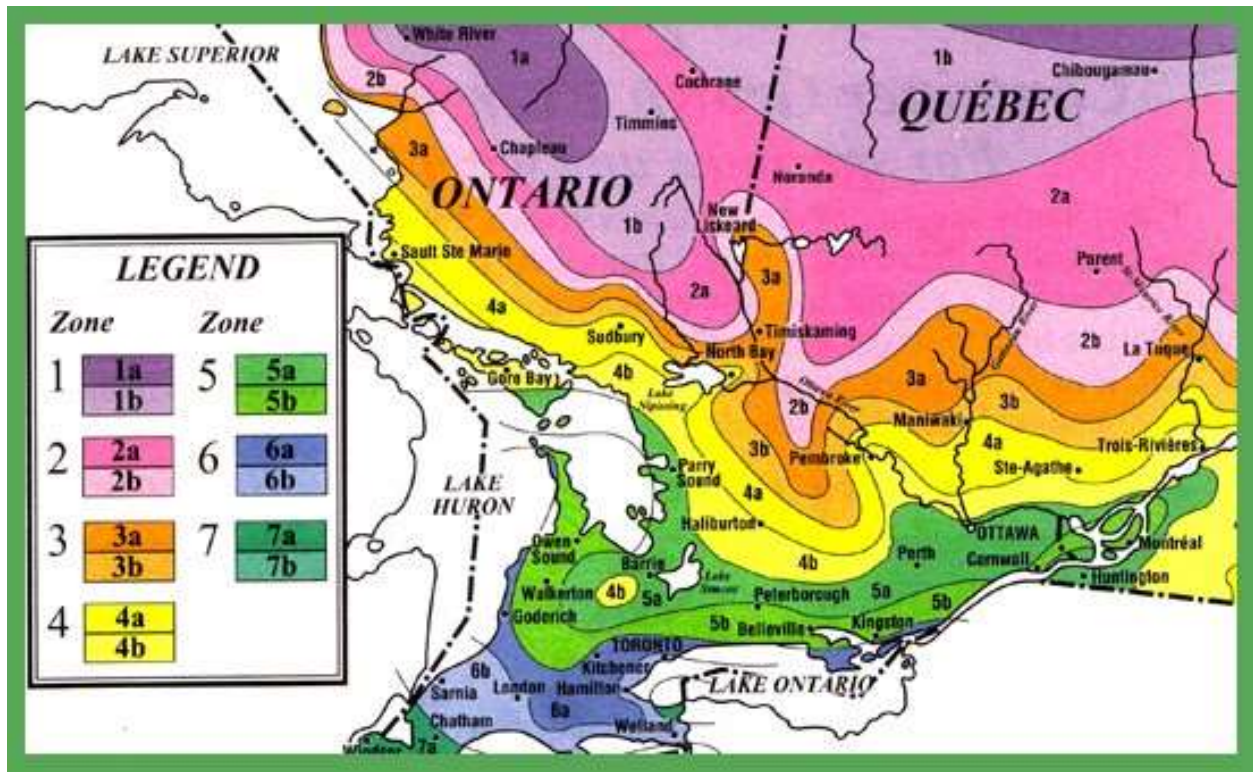




**“I love spring anywhere, but if I could choose, I would always greet it in a garden.” – Ruth Stout (1884-1980)** *American author best known for her "No-Work" gardening books and techniques.*

**MICROCLIMATES**



Plants are classified by the climate zone in which they will best thrive in. The ideal plant zone is usually listed on nursery tags. The climate zone map indicates that most of our local growing area is in Zone 5B or Zone 5A.

At this time of year, some can be afflicted by spring **'plant envy'** when friends, neighbours, and/or relatives boast about the resplendent show of blooms in their garden way ahead of Nature's schedule, and not to be found in your own garden. Unless they reside in much warmer climatic zones or on the West Coast, the likely reason for the ahead of time floriferous display in their gardens is that these bloomers are thriving in a particular **microclimate**. A microclimate is a small area within a designated climate zone where the climate is slightly different from official zone mapping. Microclimates are areas that offer unique growing conditions relative to the broader zone where they are located. A microclimate can mean a section of one's property is a lot warmer than another. Plants there thrive that would not survive otherwise, such as a designated Zone 6 plant in Zone 5. There are many kinds of microclimates, and they will be dealt with in a later newsletter, but for those who want to alleviate spring **'plant envy'**, there are ways to create a thermal mass in order to create a warmer microclimate and revel in producing early bloomers too.

