, through planting a garden at “The Barn, Serge Hill” just north of London, and watching her family grow she realized the pleasure of gardening. The book is an exploration and explanation of the impact of gardening on the mind, through her own experience, her clinical work, and her extensive research.

She argues that modern cognitive science has the wrong metaphor for understanding the brain. It is not a programable machine-like black box computer that just needs to be reset with a new story. It is an organic, growing, social construction, much more similar to a tree in a forest. In fact our brain cells develop neural networks through the communication of their *dendrites*, named for their similarity to branches and roots. She states: “...the active process of pruning and weeding that maintains the health of our neural networks is carried out by a group of cells that function as the brain’s resident gardeners” (p.33)

The book contains thirteen chapters providing wonderful descriptions of the impact of gardening on our moods, our mental health, our behaviours and our communities. She tells the story of her grandfather who was a First World War survivor of a brutal POW camp in Turkey and recovered through his work in the garden. She talks with prisoners at Riker’s Island who rely on the prison garden to keep their sanity.

She describes the work of gardening in the recovery of PTSD patients. She shows how gardening can be used to overcome addictions. From history she recounts the gardens maintained in the trenches of the First World War and how important gardens were for recovery from shell shock. And she explains the cognitive space that gardens create as places of recovery, learning and renewal.

Most interesting to me is a story from colonial Canada. She describes James Douglas finding “a perfect Eden” of ancient Garry oaks in a meadowland of blue Camassias and butterflies where he established a Hudson Bay Company fort on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. What he ignored was that this land was created by the Lekwungen people, who maintained the meadow by harvesting and replanting the Camassia bulbs, removing the white flowered death camas, and burning the meadow every fall to keep the lands open and fertile. With the establishment of the fort and colony, the settlers banned the burning of the meadows and within a few generations the shrubs choked out the Garry oaks and the meadowland.

She ends the book with a discussion of the crisis of climate change and the emotional difficulties of taking part in the work of the environmental movement. To repair our relation to nature she states that we need to nurture our ability to find ourselves, which is found in the experience of “flow” when we lose our egos through working with our gardens. She concludes that if we can use our gardens to restore our relationship with nature then as a society we may find a way to survive.



Why I Garden

- by **Barbara Mrgich**
Master Gardener, Penn State Ext.

This article is one of numerous gardening articles by Master Gardeners of Adams County, PA and Frederick and Carroll Counties, MD at:

<https://www.emmitsburg.net/gardens/index.htm>

Thought you might be interested in looking through these articles. Their Program seems to be another great opportunity for Master Gardeners to provide gardening information to our Communities!

Gardening is therapeutic. It is also good exercise. I guess, actually, a lot of things meet those particular criteria. For instance, in our younger days, my husband and I kept about eight horses. We bedded their stalls with sawdust, and cleaned their stalls every day. That resulted in a rather large manure pile by the end of the year. Neither of us minded cleaning those stalls. There is just something about working in a warm horse barn on a cold winter night with the smell of fresh hay and the horses nickering. It's very relaxing — even though you are working. It's Therapeutic.

At the same time I kept a very sizable vegetable garden. Each fall after the vegetables were done, we would cover the whole area with the contents of the manure pile, then plow it under. Other vegetable gardening neighbors warned me that my vegetables would be ruined by the sawdust, but each year, I had huge, beautiful vegetables.

Now I know the basis for the worry about sawdust is a complicated scientific explanation called "Nitrogen Tie-up". Without having any real knowledge of what I was doing, my garden was unharmed because that sawdust was well composted before any vegetable seeds got near it.

The lesson from that story is - never dump fresh

sawdust on your plants, but old, composted sawdust is actually an excellent amendment.

I really can't explain why I can spend hours weeding in the garden, and totally enjoy it. I guess I would have to say, it's my passion. It feeds my soul. Give me a vacuum cleaner and tell me to clean the house for three hours and I'm exhausted!

There is a wonderful feeling of fulfillment in planting, nurturing, and grooming a garden, then reaping the harvest of its beauty. Or, if you are a vegetable gardener, enjoying a meal consisting of food which you grew with your own hands.

