

steppingstones



BIZARRE BOTANY

FACED WITH an extraordinary number of rocks in their glacial-till soil, the enterprising gardeners at Old Goat Farm at the foot of Mount Washington, decided to make a steppingstone. Greg Graves and Gary Watson purchased 1-foot-tall cages of ¼-inch-gauge metal. The top holds a standard 16-inch square clay tile; the base is 18-inches square. It didn't take long to fill the cage with their best boulders. Once full, the tile was added and focal-point plants set in place. Their next idea is a horizontal rock cage to be used as a matching bench!

— Carolyn Jones

PHOTO Carolyn Jones

PLANT YOUR OWN LEGACY

EACH MARCH AND APRIL, Vancouver's parks and boulevards have been showered by the pink delirium of blossoms from 37 thousand ornamental cherry trees. This year, that number should swell to 40 thousand.

In celebration of Vancouver's 125th Birthday Blossoms trees are now being offered by the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival at a special offer of just \$40, thanks to support from the David and Dorothy Lam Foundation.

Trees are available for purchase online now while supplies last and can be picked up in early April at VanDusen Botanical Garden at 5251 Oak St. and at Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation Sunset Nursery, (enter through parking lot behind Sunset Community Centre) at 6810 Main Street (at 53rd Avenue). They will also be available for pick up at three GardenWorks locations: 6250 Lougheed Highway or 4746 S.E. Marine in Burnaby, and 705 West Third St. in North Vancouver.

For planting tips from UBC's Douglas Justice, turn to page XX.

— Kerry Moore

PHOTO: Fótolia



MICHEL TRUDEAU ROSE RAISES MONEY

THE ROSE DISCOVERED by Michel Trudeau's aunt and named in his memory is giving back to Canada's winter sport enthusiasts.

A chance seedling found at Betsy and Robin Dening's own Brentwood Bay Nurseries sparked immediate interest. Betsy decided this rose should carry her nephew's name and benefit avalanche awareness. The son

of Margaret and the late Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Michel perished in an avalanche while skiing in Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park.

Since the Michel Trudeau Memorial Rose was released through garden centres last spring, support has been strong. Purchases through the rose's licensed grower, Adamson's Heritage Nursery Ltd., have generated \$2,150 for the Canadian Avalanche Foundation (CAF, www.avalanche.ca) already.

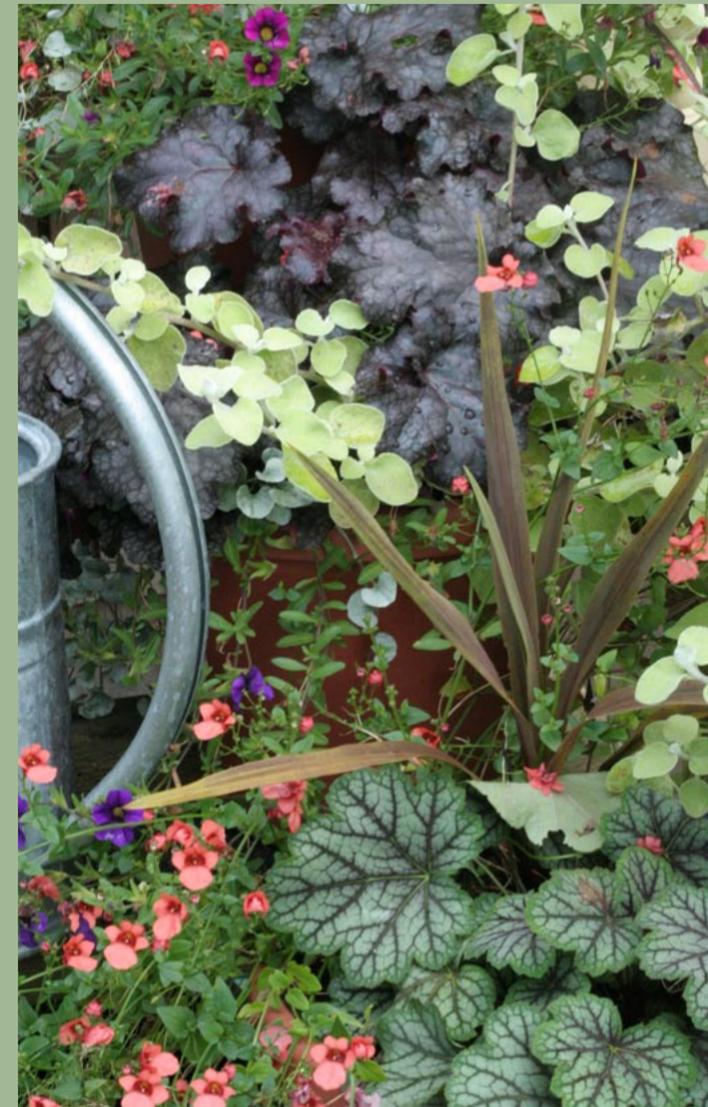
"We will continue to promote this rose to gardeners through their favourite garden centres," said Ken Knechtel of Adamson's. "The money gardeners can raise by buying or gifting this rose to their friends will have a significant and ongoing effect on the work that the CAF is able to do to protect skiers, snowboarders and sledders. But besides that, the rose has great value in the landscape – it's a really terrific plant."

