



"If you have difficulty taking a risk (*editor's note: not recommended during this time*), take a few in your garden. In fact, take lots of risks! No one will judge you for your failures and you will learn much more than the person who never pushed the boundaries. And if something dies, remember my first rule of the garden: *"There are no failures here, just composting opportunities."* - Mark Cullen: *A Sandbox of a Different Kind*

Mark Cullen and others in the horticultural profession are lobbying the government to allow garden centres and nurseries to open using the same safety protocols observed in grocery stores. Most do not have websites listing each and every plant, services and accessories for online ordering and curbside pick-up and most gardeners like to browse and pick up their own special plants. Seemingly hopeful, the Independent grocery store in Port Hope has begun setting up its outside garden centre.

And... Mark Cullen and Lorraine Johnson, the celebrated author, horticultural expert and social activist who was to speak at the next Millbrook garden club meeting on May 6th, **now sadly cancelled**, together with Sustain Ontario are also lobbying the government to declare 'community gardens' like the one at the old school in Millbrook an essential service. If you wish to sign the petition, it can be found in this link:

<https://sustainontario.com/2020/03/31/community-gardens-essential-food-service/>

NOTE: Right now, it seems unlikely our spring plant sale that usually is held at the May Millbrook farmer's market and the indoor plant fundraiser for Andy Harjula's Nain project will take place ... but hopefully that might change knows.... So please stay tuned for updates!

HOW TO NATURALIZE YOUR GARDEN WITH MINIATURE SPRING-BLOOMING NATIVE PLANTS & BULBS – AN EASY RISK!

Back in the pioneer days of local naturalist Catherine Parr Traill, native spring flowers grew in large masses. Nowadays, many species have disappeared from the landscape. These native spring bloomers are either impossible or difficult to find at most garden centres and not all are available at the few specialized native plant nurseries. For those who want to create “naturalized gardens”, gardens that are composed of perennial native plants which are long-adapted to the climatic stresses of the area, making them drought tolerant and low maintenance, there are two early blooming native plants that can actually be found in local garden centres and are worthy of introducing into any garden, natural or not – Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) and Hepatica (*Anemone americana* – round leaved and sharp-leaved *Anemone acutiloba*).

Catherine Parr Traill described hepaticas thus: *“ Back in the time In the forest—in open grassy old woods, on banks and upturned roots of trees, this sweet flower gladdens the eye with its cheerful starry blossoms; every child knows it and fills its hands and bosom with its flowers, pink, blue, deep azure and pure white. What the daisy is to England, the Snow-flower or Liver-leaf is to Canada. It lingers long within the forest shade, coyly retreating within its sheltering glades from the open glare of the sun: though for a time it will not refuse to bloom within the garden borders, when transplanted early in spring, and doubtless if properly supplied with black mould from the woods and partially sheltered by shrubs it would continue to grow and flourish with us constantly.”*



Hepaticas blooming right now in garden club member Edith Steinbeck's garden.

These little beauties that bloom in shades of pink, white and blue are virtually maintenance free when provided with the woodland conditions they crave — a shady spot in rich organic soil amended with leaf mould and compost - plus they are deer-resistant! They will self-seed slowly but surely. Hepatica is often called liverleaf or liverwort. The name of liverleaf is apparent by the shape of leaves, which resemble a human liver, and it was used to treat liver disorders. The seeds, which have a small, fleshy appendage called an elaisome, are dispersed by ants. The ants take the seeds back to their nests to consume the fat-rich elaisomes and discard the seeds. The nutrient-rich extensive ant colonies aid in germination ensuring new plants grow in a spot removed from the mother plant. This low-maintenance plant can remain undisturbed for years.



Well over a hundred years ago, Catherine Parr Traill lamented about Bloodroot: *“It is one of our most lovely native Spring flowers. It is a pity that, with the march of civilization, we shall soon lose its fair pure blossoms. It is easily cultivated, and repays care by the increase in size of the flowers, ripening the seeds perfectly and freely.”*

Bloodroots prefer a natural habitat of rich soil under deciduous trees and shrubs. The plants thrive in deep shade or partial shade with gentle, early morning light. However, if the soil is kept moist and well drained, the plants may be able to handle more sun. These spring beauties deserve a place in every garden. Like hepaticas, ants disperse their seeds in the same manner by eating the nutritious outer cover. Bloodroots also increase via creeping rhizomes.