I love to take a section of my yard that is nice, but not sensational, and study it to determine how to make it better. I suppose creating a living and growing work of art gives me the same feeling an artist has as he puts brush to canvas and creates a beautiful picture. Sometimes I look at certain plant combinations, and can barely believe the beauty of it all. Then I run and get my camera so that at the end of the growing season I can look back over my pictures and enjoy the beauty once again. We all know who created that beauty. It's no credit to me. I am just the caretaker.

On many hot, summer afternoons when the sun is lighting up the garden, my husband and I sit in the shade on the patio sipping iced tea. We watch the butterflies enjoying that hot sun, and nectaring on their favorite flowers. We watch the hummingbirds flit from blossom to blossom never staying at any one flower for barely more than a brief second. We see the busy birds diligently bringing nesting materials to the birdhouses, or, later, bringing food to their babies. It's so much better than watching TV!

Why I Garden

(Continued from Page 3)

I've learned so much just from observing nature unfold in my garden. I've watched caterpillars turn into butterflies, seen male butterflies fly upside down trying to court a nonchalant female, I've nudged a sleeping bumble bee awake as it slept on a flower. I've watched a fat little bee crawling on its tummy with its legs dragging behind it, trying to reach the nectar way up inside a flower.

In March, after the catkins on the pussy willow turn yellow with pollen, I love to watch the birds peck wildly into the catkin trying to get the tiny insect that is after the nectar that the catkin holds. Usually, they go at it so violently, they knock the catkin right off its branch onto the patio. In the fall, small birds will land on the tall ornamental grass seed heads and begin pecking at the seed. The grass will bend toward the ground, then come back up with the bird still hanging on and eating for the entire ride. I call it a bird's amusement park ride. Very entertaining!

I realize that a lot of people don't share my gardening enthusiasm. In fact, most of my family members think I am slightly crazy for spending so much time out there. But, I think that if you are still reading this, you are with me. You get it! Passion is a hard word to explain. My front yard is full of plants. I like to watch people walk by. The majority just pass by and never turn their head, but every now and then, a person will stop and look for a while. Then I know. I've found another kindred spirit!

The Colours of Autumn in the Garden

- by Heather Connors-Dunphy

The American poet Stanley Horowitz is often quoted. He wrote, "Winter is an etching, spring a watercolor, summer an oil painting, and autumn a mosaic of them all."

What we see in our autumn gardens is an amalgam of the seasons, the spare and leafless forms of deciduous trees and shrubs, the bronzes, beiges and browns of spent flowers and seed pods, the rosette leaves of slumbering biennials.

This year I have left most perennials as they stand for use by song birds and other small creatures; the stalks and seed pods remain. Until the snow comes most of these stand tall. The only exception to this is the daylily bed which has been completely cut back. In an escalating war against coltsfoot and horsetail, I decided to "scorch the earth" and give these weeds three vicious weedings. The bed has been refreshed with a coating of compost and shredded leaves.

When I first started the MG program there was debate (or so it seemed to me) as to whether it was better to clean up the garden in fall...reduce disease, keep volunteer seeds from being able to germinate, have everything neat for the start of the gardening year in spring vs leaving a lot of undiseased plant material in place for the benefit of other creatures and to enjoy its structural nature into the winter and maybe spring. I have moved back and forth between these two poles and offer my middle ground.

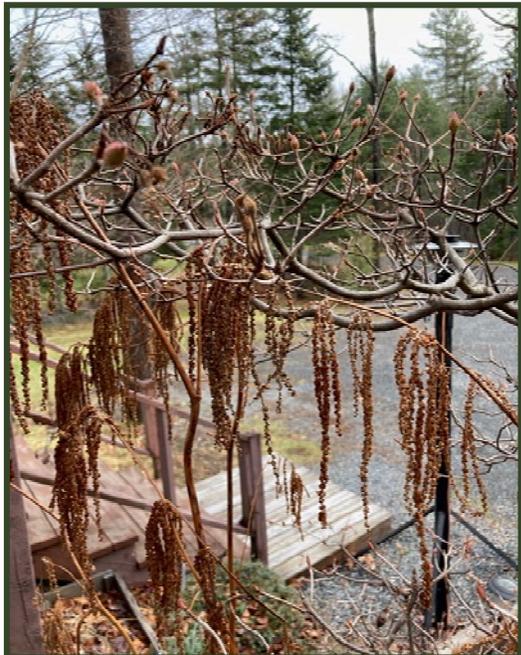
What follows is a series of photographs of the mosaic that is autumn in the garden.

