

Spring 2012

**Unique Garden Centre**

# From the Ground Up



## Vegetable Gardening

### 2012 PERENNIAL PLANT OF THE YEAR

Each year the Perennial Plant Association (PPA) selects a perennial plant of the year. This year it is *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'

This cultivar grows to a height and width of 12-15 inches. Its silvery foliage and racemes of blue star shaped flowers blooming in late spring make it a stand out in the shade garden. It is a favourite alongside hostas, pulmonaria, coralbells and Solomon's Seal.



Grow brunnera in compost rich, well-drained soil and water regularly.

When all you have is a small gardening area, maximizing yields is crucial. Follow these simple tips:

- \*Add generous amounts of compost, manure, peatmoss and even vermiculite or perlite but avoid sand.
- \*Possibly add elemental sulphur to lower pH. (See our garden centre for advice)
- \*Don't over till the garden as it breaks down the soil too much and never work when the soil is too wet in order to avoid compaction.
- \*Cool weather seeds such as peas and radishes can be planted as soon as you have worked in the soil amendments and let it settle.
- \*Warm weather seeds such as corn and cucumber can be planted after the trees start to turn green.
- \*Harden off bedding plants and set out after all danger of frost has passed.
- \*Don't overcrowd.
- \*Rotate locations every year. For example: put tomatoes where carrots were last year.
- \*Observe the garden daily. It is always best to "nip things in the bud" by catching disease or insect problems in the early stages.
- \*Monitor soil moisture levels to ensure adequate watering. If watering is necessary it is preferable to water in the morning to avoid evaporation.
- \*Keep weeds under control. If any go to seed before you pull them, they need to go in the trash not the compost.
- \*Remove diseases or damaged leaves as soon as you spot them and dispose in the trash.
- \*Hand pick harmful insects and encourage beneficial insects such as ladybugs.
- \*Avoid using insecticides except for severe infestations & always check the label for the pre-harvest interval (the length of time allowed between pesticide application and safe harvest)
- \*Seek advice from the staff at Unique Garden Centre with in doubt.

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# Hardening Off Greenhouse Plants

Hardening off is the process of adapting a plant that has been grown in a greenhouse, indoors or under protective shelter to full outdoor exposure.

Greenhouses temperatures are warm and constant. There is no wind and the plants receive regular feedings of fertilizer. But in the great outdoors.... plants need to be gradually acclimated to the realities of the garden.

To harden off greenhouse plants, start by placing your bedding plants outside for just a few hours during the day in a sunny protected spot. Increase the time as the plants toughen up. Make sure that the plants do not dry out and remember to bring them in at night. Most plants will require 5 to 10 days of hardening off.

After you plant your bedding plants outside be prepared to cover your tender plants if frost threatens. Use blankets or newspaper rather than plastic.

The plants that are hardened off are sturdier and put on new growth much more quickly than the plants that aren't. Hardening of is a little extra effort, but definitely worth it.

## Common Gardening Questions

**When planting a tree or shrub, should the hole be twice as wide and twice as deep as the root ball?**

The planting hole should be twice as wide as the root ball but no deeper. This will encourage the roots of the plant to grow outward creating stability and allowing the plant to readily find water and nutrients. Place the top of the root ball parallel to the soil surface, backfill the area and cover with 2" of mulch.

**Will adding sand loosen heavy clay soil?**

Adding sand will turn clay soil into something like cement. Instead, use lots of organic matter like compost to loosen heavy soil. Not only will it improve drainage but it will also improve nutrient quality.

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# Spotlight On

Our “Spotlight On” page provides information on a different tree, shrub and perennial in each addition of “From the Ground Up”

## *Autumn Sun Coneflower* *Rudbeckia ‘Herbstsonne’*

This large perennial has a beautiful display of flowers with lemon-yellow petals drooping gracefully from long brownish central cones. Blooming from mid to late summer, the stems are usually self-supporting, but may require staking in rich garden soils. The flowers are attractive to butterflies and excellent as cuts. Hardy to Zone 3, these plants will range from 1.5m to 2.4 m in height and spread 120-170 cm wide. They prefer full sun and moist well-drained soil.



## **Northern Gold Forsythia** *Forsythia ‘Northern Gold’*

This compact upright shrub is covered with bright yellow blooms in early spring ahead of the leaves. The rest of the season it blends into the background with medium green foliage. This shrub prefers full sunlight and is hardy to zone 3. It will mature to a height and spread of 2m.

## **Toba Hawthorn** *Crataegus x mordenensis ‘Toba’*

This vase-shaped tree features showy clusters of white flowers with pink overtones in mid spring with dark green foliage throughout the season. Showy red berries develop in the fall. The tree develops an interestingly twisted trunk with rough gray bark over time. It has thorns which can be quite sharp so this should be considered when choosing a planting location. This tree does best in full sun to part shade. It will grow to 6m tall and spread about 6m.



# How to Re-pot a Houseplant



## It is time to re-pot a houseplant when:

- ⊗ The soil around the plant is hard.
- ⊗ The water runs right through the pot.
- ⊗ The plant shows signs of stress such as dropping leaves, or getting no new leaves or flowers.
- ⊗ The plant crowds itself out of the pot.
- ⊗ Roots emerge from the bottom of the pot.

\*\*Remember, some plants like to be root bound so it may not always be necessary to re-pot.

## Supplies:

- ⊗ A sheet of plastic to protect your work surface if you are working indoors.
- ⊗ A clean, suitably sized pot with drainage holes. Choose a pot that is about 2" larger in diameter than the original pot. If the pot has been used before, it should be thoroughly cleaned using a mild bleach solution.
- ⊗ Potting mix. Use a sterilized good quality mix that is designed for houseplants. Do not use garden soil.
- ⊗ A sharp knife.
- ⊗ A sharp pair of scissors.
- ⊗ A tool for tamping the soil.
- ⊗ Water, at room temperature.
- ⊗ A small piece of landscape fabric, coffee filter, paper, or plastic window screen.

## Procedure:

1. Water the plant in its existing container an hour or so before you begin re-potting. If the water runs out of the bottom of the pot, immerse it in the sink or bucket of water to ensure water penetrates the root ball. Do not leave the plant submerged for more than 30 minutes.
2. Cut a piece of landscape fabric, plastic screen or coffee filter to fit the bottom of the pot. Put it in the pot to prevent the potting mix from running out through the hole in the bottom.
3. Note the height of the current plant's root ball, compared to the space available in the new pot. Put potting mix in the new pot to a level that ensures the plants upper soil level is about an inch below the rim of the new pot.
4. Remove the plant from its existing pot. If the plant is small enough, turn the pot over, holding the plant around its stem(s). If it is too big to do this alone, get someone to help. If the plant is root bound and won't come out of the pot, run a sharp knife around the inside of the pot rim to loosen the roots. If the roots have come through the bottom of the pot and are holding the plant in the pot, cut them off to free the plant. Bang the bottom and sides of the pot to help loosen the plant. When the plant is out, loosen the roots and cut off any that appear to be rotting.
5. Place the root ball into the centre of the new pot on the layer of potting mix. Make sure the soil level will end up being about one inch from the top.
6. Add potting mix around the root ball tamping it down as you add.
7. Water until the water runs out the bottom of the new pot. Don't let the pot sit in water.

## What not to do:

- ⊗ Do not fertilize until you see some new growth.
- ⊗ If your plant normally sits in full sun, wait a couple days before returning it to that position.



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Open Daily

\*Ask any gardening questions to the horticulturalists we have on staff.



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