The intensely-scented deep-pink blooms splashed with white are repeat flowering from spring to fall, and the blazing plum-red autumn foliage is followed by eye-catching red hips that attract birds to the winter garden. Although the parentage is unknown, it was identified as a unique Rugosa rose, and has proven to be extremely winter hardy to zone 2. The Michel Trudeau Memorial Rose does best in fertile, free-draining soil in full sun. Mulch after planting and water two to three times per week until established. It grows to 120 cm (4 ft.) high to 90 cm (3 ft.) wide – or bigger on the West Coast.

— Renata Triveri

PHOTO: VCBF BC Blossom Watch

Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old. — Franz Kafka



Contained BEAUTY

WELCOME VISITORS TO YOUR HOME with a collection of potted plants ascending the front steps. Victoria gardener-extraordinaire Judith McLaughlan shows off a grouping of perennial heucheras, interspersed with tender trailers. For impact, she advises gardeners to avoid putting plants with similar foliage side by side. Here the silver-green stems of licorice vine (*Helichrysum petiolare*) zig-zag among its neighbours. Ferny twinspur (*Diascia*) blooms in salmon-orange, nicely setting off the rounded burgundy and silver-variegated heuchera leaves. Two dracaenas add spikey foliage into the arrangement. Judith has wisely left her other banister plant-free for safety.

— Carolyn Jones

PHOTO Carolyn Jones

FOR MORE CONTAINER RECIPES, go to www.gardenwiseonline.ca

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steppingstones



SHEENA'S BEST HYDRANGEA FERTILIZER

WITH SPRING AROUND THE CORNER it's time to consider feeding and mulching our hydrangeas. An early feed will encourage rich colourful blooms, and if the time is taken to adjust the pH you can influence the colour of your blossoms over time. Mulching will help reduce your watering and weeding will also protect the roots of your shrub from compacting spring rains. Organic mulch feeds should be applied after the last frost to a maximum depth of 5 cm (2 in.) just under the shrub's dripline.

Start by knowing the natural pH of your soil. On the west coast, the soils are acidic, but in the drier interior, they might be alkaline. An inexpensive pH test kit will give you a head start.

For blue flowers, the soil pH should be 5.2 to 5.5. If yours is higher, add 1 T aluminum sulphate per gallon of water throughout the growing season. The aluminum is part of the blue pigment molecule. Avoid fertilizers with high levels of phosphates, as they have the opposite effect.

For pink flowers, the soil pH should be 6.0 to 6.2. To get to this pH, add dolomite lime three or four times a year. Use a fertilizer with high levels of phosphorus, which keeps the aluminum from entering the plant's roots.

Changing the pH can take a few years and won't affect the flower colour right away. Growing a hydrangea in a large pot would give you more control over the pH. Since they are hardy to zone 6, they can be safely left outdoors in a pot all winter in zone 8. Otherwise, winter protection should be provided.

BLUE BOOSTER

1 bag fish compost
500 mL (2 cups) organic fertilizer (be low in phosphorus!)
250 mL (1 cup) glacial rock dust (which naturally contains aluminum sulfate)
5 litres (20 cups) fine leaf mould or home compost

PINK PICK-ME-UP

1 bag mushroom manure
500 mL (2 cups) organic fertilizer
500 mL (2 cups) lime
250 mL (1 cup) glacial rock dust
5 litres (20 cups) fine leaf mould or home compost

