



Down to Earth

Editor's Corner

Summer is finally here and so is your latest issue of *Down to Earth*. In this issue you will find an article I have written about my latest endeavour in growing sunflowers. A follow-up piece will be released in September when our next issue is due to come out. In this Summer issue you will also find an update on Senior Organic Gardening and a warm welcome to our newest volunteer at COG OSO. Sally Luce has also written a wonderful article on eco-friendly, draught-resistant alternatives to sodded lawns.

To all of our loyal readers, I hope you enjoy this Summer issue of *Down to Earth*. Have a happy and successful growing season.

Matthew Orwing

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ORGANIC GARDENING IN THE CITY WORKSHOPS 2013

DAVID TOWNSON



The Organic Gardening in the City Workshops in 2013 were expanded to cover some new topics such as - Designing your urban organic garden to attract pollinators, pest eaters and to discourage pests, gardening organic herbs in containers and veggie growing in containers. The backyard and allotment organic gardening as well as eco-friendly yard care were also offered and all workshops were well attended averaging about 45 participants per workshop.

Our thanks to our instructors, George Bushell, Rob Danfoth & Pat Lucey the Workshops as well as our volunteers who make all this possible. Positive comments at the end of each workshop have been many and questions flowed easily and were fully answered.

135 people attended with nearly 40 people registering for all 8 workshops. The proceeds after all expenses have been assigned to our Senior Organic Gardeners Program and have actually allowed SOG to move forward in a significant way.

Some changes in 2013 included registration through the new COG OSO website has been both efficient and effective, the efforts of our newly formed Promotion Group has developed a Campaign Plan and has carried it out from February through the present. Joey and Meriza have worked long and hard. As you can see, the results have been amazing!

The increase in the number of topics addressed has increased the audience and has drawn attention from the media: Rogers TV, CBC Radio and CTV.

The Steering Committee is currently considering offering a couple of Fall Organic Gardening in the City Workshops. Several suggestions were received and all have been actively pursued. The suggestions to date are as follows:

- Growing Garlic Organically: to be offered by well-known and respected garlic grower and researcher, Paul Pospisil scheduled for Thursday, October 17th Paul says that the timing of this workshop is excellent for fall plantings.
- Winterizing Your Organic Garden and Extending the Growing Season in the Fall.
- Your Organic Thanksgiving Meal

Watch for more news on Organic Gardening in the City Workshops from COG OSO! Check our website: www.cog.ca/ottawa and in your September *Down to Earth* and August COG OSO E-News.

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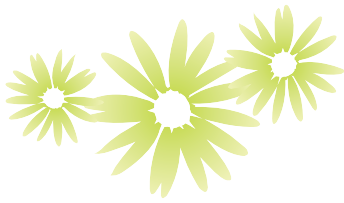
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Senior Organic Gardeners (SOG)

MARGARET TOUROND-TOWNSON

We have recently welcomed Jessica Singh to the SOG team as project manager in an effort to facilitate the expansion of Senior Organic Gardeners.

For the 2013 growing season, SOG is working in several retirement residences including: Longfields Manor, Unitarian House and The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre, Wellington Towers and one other Residence still in the introduction process.

We have held planning meetings with interested residents to find out what they might like to grow and are now completing Planting Sessions in each Retirement Home. With our program, we help seniors to source organic seedlings and then hold planting sessions. Follow-up visits will take

place throughout the growing season. We also offer workshop presentations on topics of interest to the residents.

We'll be planning ahead for harvest celebrations in late August and September.

We are doing all this on a shoestring budget and will begin a funding campaign in late August through November for SOG in 2014! Any support you might like to give will be most welcome. If you have suggestions for funding, they will be gladly received.

For funding and donations, please contact: cog.oso.chapter@cog.ca or (613) 244-4000 Ext. 2. For more information about SOG, please contact Jessica, Project Manager at sog@cog.ca or call (613) 244-4000 Ext. 8.

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A Colourful Solution to Lawn Grubs

SALLY LUCE

We are transforming our plain grass backyard into a more interesting and useful growing space for both native and cultivated plants.

The transformation began when grubs took out a large patch of grass in our backyard five years ago. We wanted to encourage some native and some introduced plants into the lawn to replace the missing grass.

The aim was to have a fairly tidy but not tightly groomed lawn that is easily walked on, offers spring colour and is impervious to grubs. We also wanted to encourage low growing plants that require less mowing and little watering. This saves time, money and is environmentally friendlier than tending the many needs of a conventional grass lawn.

The inspiration for this transformation came when I noticed how our red-leaved ajuga (bugleweed) was spreading into the yard and expanding too rapidly to be confined to our flower bed. The ajuga I moved from the flower bed into the bare spot created by the grubs became our first and most durable alternative to grub-infested grass. As other bare spots appeared over time, we also encouraged several other plants to fill the spaces left bare.