Anything with good thermal mass – the ability of a material to absorb heat – can be used to create warmth. South-facing exterior walls of our houses and outbuildings receive first sun and stay warm throughout the day. The temperature against a sun-facing wall will be consistently warmer during the day and, crucially, a few degrees warmer at night too.

Don't have a south facing wall? Large boulders, rocks, paved driveways and sidewalks absorb heat from the sun during the day and slowly release their heat at night, making the ground immediately around them warmer (caution: and potentially dryer if there is not much rain). They also block cold winds. One might notice perennial flowers in the garden bed at the Millbrook post office, which is surrounded by paved surfaces, often bloom earlier than surrounding areas. Some stunning exotic gardens have been created within the heat islands created by the foundations of old barns or outbuildings.

Don't have rocks or boulders, paved surfaces or other heat absorbers? One can increase areas in the garden to a slightly warmer hardiness zone by using a windbreak.

***The effect of a windbreak is remarkable: studies show it will usually protect an area at least 10 times wider than its height and sometimes up to 20 times its height, depending on its density. So even with a short windbreak only 4 feet (1.2 m) high, you can protect plants from cold and drying winds for 40 feet (12 m) or more! A taller windbreak 20 feet (6 m) high should create a 200 foot (60 m) zone of warmer conditions, enough to protect your entire lot... and probably your neighbor's as well! – Larry Hodgson- The Laid-Back Gardener***

A living deciduous tree windbreak must be relatively dense so open-form trees such as staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*) make poor windbreaks. Coniferous trees make better windbreaks. However as many know in our cold climate, because of the strong winter winds and roadside salt applications their needles tend to “burn” and their role as a windbreak can become ineffective. This can be mitigated by planting a row of deciduous shrubs in front of the windward and/or street side. Because these shrubs have no winter foliage, they can better tolerate the drying effect of winter winds and salt spray. And the effectiveness of the windbreak in the warm summer months is doubled.

But not everyone has a large rural acreage and can plant a long double row of trees and shrubs to profit from the effects of a windbreak. Even 3 or 4 shrubs planted in a row to reduce dominant winds may can improve the gardening conditions on the leeward side.



Two spring flowering plants that bloom earlier in a microclimate – the Western prairie native Pasque flower and wide-spread European native rock harlequin (*Corydalis solidida*) – photos courtesy garden club member Edith Steinbeck.

**This is the perfect time while waiting for the spring warm-up and during rainy day events to grab a cup of coffee or tea or beverage of choice and watch the hour long video lecture in the link below. Hosted by the North American Native Plant Society, Dr. Laurence Packer, a York University professor and bee expert who has studied our native bees for 40 years presented this often funny and informative lecture *The Wild and Wonderful World of Bees* on March 4, 2020 just before the widespread outbreak of the pandemic. Well worth watching and a good resource for identifying bees that visit your garden, why native bees are SO important, how to attract them and how to protect them.**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=574&v=masPPC-QKNc&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=574&v=masPPC-QKNc&feature=emb_logo)

# Heavenly Hellebores

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Hellebore Winter Jewels Golden Lotus - one of several varieties from pale white to shades of pink, yellow and deepest burgundy/black emerging and starting to bloom right now in a local garden.

One of the prettiest and long-blooming plants that can benefit from a microclimate, but not necessarily so, are *hellebores* (*Helleborus*). Their presence is a charming way to dispel our long winter weariness as well as the current constant state of caution we all find ourselves in now. Many gardeners have been discouraged from growing these lovely plants because they have been rumoured to be difficult to grow and maintain and not hardy to our area. Plus, they traditionally have been very pricey plants because for years the main way to propagate *Helleborus* was by seed. Divisions were possible but were also very expensive and slow. Advances in hybridization and propagation techniques such as tissue culture have brought down the cost of these plants somewhat.

These evergreen flowering plants are native to woodlands and rocky sites across central Europe and extending to western Asia. Hellebores were believed to have magical powers. In medieval times, clumps were planted close to the entrances to homes and animals were decorated with garlands of blooms to keep them safe from disease and evil spirits. The name 'Hellebore' comes from the Greek word *hellein* (*to kill*) and *bora* (*food*) - an acknowledgement of their toxic effect. Hellebore poisoning has been the subject of legends worldwide involving

murder, madness and witchcraft. During the Siege of Kirrha in 585 BC, hellebore extract was reportedly used by the Greek attackers to poison the city of Kirrha's water supply. The defenders were so weakened by diarrhea that they were unable to defend the city! All parts of the hellebore plant are toxic if ingested by animals and humans; however, the bitter taste is a deterrent and they are usually left alone by deer and rabbits as well as cats and dogs. Hellebore sap *can cause skin irritation*. When collecting seeds from hellebore plants which are produced in late summer, it is recommended to wait for the pods to dry and shake them out into a container or onto the ground to collect. Attempts to remove the seeds by hand beforehand will expose skin to the potent toxins in the sap of the hellebore which can cause burning dermatitis. These notes on toxicity and skin irritation are simply cautionary – so many of our beloved garden plants are also toxic including Daffodil (Narcissus), Foxglove, Lily of the Valley, Wisteria, Milkweed, Lobelia, Monkshood etc. etc..... and they can be found in many a garden.

