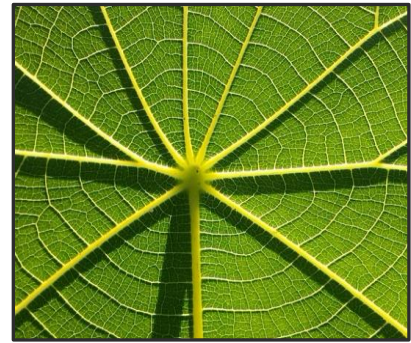


DIGGING IN

NOVA SCOTIA HORTICULTURE FOR HEALTH NETWORK

Summer 2023 Volume 9 Issue 3 nshhortnetwork@gmail.com

The Nova Scotia Horticulture for Health Network is a coalition of people interested in supporting horticulture for health initiatives through resource-sharing, exchange of practices/knowledge, and networking.



Embracing Nature: Tips for Establishing a Wildlife Garden in Summer

Text by Tim Mason

Photos by T. Mason, Lascay.Unsplash & DirectNativePlants.com

The long days of summer and subsequent flowering periods for many plants provides an explosion of colour across our gardens. This can be a time for gardeners to briefly relax and enjoy the rewards of hard work carried out in the less pleasant months preceding. For our wildlife friends though this is a time for activity, pollinators humming and buzzing across flowers seeking nectar, while dodging birds and other predators looking to further their own personal interests in the food chain.

Maintaining the 3 key elements of food, shelter, and water in your garden will provide habitat and subsistence for a wide variety of temporary visitors and permanent residents. Situating these elements nearby seating areas or by windows allows a glimpse into their world while maintaining a safe distance. Here are some tips to implement this summer in creating a wildlife-friendly environment:

Shelter

Ill effects from sun exposure is a serious consideration during summer - this rings true for the community in the garden. Shelter elements allow escape from heat and an opportunity to rest before resuming their daily tasks. Creating several locations of varying size and material increases biodiversity and prevents overcrowding.

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Photo top right: M. Jerrard

- **Shady areas** - Escaping the baking heat of the summer sun can be the difference between life and death for an exhausted pollinator. Shade can take all forms as the sun moves across the sky throughout the day - observe the space and create cool locations for resting wildlife.
- **Rocks** - Piles of rocks perform the dual benefit of transferring heat above to cold blooded animals, and establishing a cool zone on the soil beneath. Stack rocks sturdily, but with gaps to allow for creatures to access the sheltered areas between.
- **Ground cover** - Establishing ground cover instead of mulch creates a safer passage for smaller animals to travel through the garden. Planting a low growing variety will assist with shading out weeds and outcompeting invasives. Hosta are a popular choice for this purpose - a North American native alternative is the Bunchberry (*Cornus Canadensis*).



Food & Water

During summer the requirement for water is increased, as dehydration can be fatal to most organisms living on Earth.

- **Water options** - Water should be available in as many forms as possible. Moving water is ideal - the fresh water allows for drinking and bathing while the sound is incredibly calming. Despite this, any shallow waterproof vessel will provide benefit, from large dishes for birds and frogs to tiny pools for bees and butterflies.
- **Rest & recover** - A garden can be a temporary oasis for pollinators visiting during the bloom season. All that pollen and nectar collection can take a toll and exhausted bees are a common sight on hot summer days. Moving them gently to a shaded area and providing a few drops of sugar water can replenish their energy before recommencing their activity. It is not recommended to provide sugar water on a regular basis - only as a temporary boost for pollinators suffering from overexertion.
- **Native plants for native species** - Gardens should be full of the plants we love, and non-native plants can still provide sustenance and habitat for local species of wildlife. However, finding opportunities to use native alternatives is recommended, as these species generally tend to be more acclimated to local growing conditions and more closely represent the natural food source for wildlife.

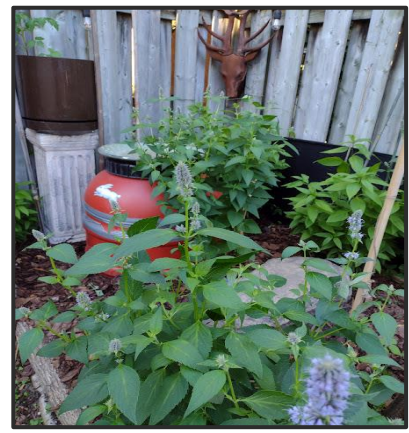
Plants

- **Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier canadensis*) - The fruits produced in June/July are a staple of several bird species, including cedar waxwings. The tart berries are edible and can be used in pies or jams, if the birds don't get them all first!