We let the wild violets in our lawn proliferate. We encourage the wild strawberries and enjoy the tiny white flowers that chickweed

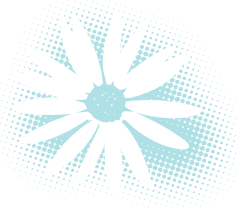
provides in late spring. We have introduced forget-me-nots and white Dutch clover. The clover nourishes the lawn in lieu of other fertilizers.

Last year a gardening friend gave us a massive bunch of bright yellow creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia aurea*), which we added to our lawn, and have added more this year. It provides an attractive colour contrast to the violets, and to the lilac and deeper purple flowers of the two varieties of ajuga we have. It also echoes the brilliant yellow leaves of our sunburst locust and the golden yellows in several of our hostas.

We don't limit our yard to ornamentals. Last summer for the first time, we planted butternut and other squash at the edges of several flower beds and let the squash vines invade the lawn. Their yellow flowers added to the summer colour mix as did the ripening squash in early fall. Their leaves shaded parts of the lawn from the parching that other sections of the lawn experienced in the hot dry weather of late summer. We will do this again this summer.

Over time the ajuga and violets in particular are taking over as the predominant ground covers in the lawn, and we are happy to have more spring flowers and less grass to tend and mow.





An Easy-Growing Giant: Blooming Backyard Sunflowers

MATTHEW IRVING

Despite towering to heights sometimes exceeding three metres, sunflowers are perhaps one of the easiest ornamental flowers to grow. However, the key to growing a teetering backyard giant is not necessarily dependent on the skill of the gardener but instead on the ability to get seeds into the soil as early as possible once frosty nights begin to subside.

Although indoor seeding beginning in early or mid-April can foster growth from seed to sprouting stages in an incubated state, such additional care is not required to grow lush yellow sunflowers in Eastern Ontario's relatively short growing season. In fact, most sunflowers develop a taproot which shoots straight down into the soil. Because of this, moving sunflowers from indoor pots to outdoor garden beds can sometimes cause trauma to the plants.

As such, this year I planted sunflower seeds approximately two and a half weeks before the onset of spring's last frost. I planted each seed about 4 centimetres under the soil surface to allow for rapid sprouting and root growth. Prior to each frost encountered, the garden was well watered in the early evening and covered by an elevated tarp for the night. This helped to trap warmth and moisture in the ground while simultaneously guarding against frost from encasing the flowers. Although frost can damage or kill mature sunflowers, developing sunflowers have proven to be surprisingly tolerant to fluctuating temperatures.

After three and a half weeks, the young flowers reached heights between four and 10 centimetres. After five weeks, heights were averaging about 21 centimetres. At this point, flowers were rearranged to ensure at least 30 centimetres between each plant. When rearrangement is required, it is important that the entire root base is scooped up from the bottom to the top. Hence, when re-planting the sunflowers, roots were planted to a depth of about six to seven centimetres and firm pressure was applied to the soil around the base of the covered roots. This helps to squeeze out air pockets that may become trapped below the surface when a hole is dug and then re-filled with soil as the flowers are transplanted and rearranged. By pressing out air pockets and slightly compacting the soil, it is possible to minimize the trauma to the mineral and water intake of the flowers that can sometimes be caused by rearrangement.

Around week 7, rows of closely seeded sunflowers should be rearranged one final time to allow for adequate space and distance to exist between growing plants. By regularly pulling out the shortest sunflowers every couple of weeks, it is possible to provide additional growing space for larger and more healthy sunflowers. This process can help you grow monster sunflowers with a massive head diameter.

However, while sunflowers are easy to grow, they extract an immense quantity of nutrients from the soil. As an organic grower, one of the best ways to replenish soil nutrients in a sunflower garden is through the addition of fish oils.

Although they are spindly now, sunflowers grow rapidly from mid-July to mid-September. In the next issue of *Down to Earth* we will look at some of the benefits that sunflowers in a garden can bring. From dried decorations to salty snacks or fill for your birdfeeders, sunflowers offer a range of uses far beyond their beautiful looks.



When sunflowers grow in close proximity to one another, it is important that the plants are moved or thinned to allow adequate space for growth.



At just 3 weeks, sunflowers are surprisingly resistant to frost.



When moving sunflowers, it is necessary to scoop the entire root system from the bottom upward.

Jessica Singh cares for some zucchinis to ensure a good harvest.



SENIOR ORGANIC GARDENERS PROGRAM, COG OSO

Welcome to our new SOG Project Manager

MARGARET TOUROND-TOWNSON

SOG has now made a giant leap forward with the hiring of part time SOG Project Manager, Jessica Singh. She is a most welcome addition to the SOG Team.

Jessica comes to us with considerable practical experience in organic gardening, greenhouse management and instruction. She is also very well qualified having completed her Plant Science Technology Diploma with specialization in Organic Agriculture. Several of her jobs have involved working with seniors.

Jessica is now involved in every aspect of SOG. Her contact information is: E-mail: sog@cog.ca and telephone: 613 244 4000 Extension 8. Welcome aboard Jessica!



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Deadline for next *Down to Earth*: **September 1, 2013**. Submit all articles to Editor.

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