The blooms last for several months as they transition from coloured petals ranging in a multitude of colours to papery bracts with attractive star shaped seed pods. A mature clump will bear many blooms – over 20 blooms at once is not uncommon. Although there are no known native pollinators in our area, the early-spring flowers can be an emergency source of food for insects if native plants are not blooming yet. They are valued in the garden because of their shade tolerance. Hellebores benefit from woodland conditions such as planting under deciduous trees or shrubs where there is light in the spring and shade in the summer. Soil containing lots of organic material is ideal. They prefer a soil pH close to neutral and even alkaline. According to OMAFRA mapping the soils in our area are mostly neutral or only slightly alkaline. While hellebores like consistent moisture in the spring, they will not survive in wet soil conditions. Good drainage is vital to their ongoing health. They can tolerate late dry summer conditions.

Hellebores are very long lived. They are seldom bothered by any disease or insects. Over the winter some of the evergreen leaves can become black or brown and should be removed. They are slow-growing and thus rarely, if ever, require splitting. **NOTE: mature plants do not take kindly to being moved and can die if transplanted – so choose a site carefully.**

However, Hellebores frequently produce masses of seedlings under the skirt of their foliage that in their early stages can be transplanted to start new colonies

and can be brought to future Millbrook Garden Club plants sales usually held at the Millbrook Farmers Market.

**Note...** The government of Ontario has determined since food is a basic human need, “businesses that primarily sell food” to be essential workplaces and this applies to the **Millbrook Farmers Market**. No decision has been reached by the local planning committee as of yet whether the monthly market will go ahead and, if it is decided the local farmers market will proceed, how the very strict safety protocols will be instituted. Since garden perennials are not a food source, the annual spring Millbrook Garden Club plant sale fundraiser held at the market does not qualify for inclusion. Hopefully we will be able to have a super plant sale in the fall. For more information and updates on the local market check the website:

<http://millbrookfarmersmarket.weebly.com/>

## Houseplant Spotlight

**CALAMANSI** (Citrus x microcarpa)

Recipient in the UK of the Royal Horticultural Society’s Award of Garden Merit

Of all the houseplants I have tried to grow, by far my favourite, a gift from my nephew, is the Calamansi – for its shiny green leaves, its fragrant flowers, and the decorative small bright orange fruit which I have also made into a delicious marmalade.



One of the most popular potted citrus, Calamansi, also known as Calamondin, or Philippine lime, is a bushy upright evergreen shrub or small tree, grown more for its ornamental value than for its fruit edibility. Calamansi produces white flowers which are self-pollinating and require no cross pollination. The fruit sets intermittently throughout the year, and takes nearly a year to ripen, adding to the shrub's decorative appeal. When in flower the fragrance of orange blossom is in the air, especially in the evening. Calamansi tolerates cold temperatures, as low as  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  for short periods, better than any other true citrus species, but enjoys temperatures from  $15 - 30^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It will thrive in a warm, sunny room in direct sunlight or half shade and requires regular watering but avoid saturating the soil. Repotting into a slightly larger container is recommended every 1 – 2 years. The shrub can reach 6 – 10 ft. tall and 4 – 5 ft. across so pruning is normally required. Being a heavy feeder, regular fertilizing is recommended.

Calamansi is native to the Philippines and surrounding areas in southern China, Taiwan, and northern parts of Indonesia. It is a natural hybrid between kumquat and mandarin orange. The flesh of the tiny oranges is sour, juicy and contains 1 or 2 seeds. The peel is thin and smooth. The fruit can be used in beverages, cakes, pies, preserves, sauces, soups and teas. Calamansi is most widely cultivated in the Philippines and popular in traditional Filipino cuisine. It is also used in the cuisines of Malaysia and Indonesia.



## Millbrook and Area Garden Marketplace

**Some very good news!** On Saturday April 25<sup>th</sup>, the Ontario government, in a directive, *has opened up Community gardens* like the one at the Old Millbrook School! Distancing and safety measures will be instituted.