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- **Yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium*) - A hardy perennial with clusters of flat topped flowers that are coveted by butterflies. Both foliage and flowers last through early to late summer, bringing a pleasant aroma to the garden.
- **Anise Hyssop** (*Agastache foeniculum*) - Another fragrant favourite for the wildlife garden. This plant provides food for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Clusters of bright blue flowers erupt in spikes and the plant gives off a pleasant anise smell when bruised.



serviceberry, yarrow, anise hyssop

Summer is an excellent time to witness the network of life your garden supports - unless you set time aside to sit and observe, many beautiful relationships can be missed. Take heart in your role as a provider to your local community in the garden, celebrating victories however small, and learning lessons on things that may not have thrived as expected. Observe how nature interacts and grows with your space - remember 'If nothing is living in your garden, then your garden is not living!'

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Tim Mason is a nature-based gardener living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Originally from Australia, Tim grew up with a deep love for nature which influences his garden design and creation, notably 'Wildlife Windows'.

Edible Flowers – Top Choices with Ideas for Easy Use

By Lana Bos

If you enjoy growing and cooking fresh herbs, you're sure to enjoy the taste and versatility of freshly cut edible flowers. More than just a garnish, here are five popular edible flowers and some ideas for how to use them.

Borage *Borago officinalis*

Borage is a large plant, with edible leaves and beautiful blue edible flowers. It's good for the beginner flower aficionado, as the blooms have a soft and subtle taste. For lighter flavour, remove the stamens (black centre) and just eat the petals.

The plant is best grown in full sun with well-drained soil. Easy to grow from seed, keep seedlings well watered until they are established. Bees love this plant, so if you are cultivating a crop that requires pollination, plant a couple of borage nearby.

Pick young leaves directly from the stem and fresh flowers just after they have opened. Both can be used in salads, and the flowers look great on cakes or frozen in ice-cubes.



Nasturtium *Tropaeolum majus*



Not only are nasturtiums great ornamentals, but the leaves, flower buds and flowers are all edible. Not to everyone's tastes, they are a bit spicy and definitely add spark to a salad! For best use, harvest young leaves, newly formed flower buds, and just opened flowers.

Common nasturtiums can be grown from seed, while some varieties are vegetatively propagated. Plants grow well in containers and some varieties are trailing and have double flowers.

Easy to care for and maintain, they will take full sun or part shade. Shear plants back a couple times a year if they start to get unruly.

Marigold *Calendula officinalis*, *Tagetes* spp.

Most commonly used as a bedding plant or a repellent to pests in the garden, marigolds have edible flowers that will add a zesty zip to any dish. A word of caution, African and French marigolds are bitter so for palatability, eat only pot or signet marigold blooms. The single flowering *Tagetes signata* is a good choice for beginners and has a slight spicy tang.

Plants grow best in full sun, well-drained soil and can be planted directly into garden beds, or as a container plant.



Violas and Pansies *Viola* spp.

Pansies and violas are gorgeous spring hardy plants with mild tasting flowers. Cut young flowers and use them in salads, pastries and just about anywhere. The tri-colour bloom is cheerful and sure to be a crowd pleaser.



Photo: Lana Bos

In Northern climates, violas are frost hardy and are known to be the first and last blooms in a garden. They thrive in cooler weather and tend to die back in the heat of the summer. If this happens, give them a hair cut, and tuck them in the shade, bringing them back out in the cooler fall weather, for a late bloom.

Violas are easy to grow from seed, and they do well in containers and slightly shaded beds.

Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*

In North America, we often consider the stoic dandelion a weed, and do our best to eradicate it, while in European countries it is cultivated as an agricultural crop for many uses. All parts of the plant are edible; the root is used as a coffee substitute, the young spring leaves are a great nutrient rich salad green, and the flowers are tasty in salads, fried as a side dish and can be processed into syrup or wine.

When using the flower as an edible, the bud or the young flowers can be picked and the greens removed. Flowers stay open best if placed in a bowl of water until used.



Photo: Lana Bos

Dandelion is easy to grow from seed or a small piece of the root. This hardy perennial will come back every year and can spread vigorously, so make sure to use it regularly to keep it contained.

Tips and Tricks for Using Edible Flowers:

Freeze flowers in ice-cubes for fun and fancy drinks. Infuse vinegars with fresh flowers. Candied or crystallized flowers are great cake toppers. Decorate focaccia bread with flowers. Add edible flowers to ice-cream or potatoes.

Serious Note: When using edible flowers from a therapeutic or community garden, make sure you only eat blooms that have not been sprayed with any chemicals.

Lana Bos is a horticulturist by trade and by heart. She worked at the Federal Women's Prison in Truro teaching a Therapeutic Horticulture Skills Training Program from 2005 until 2017 and has witnessed first-hand how learning with plants can change lives. Lana works and travels with Dalhousie University, Faculty of Agriculture doing International Development and curriculum work. Her passion is teaching agriculture and helping to improve food security and livelihoods. She is still found in her garden most days, where she uses plants as her therapy, but also loves to grow all manner of fruits and vegetables.

Landscapes for Health

Cemeteries: Historical Context as Healing Places and Green Spaces

By Lesley Fleming, HTR

Cemeteries are not often thought of as gardens though they provide plant-rich environments. Their prominent purpose today is as places for grieving and healing, a final resting place for departed loved ones. In this context, some would consider them a type of restorative healing garden (Fleming, 2021).