(Continued on Page 5)

The Colours of Autumn in the Garden

- by **Heather Connors-Dunphy**

(Continued from Page 4)



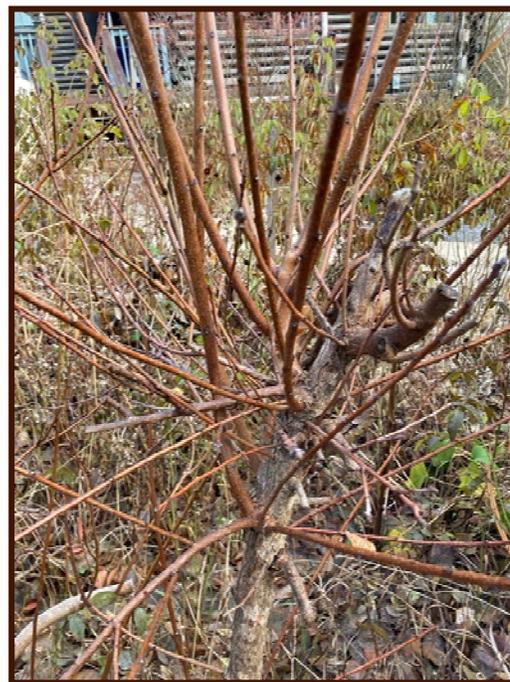
Seed heads of Goatsbeard, *Aruncus dioicus* under buds on Azalea 'Northern Hi-lights'



Last fruits on Burning Bush, *Euonymus alatus*



Japanese Silver Grass, *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silverfeder' showing off its fall colours



Bare branches of Smoketree, *Cotinus coggygria*. These are iffy in my zone so is cut back each spring

AMGA Event Calendar 2021

January 2021

9 Canadian Hort Therapy Assoc Webinar <https://www.chta.ca/featured-events>

25 AMGA Executive Meeting - Zoom - 7:00 pm

February 2021

13 Canadian Hort Therapy Assoc Webinar <https://www.chta.ca/featured-events>

March 2021

1 - Deadline: Newsletter articles (Spring)

29 - AMGA Executive Meeting - Zoom - 7:00

May 2021

31 - AMGA Executive Meeting - Zoom - 7:00

June 2021

1 - Deadline: Newsletter articles (Summer)

3 - 6 - American Rhododendron Society Convention June 2-6, Old Orchard Inn (ars2021.org)

July 2021

7-8 - AMGA Conference - More details to be determined.

May be Virtual /Live /VideoSpeaker and workshop leader Julie Moir Messervy

September 2021

1 Deadline: Newsletter articles (Fall)

12 - 17 - International Master Gardener Conference -Norfolk, Virginia
<https://www.internationalmastergardener.com>



AMGA Executive 2020-2021

NOTE: To contact a member of the Executive below, please send an email to:

atlanticmastergardeners3@gmail.com

PRESIDENT:	Jim Sharpe
VICE-PRESIDENT:	Sandra Matchett
PAST PRESIDENT:	Lynn Brooks
SECRETARY:	Gigi Pelletier
TREASURER:	Johanne Robertson
MEMBER AT LARGE (1): Annapolis Valley/Central NS	Carol Goodwin
MEMBER AT LARGE (2): Halifax NS (Coastal Gardeners)	Ann Buck
MEMBER AT LARGE(3): Cape Breton NS	Janet Elsie
MEMBER AT LARGE(4): New Brunswick	Heather Connors-Dunphy
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR:	Carolyn Downie
NEWSLETTER EDITOR:	Sue Stuart