



Fall 2016

**Unique Garden Centre**

From the Ground Up ↑

Regina Gumbo: Coping with Clay Soil

Regina gumbo is soil composed mainly of clay. It is heavy and dense because its small particles fit closely together. That's why it's so difficult to dig. Water drains slowly because of clay's compacted nature, and there is less oxygen available to plant roots. Clay can absorb and hold water for very long periods of time. It is slow to dry out and warm up in the spring, but during periods of drought it hardens, and water often rolls off the concrete-like surface before it has a chance to penetrate down to thirsty roots. Though all of this sounds bleak, it is good to know that clay soil is high in minerals and nutrients. The biggest issue for plants in clay soil is slow drainage. Improving its structure improves drainage. Plenty of organic matter needs to be added to make these nutrients available to plant roots while aerating the soil and improving its tilth. Organic matter is constantly being depleted as tiny microorganisms break it down and plants take it up. An annual addition of 2-3 inches of organic matter into the soil is essential.

Organic mulches will help keep the weeds at bay thereby reducing the need for hoeing or cultivating which degrades the natural soil structure. It also eliminates the packing effect caused by heavy rain or sprinklers on the soil surface.

Clay soils can be damaged if worked or walked on when wet. Weight will effectively compress and eliminate the tiny air pockets present in clay soil making it difficult for plants roots to infiltrate. Avoid disturbing clay soil that is wet enough to stick to your boots or tools, and do not over cultivate. Hand digging is preferable to rototilling because rototilling will pulverize it to too fine a texture.

Though over time with careful management you will make some improvements to clay soil by continually adding mulch, you still have clay soil. Choosing plants that can cope with these conditions is essential. Fortunately there is a good selection.

Plants for Clay Soil:

Common Name	Botanical Name
Amur Maple	Acer ginnala and cvs
Manitoba Maple	Acer negundo and cvs
Hackberry	Celtis occidentalis
Green Ash	Fraxinus pennsylvanica and cvs
Bur Oak	Quercus macrocarpa
Willow	Salix
Syringa reticulata	Japanese Tree Lilac and cvs
Linden	Tilia
Saskatoon	Amelanchier spp and cvs
Barberry	Berberis spp and cvs
Dogwood	Cornus alba and cvs
Cotoneaster	Cotoneaster
Mockorange	Philadelphus
Cranberry	Viburnum opulus and cvs
Yarrow	Achillea millefolium and cvs
Shooting Star	Dodecatheon spp and cvs
Echinacea	Echinacea pupurea
Helenium	
Daylily	Hemerocallis
Hosta	
Kansas Gayfeather	Liatris spicata
Wild Beebalm	Monarda fistulosa
Penstemon	Penstemon digitalis
Rhubarb	Rheum
Globeflower	Trollius

Hackberry Tree Celtis occidentalis



Hackberry is amenable to many conditions, including drought, flooding and pollution. The leaves are alternate and simple 2-5 inches in length with a long oval shape. They are serrated except at the base where they are smooth and uneven. Leaf colour can vary from light to medium green with a golden-yellow fall colour.

The bark has a very interesting coarse texture with warty projections. This species is moderately shade tolerant. Hackberry develops a round spreading crown with drooping branches. It is a relatively fast growing tree with a mature height of 35-40' and spread of 20-30'. It is hardy to Zone 2.

Preventing Rodent Damage on Trees

Although the past winter was unusually warm and dry with not much snow, this is not typical for the Saskatchewan prairies. Often the snow is deep and stays for months. This provides a haven for hungry voles and field mice as they feed on the bark of many trees and shrubs right at the soil line. At the same time, crusted snow allows rabbits to feed on the bark of the same plants two, three and even four feet off the ground.

Most multiple-stemmed shrubs including red twig dogwood, burning bush, viburnums, etc. can recover from this type of wildlife damage. New buds just below the feeding damage will emerge and within a couple of months a number of new shoots will have grown several inches to more than a foot in length.

By late spring, many rabbit-damaged shrubs will send up new shoots from buds just below the site of the feeding damage. Simply cut these plants back to a point just above the new shoots. Though drastically reduced in size, these plants will gradually regain their previous size and form.

