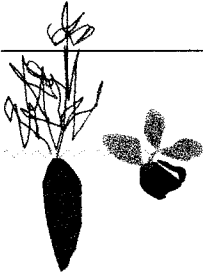


NAGANEWS

Nepean Allotment Garden Association Bulletin



Spring, 2002

THIS AIN'T HAY

If you would like a cheap source of compost to add to your plot, our intrepid reporter, Bill Nye, last year investigated the process of obtaining some from the City of Ottawa Waste Facility.

The results were quite surprising, he says. For the sum of \$15, he obtained a trailer-full of well aged, screened compost. This amounted to 455 kg, or 1,000 lbs of the black substance.

Bill goes on: "Show up at the Trail road main gate by driving south on Moodie drive from Hunt Club road and follow the signs to the waste facility (where the garbage trucks are headed). First of all, you have to be weighed by driving onto the vehicle scale. Then, the attendant will point you to the large pile of compost nearby. Simply load your compost and drive onto the outgoing weigh scale, where you can pay the man \$15.

"The facility is open Monday to Friday from 7:00 to 18:00, Saturday from 8:00 to 16:00, and Sunday from 8:00 to 15:00.

"The quality of the compost is excellent. I would think I received the equivalent of 10 wheelbarrow loads of compost."

While on the subject of compost, it has been decided that it is no longer economical to make **mushroom compost** available to our members. Last year's increase in transportation costs, together with a decrease in members' demand for the product, made us think twice about providing it again. There is little doubt that fuel prices will jump again this season. This would result in an unreasonable increase in cost for the Association and its members.

For those who may still wish to use mushroom compost this year, the Canadian Cancer Society offers the stuff at a couple of locations on Merivale Road every summer.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Volunteers make this Garden Association work. As we start a new gardening season, I would like to thank on behalf of all gardeners the many volunteers who make the Association a success. I would also encourage every gardener to volunteer some part of their Summer to helping us out. It can be as simple as walking around picking up plastic bags or paper which blows into the garden area, or checking the composter to make sure others don't put non-compostables in the bins (plastic and stones don't compost worth a darn). Make it a resolution to do something this Summer.

Bill Nye

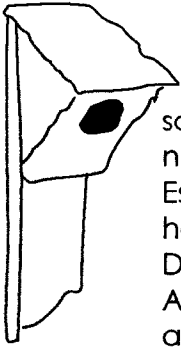
AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

Every year, a few gardeners put off notifying the Registrar of whether they wish to keep their plot, or have decided to discontinue using it. There is always a long waiting list of potential users, and it is unfair to keep them on tenderhooks. In the past, although it is not part of her responsibilities, the Registrar has made sometimes repeated phone calls to obtain a "yes" or "no".

This year and in the future, if we have not heard from you by April 30, we will assume that you no longer wish to use your plot or plots, and will assign it or them to other gardeners. Payment must be received by May 30.

Please send your renewal form today to:

**Mary St-Jean, Registrar,
Nepean Allotment Garden Association
8 Assiniboine Drive
Nepean, ON
K2E 5R7**



GIVING INSECTS THE BIRD

If you look along the fence on the south side of our park, you will find a number of birdhouses mounted there. Especially designed for bluebirds, these houses were obtained free of charge by Denis St-Jean from a gentleman in Almonte, after the Citizen ran an article about them in its bird column one day.

Not only are bluebirds attractive, they are insectivorous. They stuff their beaks with hundreds of bugs every day, keeping the pests off our crops and our bodies in the process.

We are told that there are generally two nestings a year in this part of Ontario. With Spring weather having arrived early this year, it is possible that we missed the first such nesting. Please do not unduly approach the birdhouses. We want to make the bluebirds welcome.

ROCKS, ROCKS EVERYWHERE

It sometimes seems that rocks are actually growing in our gardens. Every summer, many gardeners find them sprouting here and there. Our first action is to place them along the edge of our garden, with the intention of eventually transferring them to the rockpile near the equipment shed. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen, with the result that grass overgrows and hides them.

This can become a hazard to our volunteers who mow the grass in the Summer. Rocks can be catapulted by the mower blades and seriously injure the operators. Such incidents can hit us in the pocketbook, as well. The damage caused by an errant rock can result in considerable repair expenses. It would be a shame if rental fees had to be increased because of such neglect.

As we do each year, we ask your cooperation in transferring the rocks you find to the rock pile. There are wheelbarrows available for this purpose. Just ask one of the Board members.

CAN DO

Jim Bird has a novel idea for reducing the shock of transplanting some vegetables that are home-grow from seed.

He uses tins commonly utilized for nuts and cocoa -- the fat ones that come with a plastic cover which seals the tin after it has been opened. After enjoying the contents, he cuts out the metal bottom of the tin with a can opener, replaces it with the plastic lid, and then re-inserts the metal bottom, thus providing a double bottom for the container.



When it is time for transplanting, he simply pushes the plant and soil out with a minimum of disturbance to the roots. He finds that the tin will last two or three seasons.

The same can be done with pet food cans and others of similar size by purchasing plastic lids from grocery stores or pet shops.

Good News!

The City of Ottawa is now paying our third party liability insurance, which saves our gardening club \$378 per year.

IF YOU HAVE A SURPLUS ...

... why not bring it to one of the soup kitchens in the Ottawa area?

one such organization that is always thankful for receiving donations is the Shepherds of Good Hope, at 233 Murray street (tel.: 789-8210).

There are others. Call city social services for information.

Your Board of Directors is planning on purchasing 3 new picnic tables. If you want a table in your area, please contact Ian Reid.