NOTE: The roots of bloodroot are extremely poisonous! However, a refined form of bloodroot’s main alkaloid, “sanguinarine,” has been used commercially as a plaque-inhibiting agent in toothpastes and mouthwashes. Some indigenous communities traditionally used it as an insect repellent. The red juice from the plant root has also been used as a dye for clothing and for decorating skin, various tools and household items.



While specimens of these native plants can and should be rescued from construction sites, they should never be dug from intact woodlands!

NON-NATIVE MINIATURE BULBS FOR NATURALIZING





Left: Glory-of-the-snow (*Chionodoxa*), Right: *Puschkinia scilloides* (unusual striped squill)
Lower: a mass of crocus blooms

In terms of gardening 'naturalization' means something planted that thrives and spreads with minimal effort aside of the initial planting. These 'naturalized plants' are usually problem and maintenance free. However, some argue these 'naturalized plants' can end up crowding out native, or "indigenous" plants.

A changing climate often means a very early spring awakening of dormant pollinators and also a shortage of early spring blooming native plants. Thus there needs to be a readily available food source for these pollinators. Until such time commercial nurseries, mail order businesses and garden centres offer all manner of native species, not just a few, that crucial early food source for pollinators source can be in the form of masses of miniature spring blooming bulbs.

One might be surprised to know Ontario has about 400 species of native bees. Most of Ontario's native bees are termed "generalists". This means they forage for nectar and pollen on a wide variety of plants and will welcome these early bloomers.

However, some bees are "specialists" that require a particular genus of plants or even a particular species of plant in order to survive. These 'oligolectic' species feed only on one or a few closely related plant species. It is difficult for specialist bees to survive if their specific flowers of choice disappear. These specialist relationships are mutualistic because the plant is pollinated by the activities of the

specialist bee. For example, there is a sweat bee that collects only pollen from evening primroses such as the native *Oenothera biennis* and other native and non-native species in the *Oenothera* genus. There are specialist bees that depend on native asters and goldenrod species. In the veggie garden squash bees are specialist pollinators of *Cucurbita* crops (pumpkin, squash, zucchini, and some gourds) and do not forage for pollen on any other plants.

NOTE - Although there has been much media attention given to declining honeybee populations, these non-native bees often out-compete native bees for food sources and native populations are rapidly declining.

This is a link to a handy and very informative guide for landowners in Ontario on how to help our native bees:

<http://feedthebees.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/A-Landowners-Guide-to-Conserving-Native-Pollinators-in-Ontario.pdf>

Naturalized spring bulbs give gardens and landscapes a look of carefree abundance. Drifts of blue scilla beneath shade trees and clusters of windflowers sheltered by a stone wall are appealing and require very little effort. Bulbs are not fussy about soil as long as the ground is not soggy. Select an area that has well-draining soil so bulbs won't rot. Although the bulbs do need moisture during the spring and fall, during the summer months when the bulbs are dormant, they actually prefer dry soil.

Spring bulbs should be planted where they will get at least 4 hours of bright light each day. They bloom before most deciduous trees have leafed out, so can be planted in these summer-shady areas. Possible planting locations include lawns, beneath shrubs and trees, in fencerows, and at the sides of roads and pathways. Small bulbs even work well in rock gardens where the soil is shallow and they can be combined with alpine flowers and dwarf evergreens. The bulbs should look like they sprang up on their own to create a natural look. Plant small bulbs in groups of 30 or more. Plant in big drifts of one variety for maximum effect. Planted once, these little beauties will come back each spring in greater numbers. For the ambitious, a few hundred bulbs can quickly become thousands.

To plant these small bulbs into a lawn, cut and roll back a section of turf. Use a garden fork or shovel to loosen the soil several inches deep. If the soil is dense or

compacted, also dig in some compost. Rake the area smooth and then scatter a handful of bulbs. Use your fingers to push them into the soil about 3" deep. Slash the underside of the turf with a knife before replacing it over the bulbs. This will help the bulbs make their way up through the root mass.

Bulbs use their foliage to produce the energy they need to flower and multiply. In naturalized plantings, bulb foliage should be allowed to yellow and die back after flowering. If the foliage is mowed down or cut back too soon, the bulbs might survive but not have enough energy to put on a good show of flowers... so if in lawn, hold-off mowing until the foliage has died back. In the garden, dying foliage can be hidden by other emerging perennials, grasses and leafed out trees and shrubs.