On the other hand, single-trunk fruit and ornamental trees will gradually decline and eventually die if most or all of the bark has been eaten from around the entire trunk. Carbohydrates produced in the leaves of damaged plants will not be able reach the root system because the transport tissue (phloem) immediately beneath the bark will have been eaten, too! In fact, it's this sugar-containing tissue that the critters prefer.

It is far easier to prevent this kind of damage than try to repair it. This can be done by enclosing the trunks of young trees in protective cylinders fashioned from ¼ inch mesh hardware cloth or plastic white spiral trunk guards, available at Unique.

Bury the bottom of the cylinders under several inches of soil to prevent mice and voles from burrowing under them. Also make the cylinders tall enough to cover the trunk all the way up to the lowest set of branches to prevent rabbits from getting at the bark while perched on top of crusted snow that may be several feet deep. Remove the cylinders or trunk guards after the snow melts.

And, finally, it may be worthwhile to wade out and shovel the snow away from the base of valuable single-trunk trees in your landscape. Mice and voles will not feed as heavily on exposed trunks, and rabbits won't be able to gnaw on branches above the hardware cloth or trunk guards from the top of a snowdrift.



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Planting Trees in the Fall Peppers from the Garden

The fall season can be an excellent time to plant trees. During the spring, soils are cold and may be so wet that low oxygen levels inhibit root growth. The warm, moist soils associated with fall encourage root growth. A fall planted tree means more time to become established and better able to withstand summer stresses.

Fall planted trees require some special care. The roots are actively growing even though the top is dormant so the soil should not be allowed to dry out. This requires monitoring for watering throughout the fall until freeze-up. Mulch is also helpful because it minimizes moisture loss and slows the cooling of the soil so root growth continues as long as possible

Your gardening efforts have paid off and you have an abundance of peppers. Now what? Peppers are able to be stored fresh much longer than tomatoes. They will usually keep in a crisper drawer of a refrigerator for several weeks if kept moist but not wet. For longer storage, freezing works well although they will be mushy when thawed. The flavour still comes though in cooked foods. Try dicing them into small pieces and then freezing on a cookie sheet. The frozen pieces can then be poured into a plastic bag for later use. Measuring is much easier as the pieces are not frozen together in a clump. This method works equally well for hot or sweet peppers.



Autumn Joy...

Autumn is crisp cool evenings, trees changing color, bright fall sunshine and leaves falling though the grass is still green. The season is bittersweet. But some things are just better in the fall.

For instance, many sedum varieties are spectacular in the fall. As perennials, they die back to the ground in winter but emerge in the spring with the daffodils as little round tufts of fleshy, blue-green basal plant growth. Without any additional water, Sedum spectabil and Sedum telephium will grow 28-36" tall. Their large, lovely blooms are open for weeks!! Usually pink or coppery in color, they attract a great variety of pollinators (butterflies, honeybees) to the late season garden. This is an excellent plant to cultivate for the last bit of nectar for the honeybees before winter sets in.

Sedums are succulent plants that thrive in low moisture environments by storing water in their fleshy leaves and stems. This means they prefer neglect as their method of care. There are many varieties to choose from. Some are tall late bloomers such as 'Autumn Joy', 'Purple Emperor', 'Frosty Morn'... others are great ground covers "Dragon's Blood", 'Tri-color', 'Angelina', Sedum kamtschaticum, Sedum sieboldii, Sedum acre, , Sedum 'John Creech', Sedum 'Elizabeth'

Many can handle snow and all can handle heat and drought. Most prefer full sun.

Karl Foerster grass, Blue Fescue Grass, Heliopsis (False Sunflower) Artemisia, Lady's Mantle, or Heuchera (Coral Bells) are some fantastic perennials that make wonderful companion plants to the sedums.

**Sedum
Autumn Joy**



**Sedum
'Frosty
Morn'**



**Sedum
'Purple
Emperor'**



**Sedum
kamtschaticum**



**Sedum
'Dragon's
Blood'**



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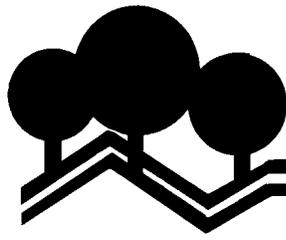
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