TALL TALES ABOUT COMPOSTING

Source: Brooklyn Botanic Garden

It is a tribute to composting that humans have taken such a simple, natural process and elevated it through myth and misunderstanding into a form of New-Age alchemy. The spread of these myths has been facilitated by word of mouth, misguided publications and, worst of all, hard-core marketing. Let's put to rest some of the more popular myths.

There are scores of weird and wonderful commercial designs from black plastic cubes with deluxe sliding doors to rotating drums to free-wheeling spheres. The prices range from tens to hundreds of dollars.

Ads and popular literature lead many to believe that an enclosed bin is essential. The reality is that heaps or piles work just fine.

Here are a few more myths that have been propagated in articles and advertisements:

Bioactivators: These bacteria-laden powders and liquids are the snake oil of composting. The fact is that special inoculants are unnecessary. There are approximately 10 *trillion* bacteria in a spoonful of garden soil. Every fallen leaf and blade of grass you add to your pile is already covered with hundreds of thousands of bacteria -- more than enough to do the job.

Yeasts, elixirs and worms: There are a number of recommended additives for boosting compost performance, most of which are unsubstantiated or silly. Some practitioners suggest pouring cola into the pile to increase biological activity. It will, but mostly in the form of wasps and ants. Adding yeast is expensive and useless. Worms do a tremendous amount

of good, but need not be purchased: just build a pile and they will come.

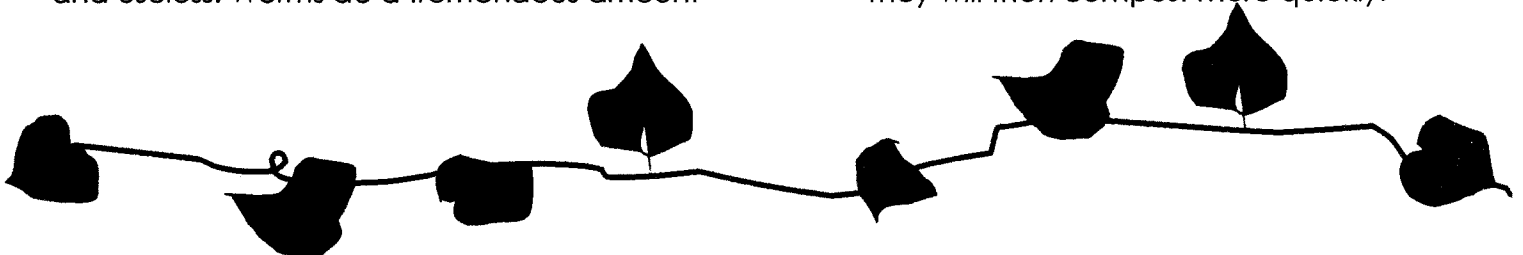
Fertilizer: Adding this to increase the nitrogen content is wasteful and expensive. Moreover, synthetic fertilizers contain high salt levels and other compounds (perhaps even pesticides) which are harmful to worms and microorganisms.

Lime: Adding ground limestone to your pile will turn your compost into an ammonia factory, with nitrogen rapidly lost as a noxious gas. Finished compost is almost always neutral.

Layers: Building a compost pile by layering browns/greens/browns lasagna style will lead to layers of anaerobic activity (and no composting). When building a pile, throw an armful of browns, then an armful of greens, and add a little water as you go if materials are dry. Then mix and fluff after every few additions.

A properly built and managed compost pile should smell like a forest floor. Odors result primarily from trying to compost grass clippings by themselves, adding too many or the wrong types of food scraps, and allowing too much water or too little air to get into the pile. Before placing vegetable material into our compost bins, remember the following:

- 1] Few weed seeds are destroyed during composting. Try to put them into the compost bins *before* they go to seed.
- 1] Let the pulled weeds dry and wither in the sun before transferring them to the bins.
- 1] Break or cut coarse corn and sunflower stalks and similar material into small pieces. They will then compost more quickly.



CHECKING YOUR SOIL'S pH BALANCE

A few years ago, Dave Nott had the soil in his garden tested professionally. No doubt this helped him determine what extra nutrients were needed for maximum benefit.

Accutest labs, located on Colonnade road, did the testing. They found that Dave's garden did not need phosphate or potash, but that it would benefit from nitrogen. They suggested he apply a 33-0-0 fertilizer for this.

The lab also discovered that there were very high levels of phosphorus and potassium. These, they said, could cause reduced yields or quality of some crops.

Their ratings showed that his soil was acceptable for most garden plants, but not for acid-loving ones.

Did you know?

- 1 Plant taller plants on the north side of the garden so they don't shade the shorter ones.
- 1 If you have trouble sowing small seed such as turnip or carrot, mix 4 parts dry sand with 1 part seed and then sow. The result will be a more even distribution of seed.
- 1 Plant vegetables from the same families together so you can rotate the crops each year and avoid transmission of soil-borne diseases.
- 1 If a single washer doesn't stop a hose coupling leak, add a second washer. This often fills the gap that is causing the leaking.
- 1 Deep-rooted weeds are much easier to remove if you wait until after a rainfall or after soaking the area with a hose.
- 1 If you plan to leave your new hose at the garden site, wrap strips of black tape in a couple of locations along the hose. It will make it look old and leaky, and discourage theft.

NEED A LOCKER FOR TOOLS, ETC.?

By Dave Nott

There have been a number of requests for additional lockers to be provided for storage of tools, hoses, etc.

These are a quite expensive proposition and beyond the current means of the Association, unless very high rentals are imposed.

In view of the above, the Board has decided to approach the city of Ottawa to see whether funds could be made available from previous city of Nepean reserves.

Any other suggestions from members would be welcome (e.g. sharing).

YOUR 2002-2003 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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