What to plant? Bulbs are available for purchase either in stores or in catalogs in the fall. Here is a list of some suggestions of small early spring-blooming plants that will not only delight the eye, but also help our early emerging hungry pollinators:

Anemone blanda (Windflower)

Chionodoxa (Glory-of-the-snow)

Crocus species and hybrids (Crocus)

Eranthis species and hybrids (Winter aconite)

Hardy Cyclamen (*C. coum* and *C. hederifolium*)

Tulipa tarda (miniature species tulip- a fragrant tulip that will come back and multiply – *and* not loved by squirrels)

Scilla siberica (Siberian squill)

Puschkinia scilloides (Striped squill – very pretty)

Scilla campanulata (Spanish bluebells, Wood hyacinth)

Galanthus nivalis (Snowdrop)

Fritillaria meleagris & *Fritillaria michailovskyi* (Checkered lily)

Erythronium species (Dog tooth violet, Trout lily - * *Erythronium americanum* is our native species)

Muscari species (Grape hyacinth)

Short ornamental onions: *Allium Roseum*, *Ostrowskianum*, *Azureum* and *Cowanii*
Darwin Hybrid Tulip , Miniature Daffodil and Narcissus varieties

Spring Clean-up – Leave Those Leaves!

“Watching a social media ad for a local landscape maintenance company and abhorred at the advice to “clean out beds” and rake the leaves out from around plants. Folks, this is actually going to harm the plants, the soil, birds, and insects. There's no profit in following nature?”- April 17, 2020 twitter posting – Benjamin Vogt, lecturer, and author of A New Garden Ethic

Plants whether native or non-native, do not appreciate or thrive in a barren landscape, yet this seems to be the common ‘human’ aesthetic at this time of year where many gardens have been super cleaned with every last piece of debris raked out leaving emerging plants in isolated islands.

By removing fallen leaves completely, important nutrients are being removed from the soil. Trees drop those leaves for a reason – to provide nutrients into the soil to be picked up again in the ongoing cycle of life. It may look unsightly to our human eyes, but messy gardens also provide habitat to a wide diversity of beneficial insects including native bumblebees, leafcutter bees, assassin bugs, praying mantises, lace wings, wolf spiders, pirate bugs, damsel bugs, ground beetles and ladybugs to name a few. Leaving layers of leaf litter allows these predators of problematic pests to get a jump start on infestations. Returning hungry birds also look to leaf litter as a food source. And guaranteed, no matter how deep the layer of leaves in the garden beds, emerging plants will find their way through (the exception being black walnut leaves which contain a toxic plant-inhibiting compound), and like magic, by mid-summer, the leaves will have all disappeared, dragged down by earthworms or decomposed into nutrient rich compost.

Niki Jabbour, the award-winning author of three books and one of the contributors to the *Savvy Gardening* website has some spring clean-up tips in the link below:

<https://savvygardening.com/spring-garden-clean-done-right/>

Pampering Your Houseplants after their Winter Dormancy

Spring seems to be playing with us this year, teasing us with warm sunny days one week, snow showers and freezing temperatures the next. The longer daylight hours and warmer temperatures are waking your indoor plants from their winter dormancy. Now is a good time to give them some special care as they head into their peak growing season.



1. **Fresh Soil – Nutrient Boost**

Your indoor plant absorbs the majority of its food through nutrients in the soil. Over time, the soil becomes increasingly depleted. You may notice that after a few seasons of thriving, your plant produces small new grown, off color leaves, or is just generally “unhappy.” Even if you fertilize regularly, re-potting (or potting up) with new soil provides a nutrient boost that will give your plant what it needs to thrive.

2. **Better Watering**

Ever notice that when you water, it seems to immediately seep out of the bottom of the pot? Your plant is likely root bound – a condition in which the plant needs new space so badly that the roots have wrapped around and around the inside of the pot. This creates channels for the water to flow through which is why a root bound plant is very difficult to actually water. Freeing up these roots through re-potting will help your plant get the water it needs to keep its thirst quenched and its leaves lush.

3. Everyone likes a little breathing room, houseplants included. Another reason to free plants from being root bound is to promote new growth. Plants can rebound dramatically and generously from re-potting. A stronger, growing root system will make your plant happier and grow faster.

4. **Plant Babies!**

When plants get too crowded, many can be divided to free up space and make new plants! Re-potting time is also the ideal time to divide offshoots and pups into self-sufficient plants.

Reminder: If your plant is stressed, wait to re-pot! For example, if it's wilted from thirst, best to soak it and allow the plant to perk back up before re-potting. Likewise, try to avoid re-potting in extreme weather, like heat waves, which can add stress.



