



Summer 2011

From the Ground Up

It All Starts with the Soil Although some people are lucky to have nice sandy, loam soil, most of us in the Regina area have either very heavy clay soil or sandy soil. Clay soils are very fine textured. They have great water holding capacity but tend to get waterlogged and can easily become compacted. Clay warms up quite slowly in the spring and freezes hard in the winter. Sandy soils hold little moisture or nutrients, but are well aerated. They warm up quickly in the spring but are subject to wind and water erosion. Though they are opposite soil types, both benefit from the same thing--the addition of organic matter.

Spread a 3-4" layer of these kinds of organic material on the planting bed and incorporate it into the existing soil.

Peat moss—Great stuff for the quick fix in the spring to loosen the soil, add some moisture retention while improving the drainage. In other words, it helps the soil to hold the right amount of moisture. Peat moss breaks down quickly in the soil and has little nutrient content. Peat moss is best when combined with compost or manure for additional benefits.

Compost—Good compost looks like dirt. Compost helps to loosen the soil and acts like slow release fertilizer because as it breaks down further more nutrients are released for the plant to use. If you are making your own compost, avoid adding weed seeds or any diseased plant material to the pile.

Manure—Any kind of manure will help feed and loosen soil. As long as it is well rotted, you can use lots. It should have little to no smell when well rotted. The nutrient value will vary with the source.

Adding organic matter to your soil is like us eating healthy—organic matter breaks down into basic nutrients which the plants use to grow.

...speaking of compost...

It's okay to put rhubarb leaves in the bin in the pile. You should not eat the leaves of a rhubarb plant because it is poisonous, so people assume that you should not compost them either. The reality is that as the leaves decompose the nutrients return to their elemental form and balance the pH in the process. Testing has proved that compost made up entirely of rhubarb leaves behaves the same as mixed compost when used in the garden. So there you have it, another myth that is just that—a myth. Other materials which are safe to use but often get avoided include philodendron, walnut leaves, pine needles (in moderation), citrus rinds, and newspaper.

There are items that do not belong in the compost bin such as eucalyptus leaves and bark, cat and dog feces, diapers, meat scraps, and treated lumber.

Keep your compost aerated! If you are composting with a tumbling composter, make sure you turn it whenever you add new materials. If you are composting with a pile, or in a static (non-tumbling) compost bin, be sure to mix up the contents so that the pile gets oxygen and can break down effectively.

Before you plant a wildflower garden...



With all the discussion of late on planting native plants that require less care and water, many people think that a wild flower garden falls into this category. Most people's idea of a wild flower garden is lots of pretty flowers, right? But nature does not limit itself to just pretty flowers therefore to have a nice wildflower bed, some maintenance is required. Weeding will have to be done by hand by someone who can recognize the difference between seedlings of a desired flower from that of an undesired weed. Also, when the seeds germinate, they most likely will be overcrowded. If left un-thinned, the flowers will struggle for survival making them susceptible to insects and disease (nature's way of eliminating weak plants). A wildflower garden that will be beautiful takes a lot of forethought, greater knowledge and time and a fair bit of labour. Eventually it will stabilize and be relatively easy care. Remember, a pigweed is one of Mother Nature's wildflowers too and one pigweed left unchecked can multiply itself into 13,689,000,000 individuals by the third growing season.



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

Spike Speedwell

Veronica spicata ‘Royal Candles’

This perennial forms a low bushy mound of dark green leaves. It bears short spikes of bright blue flowers in early summer, generally blooming for several weeks. It could be sheared lightly after blooming to encourage new foliage growth and possible re-blooming in the fall. . It is quite compact reaching 8-12” in height and spreading 12-18.” It is hardy to Zone 2



Dwarf Norway Spruce

Picea abies ‘Ohlendorffii’

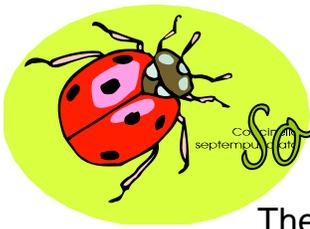
This multi-stemmed evergreen shrub is adaptable and hardy, and very slow growing, eventually growing to 5-6’ tall and spreading to 4-5’ wide in 15 years. It is quite rounded when young but as it matures it becomes pyramidal. This shrub does best in full sun to partial shade with average to evenly moist conditions. It is hardy to Zone 3.

Gladiator Flowering Crab

Malus ‘Gladiator’

This is a very hardy columnar ornamental tree which is covered with showy pink flowers in early spring before the leaves emerge. It has attractive purple foliage which turns yellow in the fall. This tree prefers full sunlight and average soil conditions. It will grow to a height of 20’ and a width of 9’ and is hardy to Zone 2.





So you saw a bug...

There are many insects that are beneficial. Lace Wings and Ladybugs to name a few! If you enjoy seeing hummingbird moths, swallowtail butterflies, etc you will need to tolerate a few larvae munching your plant's leaves. Using an integrated pest management approach will benefit your yard and your pocket book. The best method of pest control is a healthy plant which can be achieved by regular watering, fertilizing and frequent checking to catch problems in the early stages. If you see an insect, find out what it is, what it eats and if it is putting your plants at risk. Once you determine that the insect is a problem start with the least toxic control available. If there are only a few bugs, pluck them off! Daily sprays to the problem area with a water hose creates an environment inhospitable to many insects. Insect traps, floating row covers and companion planting are easy methods of insect control. There comes a time when infestations become serious and require the use of commercial pesticides. At this point chose the product best suited to your situation, and read and follow the label's instructions! Commercial pesticides can play an important role in your Integrated Pest Management program. Just don't make them your only line of defence.



Black Knot

is a fungal disease that occurs on mainly cherry, mayday and plum trees. If you have seen ugly black rough swellings showing up on your trees, then this is probably the cause. Untreated, black knot will eventually kill all or parts of the tree. Chemical control is not an effective method which leaves the tree owner with pruning as the only practical option. It is important to remember to disinfect the cutting tool between each and every cut to the tree in order to prevent the accidental spread of the disease. Contact Unique Garden Centre for more detailed information on this disease, symptoms and its control.

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