



Trowel Talk!

June 2018

Mystery plant a lovely surprise (Columbine)

Many gardens, including mine, have occasional unexpected green visitors that I call mystery plants. Mystery plants usually appear suddenly and apparently from nowhere. Sometimes they aren't at all welcome and have to go, sometimes they enchant us and stay.



A long time ago I was enchanted by a granny's bonnet columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) and it was love at first sight. On that early spring day I "discovered" a young seedling busy unfurling its bright green, delicate leaves and it was such an appealing sight in a still bare hosta bed. I misidentified it as a fern and thought that it would be a nice companion for my hostas. However, my hosta collection grew that year and I needed room for new arrivals. I had

to move the "fern" to another bed. Surprisingly, transplanting was hard work since the plant had a long, dandelion-like tap root.

Imagine my amazement the following spring when the 'fern' bloomed! And what blooms! Dozens of nodding, deep purple-blue flowers were carried gracefully on wiry stems above a mound of lacy grey-green foliage. Each flower had an inner cup of five petals nestled within an outer circle of five petals with a backward-projecting, comet-like-tail called a 'spur'. The common name "columbine" means "like a dove" in Latin and comes from the resemblance to flying doves. The extraordinary beauty of the columbine blossom was stunning and its unusual form made it unique.

Columbines aren't at all demanding and a spot in dappled-shade in a well-drained, cool soil keeps them happy. Most columbines are sun- and heat-tolerant as well as drought-resistant. Although disease-free, columbines are subject to some pests. The main damage is usually from leaf miners which feed between the outer layers of the leaves leaving light-colored, winding trails behind them. Removing the affected leaves will encourage the plant to produce fresh foliage.

Don't be deceived by the delicate appearance and beauty of the columbine and treat it with caution since all the parts of the plant, including its tiny, black seeds, are poisonous. Columbines self-seed easily if you don't remove the sticky, brown seedpods. However, due to

cross-pollination, the resulting seedlings may not resemble the parent plants. Moreover, their flowers may be reduced in size and number. If you want to grow more than one variety and have true parent seedlings, remove the faded blooms before they set seed or plant different varieties at least 30 metres apart. Starting columbines indoors is very easy too. However, remember that seeds need to go through a cold period in order to germinate successfully. You can do that by sowing them in moist soil and placing in a ziploc bag for three weeks in the refrigerator.



My beloved columbine stayed with me four years. Although short-lived, it left behind a large columbine colony. To this day, I and my friends and neighbours continue to enjoy the descendants of that long ago mystery plant.

Gina Dobrodzicka
Master Gardener

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June To Do

- Deadhead and prune spring-flowering shrubs when they finish blooming.
- Raise the lawnmower blade to 3" for summer.
- Get stakes and supports for tall plants placed before they get too big.
- Monitor plants for pests and diseases.
- Deadhead self-seeding plants promptly (unless you want them to seed themselves all over).
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

Tip of the Month

The 2018 perennial plant of the year is an ornamental onion, *Allium* 'Millenium', a summer bloomer with rose-purple flowers. However, it's a zone 6 plant according to some sources, which means, sadly, that it might not be reliably hardy here in Ottawa. But there are plenty of other alliums that will survive here, and are worth planting. In general, alliums are not attractive to deer and rabbits, but their flowers are loved by bees and butterflies. They like a well-drained garden soil and full sun, but aren't too fussy. Sizes can range from a few inches tall to a few feet. Flowers are usually globe-shaped clusters on a narrow stalk, in white, yellow, pink, purple, or blue. Some dry nicely for added interest. Often (particularly spring-blooming alliums) the foliage will die down in summer, like other spring bulbs, so it can be best to plant them where the dying leaves will be hidden. Some will reseed themselves prolifically; in this case, cutting the dying flower heads off rather than saving them for decoration is probably best.

Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener



Alliums and Iris
Photo:
Amanda Carrigan

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034—Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca - monitored daily

Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

CLINICS:

CARP MARKET: Saturdays, June 16th, 8:00 am-1:00 pm .

HERB EVENT: June 23rd, 8:00 am-3:00 pm,

June 30th, September 1st to September 15th, September 29th, 8:00 am-1:00pm.

CARP GARLIC FESTIVAL (Carp fairgrounds)

August 11th, 8 am-3 pm and August 12th, 10 am-3 pm.

CUMBERLAND MARKET (1115 Dunning Rd):

June 23rd, July 7th, August 11th, September 8th, 9:00 am-1:00 pm .

MAIN MARKET: July 7th, July 21st, August 11th, August 25th, September 8th,

September 22th, 9:00am-1:00 pm

NORTH GOWER FARMERS MARKET: June 16th, September 15th,

8:30 am-1:00 pm

OTTAWA FARMERS' MARKET (Lansdowne Park):

Sundays, June 17th to September 23th, 9:00 am-1:00 pm

PARKDALE MARKET: Saturdays, May 5th to June 16th, 8:00 am-11:00 am

RIVERSIDE SOUTH MARKET (Riverview Park & Ride):

June 24th, July 8th, July 22th, August 12th, August 26th, September 9th, September 23rd,
October 14th, 10:00 am-2:00 pm

WESTBORO FARMERS' MARKET (Byron Linear Park):

June 23rd, July 14th, August 11th, September 8th, 9:30 am-1:00 pm

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

June 16th – 24th Garden Days

<http://gardendays.ca/>

Tuesday, June 19th—7:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Flowers with Vegetables: Beauty and the Eats

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

2 Pretty Street, Stittsville,

Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society. No guest fee

FAIRY GARDEN WORKSHOP

for child and parent.

Saturday, June 23rd; 10:00 am or 1:00 pm

Each child, helped by accompanying adult, will make a fairy garden to take home.

\$35 per child.

Must pre-register.

See <http://mgottawa.ca> for details and registration form.



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>