The root bound plant: Roots have grown through the drainage holes of the container. A tangled knot of roots has circled the container, replacing the potting mix and depriving this plant of nutrients, air and water.

You can prune the roots of a Root Bound plant and repot it into the same container.

To prune the roots, start with a pair of scissors, pruning shears, or a knife and trim under the plant's root ball, removing about 1/3 to 1/2 of both roots and soil. You can be pretty aggressive, cutting away both large and small roots. When you are done, take a stick, pronged cultivator, or a fork and loosen the soil and roots around the surface of the root ball, teasing out tangles and spreading the

roots. This encourages the roots to expand into the soil around the ball rather than continuing to grow in circles and strangle the plant. Dump remaining compost from the container and clean any sediment with hot water. Add moist fresh potting mix to the container and set the plant back into its container so that the soil surface is about ½” from the rim of the pot. Add soil around the plant covering all the roots, firm gently to ensure that there are no air pockets, but take care not to crush delicate roots. **Water lightly** so that the new soil is moist, but not sopping wet. Always use tepid water – cold water is a shock to people and plants alike.

Potting Up into a larger container: Potting up should only be done when your plant has become root bound or overcrowded in its container. Choose a clean new pot that is no more than 2” larger in diameter than your plant’s old home – too much space slows growth and can lead to root rot. Gently loosen the root ball so that the roots can spread out. Plant up in the new pot as above, water lightly.

After re-potting or potting up, plants tend to enter a period of shock. Don’t worry – its normal! Plants may appear wilted and thirsty, but take care to refrain from watering until about a week after re-potting to ensure that any roots damaged during re-potting have healed. During the recovery period, place plants in a cooler, shadier spot.

Most potting soil contains fertilizer. To prevent from over-fertilizing and damaging your plant, you can hold off on fertilizing for about 6 weeks after re-potting.

Groom Your Indoor Plants They will look their best, and you will feel better about them. Remove any yellowed leaves – they are not going to recover, and trim any weak growth. Dust velvety leaves gently with a soft paint brush, dust smooth leaves with a soft damp cloth. Or take the smooth leaved plant to the shower and spritz with water to the point of run off. Leave it there to drip dry. This is also a good time to spray for insect infestation. My favourite all-purpose spray for indoor and outdoor plants, a DIY recipe, comes from Ed Lawrence:

All Purpose Spray

1 Litre	1 Gallon	Warm Water
1 ½ tsp.	2 Tbsp.	Baking Soda
¼ tsp.	1 tsp.	Insecticidal Soap
¼ tsp.	1 tsp.	Horticultural Oil

Spray underside and topside of leaves to the point of run off, spray soil surface as well. Wait 10 minutes. Spritz with water to rinse – (I omit this step and have never had a problem.) Be sure leaves are dry before placing the plant back into high light.

Too Much Light? Strong summer sunlight may be too intense and hot for your indoor plants, so you may need to move them back from a south or west facing window, or to a shadier area of the room.

Many indoor plants benefit from being outside during the summer. It's best to slowly acclimate them to living outdoors. Houseplants can get sunburned, just like humans can. They're also used to living a cushy, pampered life indoors where there's no wind, heavy rain, or wildly fluctuating temperatures. So, to avoid major damage to your houseplants in spring, move them into the sun and rain slowly over a few weeks. Never put them outside in pots without drainage holes or they will drown, and don't leave them out overnight until the nighttime temperatures are consistently above 50F.

Feed Your Indoor Plants when new growth appears, usually from March to October. Always feed at ½ strength with liquid fertilizer once or twice a month, and feed only when the potting mix is moist to avoid burning the roots.

Saying Good-bye: Your indoor plants are there to bring you joy. But if you have a plant which simply does not thrive, no matter what you do or how hard you try, end the frustration: go ahead and say good bye - take it to the compost bin, where it will eventually add nutrients to the soil.

Earth Day 2020

On Wednesday April 22nd, this will be the 50th anniversary of *Earth Day*. The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970 in the United States, with the goal of raising awareness about mankind's critical role in protecting our natural world. On this date in 1970, 20 million Americans protested in favor of a more eco-conscious society. Sadly, many will argue there have been more losses than gains since that time.

Yet this is another special time and opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to understanding our planet's interconnected systems and to protecting it now and for future generations. Since so many of us are in isolation, perhaps after this pandemic, caused in part by our total disrespect for wildlife, passes, we will work harder together to protect our environment - starting at the local level.