Some are unaware one can rent a plot at the Community Garden. A 5 by 10 foot plot is available for the grand cost of **ONLY \$5.00.** A larger 10 by 10 foot plot will set you back **\$10.00.** Plot holders are required to volunteer 4 hours during the growing season assisting with the larger community vegetable garden which is used to supply the local Food Bank. To obtain a plot or if you have any questions – contact Joanne Rowland at 705 932 3214 or email [joannerowland@gmail.com](mailto:joannerowland@gmail.com)

### **Bulbs n Things by Irene (located on County Road 10 south of Millbrook) 2020 Seedlings, Plants, Roots, Tubers and Bulbs Individual Pots of the following are \$ 2.50 each**

**Herbs:** Genovese Basil, Catnip, Thyme(common), Sage(common), Valerian, Comfrey (roots), Spearmint (roots), Valerian

#### **Veggies:**

**Tomatoes:** Eva Purple Ball, Caspian Pink, Opalka, San Marino Roma, Striped Cavern, Black Krim, Harbinger, Cherry Tomato German Riesentraube, Purple Tomatillos, Ground Cherries

#### **Peppers:**

**Sweet:** Hungarian Paradisco, Doux D’Espagne, Ajvarski, Orange Small (from Seedy Sunday, awesome producer), Green/yellow/red Mix (from Seedy Sunday, awesome producer)

**Hot:** Portugal, Mild Jalapeno

**Eggplants:** Purple small Thai, Rosa Bianca

### **4-packs of the following are \$ 4.00 per pack:**

Blue Curled Scotch Kale, Swiss Chard, Red Romaine, Green Canary Tongue lettuce

## **Edibles:**

**Red Summer Bearing Eurasian Raspberry Canes \$3.00 per cane or \$6.00 per large root ball**

**Blackberry plants 12.50 per 1 Gallon Pot**

**Rhubarb plants \$12.50 per 1 Gallon Pot**

**Horse radish \$12.50 per 1/2 Gallon Pot**

**Jerusalem Artichokes \$12.50 per pound**

**Garlic will be coming in June/July: Tibetan, Nootka Rose, Bogatyr, Persian Star, Russian Red and Elephant Garlic. Regular garlic \$2.50 - \$3.00 per Bulb, Elephant \$5.00 - \$7.50 per bulb.**

## **Ornamentals:**

**Forsythia \$12.50 per 1 Gallon + Pot**

**Lilac: \$12.50 per 1 Gallon + Pot**

**Various Dahlia Bulbs: \$5.00- \$10.00 (you should be able to see them on my FB Page except for the Yellow Dinner plate)**

**Hostas (plain green), Oriental Poppies (orange/red), Ladies Mantle, Turtle Weed (one of my favorites for naturalizing landscape) \$8.00 per pot (around 1/2 gallon pots)**

**Sweet Grass \$ 8.50 per pot**

**We also offer honey from our bees raw and natural!**

**All items are grown here in Millbrook. My seedlings are grown in an unheated Green House, there for they are sturdy and robust little gems! I mostly grow rare heirloom varieties.**

**You can preorder anything, because I am a small SHOP only while Quantities last. By the end of May I will arrange with each customer for farm gate P/U.**

**You can contact me:**

**Cell: 416-276-2727 (text only)**

**Email: [info@makeup-services.com](mailto:info@makeup-services.com)**

**FB: Bulls n Things by Irene**

## **Attention All Gardeners:**

**St John's men, (and women) are making plans to offer for sale, bags of well-composted cattle manure to make your garden grow. The entire project will take place respecting the social separation guidelines with which we now live.**

**From the base of operation at Ben and Sharon Dickinson's farm, no contact pick up or delivery will be offered. All payment will occur by either direct e-transfer to [treasurerstjohnsida@nexicom.net](mailto:treasurerstjohnsida@nexicom.net) or a cheque mailed to Kelly Capper at 740 Wilson Line, Cavan, ON, L0A 1C0, (payable to: St John's, Ida)**

Please phone or email your orders to either: Don Winslow (705) 944-5403 or [dwinslow@nexicom.net](mailto:dwinslow@nexicom.net) OR Ben Dickinson (705) 932-2030 or [benshar@nexicom.net](mailto:benshar@nexicom.net)

Price per bag is still an amazing \$3 for all orders of four or more bags.( 4\$ per bag for one, two or three bag orders).

## **Twin Pines Alpacas Farm & Fibre Mill**

10374 Peterborough County Rd 10, Millbrook, ON L0A

**Alpaca manure is in season.**

**\$5/bag.**

**Email to inquire on availability and details on how to purchase.**

[Info@twinpinesalpacas.ca](mailto:Info@twinpinesalpacas.ca)