The historical context of cemeteries reveals that they were the first public green spaces in the 1830's, the closest thing to parks that were accessible for most people. These tranquil settings, viewed as sacred healing places and restorative meadows, played multiple roles - spending time with deceased family, spiritual communing, and strolling, socializing and picnicking (National Gallery of Art, 2021; Downing, 1849).

The history of cemeteries, described in an 1849 essay, revealed the perceptions and uses of cemeteries (Downing, 1849). Referring to the famous Mount Auburn Cemetery, Downing comments it had “the double wealth of rural and moral associations . . . it awakens, at the same moment, the feeling of human sympathy and the love of natural beauty. ... The space was also an educational tool, providing exemplary taste in planting arrangements, as well as a guide to American history” (National Gallery of Art, n.d.).

Cemeteries have played a role in connecting people to plants in times of grief, sorrow and remembrance. This element differentiates them from other green spaces, though memorial gardens have provided similar connections. A few examples elucidate the role of cemeteries, and the healing role nature plays in these settings.

Beny-sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery/Cimetière Militaire Canadien de Béný-sur-Mer, Reviens, France



Normandy Sightseeing Tours

An important war cemetery, offering remembrances for fallen soldiers, [Beny-sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery](#) is a symbol of peace, history and positive relationships between countries. Designed by P.D. Hepworth for 2,048 burials, the majority Canadian, the beauty of the cemetery is the individualized plantings at each grave, and [individualized quotes on each headstone](#) that families of the fallen chose. The serene setting, enclosed by pines, maples, and hedges, commemorates people, service, history, and multi-generational care of the site by the Reviere community and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (Government of Canada, 2019). The final resting place amid the gardens of Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery, the burial ground of predominantly Canadian soldiers killed during the later stages of WWII in the Battle of Normandy is another example of cemeteries as healing places and green spaces (photo below: Government of Canada).



Sacramento Old City Cemetery and Historic Rose Garden, California

[The Old City Cemetery](#) was established in 1849, with the Historic Rose Garden created in 1992 on a neglected area of the grounds (MacKenzie, 2022). Roses dating back to the early 19th century—heirloom roses, found roses, ones from gold rush sites and other historic sites have been planted—with a botanical database now recording the history including photos of each specimen. Now considered one of the great rose gardens in the U.S., cuttings from the collection are shared with other botanical gardens as a preservation safeguard, and as a living library for study according to T. Cairns, former president of the World Federation of Rose Societies. This site, originally a cemetery, functions now as a community gathering spot. Volunteers from the Historic Rose Garden maintain the grounds, hosting workshops, and rose sales with additional maintenance done by offenders from the local Sheriff's Work Release program.

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Cemetery-School Partnership

An interesting model partnering a school with a local cemetery has been beneficial to both organizations while providing students with insight, experience and hands-on activity spanning several disciplines. Sarah Sterling, Coordinator of Educational Horticulture at Shipley School, Bryn Mawr, PA, initiated a history/gardening service project at Lower Merion Baptist Church, founded in 1808. Twelfth graders prune shrubs, excavate sinking headstones, restore and replant [cradle graves](#). Set up as part history lesson and service project, with permission from the Cemetery Board and in guidance from the Legacy Marker Program, the students “learned important lessons about horticulture, reflected on the meaning of life and death, and gained awareness about the rich history of our local region” (Sterling, 2023). Photo: S. Sterling



Purple Produce

Text & photos by Lesley Fleming, HTR

Purple fruits and vegetables are nutritionally dense, rich in anthocyanins, vitamins, minerals and fiber. Their natural plant pigment makes them appealing to choose and taste. These [superfoods](#) include beetroot, purple corn, [purple sweet potato](#), figs and acai berries.



Resources Summer 2023



Photo: D. Parkhouse.unsplash

[Canadian Wildlife Federation](#) spans lakes, rivers, endangered species, biodiversity, forests, grasslands, coasts & oceans in support of education, sustainability leadership and connections to nature. Its Gardening for Wildlife program, iNaturalist citizen science program, on-line resources and *Canadian Wildlife & Wild* magazines use multiple platforms to inform, share, and inspire.

[Gardens for Wildlife](#) website is hosted by the National Wildlife Federation with resources, tip sheets, guides and videos. With a focus on native plants (sale of plants, native plant locator), support for wildlife gardens at schools, communities and residential homes, along with a program to certify and support wildlife habitats, their efforts have provided leadership for 50 years.

[The Nature Conservancy](#) is active in more than 70 countries & territories across the globe, with projects protecting more than 125 million acres of land, with a focus on climate and biodiversity. Videos on their site share their stories, successes and help make connections between individuals & communities.

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www.ediblewildfood, <https://wildwood.express>, <https://www.gardenia.net>,
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