— Sheena Adams

PHOTO courtesy bailey's 'endless summer

As of mid-February light levels increase, plants begin to grow – hooray! Start pots of lettuce in a cool greenhouse, or sow in a cold frame. Sow “slow” annuals in a cool greenhouse or indoors with bottom heat: *Salpiglossis*, snapdragons, cleome, petunias, begonias, impatiens and more. **Grass lawns** require work, precious water and chemicals to stay that way. Opt



Tomatoes

Seedy Saturday is the place to find heirloom/heritage seeds, knowledgeable growers, and enthusiastic fellow gardeners. Be sure to attend! Last year there were literally thousands of enthusiastic gardeners buying up the great seeds, many of them locally grown. See page 65 for locations and times. **Speaking** of seed-starting, use a good quality soil-less

indoors but can't be set outside until the weather warms – usually mid to late May. On the coast, tomato lovers should choose reliable types with short “days to maturity” like ‘Green Grape’, ‘Sungold’, ‘Black Cherry’, ‘Early Girl’, ‘Elfin Cherry’ and newcomers ‘Cherry Buzz’ (Territorial Seeds) and ‘Solid Gold’ (Johnny’s). **Small fruits** (raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries,



Sweetpeas

strawberries with extended harvest and delicious sweetness!

Soon your compost will come to life. Continue to layer using leaves stored from last fall. Avoid the “dump and run” method of piling on veggie wastes. The extra minute it takes to alternative carbon (dry) and nitrogen (wet) layers will give you great results. Peel potatoes, apples, veggie parings directly onto a doubled sheet of newspaper. Roll like a cabbage roll and add to compost – instant carbon/nitrogen layering, saves washing a cutting board or bowl.

Fertilize with care – overdoing it harms the planet. Instead of “chemical” options, try kelp meal, rock phosphate, alfalfa, worm castings and more for thriving plants and a healthy Mother Earth.

Dig and divide snowdrops (*Galanthus*) plants after flowers fade if you'd like to increase your stock of them or give away to friends!

Cut type-“C” clematis back to knee height and top-dress with rich organic matter like compost or manure.

Prune back winter-flowering shrubs lightly, and nip annual weeds now to minimize weeding chores later.

Prepare sweet pea beds by digging deeply, adding a 10 cm (4 in.) layer of compost or manure, topping with soil. Add soil inoculant to help the peas thrive. Seedlings (or seed) can be carefully planted when the soil warms a bit, usually by the end of March on the coast, mid-April in colder zones. Load of nourishment encourages long stems, nice big blooms and luxurious scent! 🌸

BCLNA
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Seeds of Victoria
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In the Garden

BY SHARON HANNA

The big question this time of year is... When can I start planting my spring vegetable garden?

Soil is chilly for most food crops but if you have raised beds, try sowing arugula, mache, onion sets and Asian greens as long as soil isn't mucky. Tuck in some broad beans and snow peas too, using inoculant, which encourages microbial activity in cold soils.

Arugula

for tough, environmentally friendly lawn alternatives grown from seed. Consider replacing some of your sunny lawn areas with garden beds to grow veggies, berries or fruit trees. Or, opt for raised beds. Some companies will deliver grow boxes as well as soil right to your door.

Can't garden yet? How about some TLC for garden tools – rub spades and hand tools with emery cloth, applying a thin coat of linseed oil to deter rust. Badly rusted tools? Try an overnight vinegar bath, then dry and rub with oil.

Be on the lookout for mason bees! These hard-working pollinators are vital as other bees struggle with environmental problems. Make or buy special housing to encourage them to linger. Nectar providers include native currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), other berries, *Pieris*, *Doronicum* (leopard's bane) and heather, as well as dandelions and buttercups, so allow these “weeds” a place in wilder sections of your yard.

Feed your garlic seedlings – a snack of liquid fish or kelp is appreciated now and occasionally through June.

starter mix. Regular garden soil is too heavy, full of critters and assorted microorganisms that can nip precious seedlings in the bud. **Consider** purchasing a heating cable to provide bottom heat to the many types of seeds that prefer it. Indoor grow lights are a good investment too.

If you want to grow tomatillos (*Physalis philadelphica*), start them now. Consult a reliable seed catalogue for growing info.

The National Garden Bureau has dubbed 2011 as “the year of the tomato.” Tomatoes grow quickly



Compost

grapes, rhubarb, etc.) arrive in garden centres this month to be planted now, or when you are able to dig. Try one of the new day-neutral type

FOR MORE ON WHAT TO DO IN THE GARDEN, go to www.gardenwiseonline.ca

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