It's Spring Migration!

If you're lucky, you might see the beautiful Hooded Warbler passing through Toronto during this time of year.

A striking small bird of eastern hardwood forests, the Hooded Warbler prefers forests with some shrub understory.

What a tangled web...

The Toronto Reference Library can help you untangle the web and learn how to use the internet. You may be interested in registering for: "Your City of Toronto on the Web" to learn about the City's website, how to find housing and job information, financial assistance programs, recreational events, and more. "Your City of Toronto on Web" is being held on Thursdays, May 20, June 17, from 2-3 pm.

Some of the other learning opportunities are:

•"Move That Mouse", Thursday, June 3, 10 am-12 pm.

•"Web Basics for Seniors", Thursdays, May 20, June 17, 10 am-12 pm.

•"Web Basics", Mondays, May 17, June 14, 10 am-12 pm.

•"Web Basics II", Monday, May 31, 10 am-12 pm, Tuesday, May 11, 6-8 pm.

•"Web 2.0: YouTube, Flickr, Wikis and More", Friday, June 18, 10 am-12 pm.

•"Email Made Easy", Friday, June 11, 10 am-12 pm.

•"Word Basics Part I: Create and Save a File", Tuesday, June 1, 10 am-12 pm.

•"Word Basics Part II: Editing and Templates", Tuesdays, May 18, June 15, 10 am-12 pm.

You will need to register for any of these learning opportunities by calling 416-393-7209.
The Toronto Reference Library is located at 789 Yonge St., just a short walk north on Yonge from the Yonge-Bloor subway.

Homes First Society
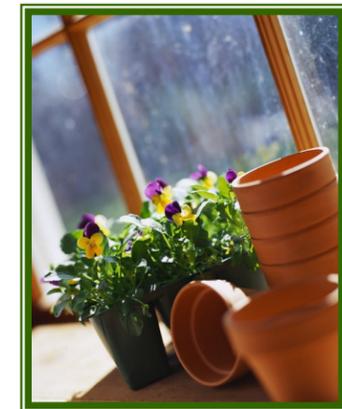
Community Village Bulletin

Issue 8
Spring 2010

How does your garden grow?

Whether you've got a certified green thumb and are lamenting your move to a yard-less apartment or you're a longtime apartment dweller looking for a nature-friendly hobby, apartment gardening can be a rewarding way to spend some time, decorate your home, and maybe even grow something edible.

If you don't have any outdoor space to speak of, putting some plants by your windows or growing highly shade-tolerant varieties are also good options.

Just because you don't have a garden plot to plant in doesn't mean you can't grow something beautiful or beneficial. Container gardening presents many options for growing a variety of plants, from asparagus to zinnias. It's also a great opportunity to be creative. Almost anything can serve as a container for soil with a few changes. From overturned football helmets to watering cans to old boots, you can create a window full of unique containers holding exciting plants. Even if you're just using plain terra cotta pots, consider painting them in interesting ways.

Drainage holes are the main necessity for any container being used for plants. If you can't or don't

Get Rich Quick!

How to get rich quick — rich soil that is.

Gardeners often call compost "black gold" for very good reason. It is a valuable addition to any kind of soil, improving its texture, drainage and moisture retention.

The City of Toronto offers free compost from April 10 to October 16 Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant, 9 Leslie Street, (north end, at Commissioners Street).

You can also pick up free compost at your local Community Environment Days .

Local Community Environment Days' dates are usually posted in advance at the park the event will be taking place at.

Please see the article, "The Dirt on Dirt" on page 3 for more information on using compost indoors.

(continued from page 1)

want to put holes in a particular pot, think about how to fit a smaller container already has drainage holes inside the pot. This can be a good way to hide the not-so-pretty plastic containers you might buy your plants in. You may have to empty the larger containers of water and clean them every so often, but it's a small price to pay for having better-looking pots.

Consider *STYLE*

You'll want to plan a decorating scheme for your plants. Should it be country? Cutesy? Modern? Make sure your containers look good together, as well as with your home's atmosphere . If you have a colorful house a plain collection of terra cotta pots will seem out of place.

Experiment

In addition to being practical for small spaces, container gardening is also convenient and beneficial in other ways. It allows for a lot of experimentation without a lot of investment. You can easily move your plants around to see what looks good together—and which ones don't. Plants are great for hiding something you don't want to look at—they're also great for bringing attention to something you want to show off.

Get WILD

Keep in mind that, depending on their size, your containers by no means need to hold only one type of plant. Furthermore, you can create beautiful arrays of color by joining different types of flowers in the same pot or window box.

The Practical

The size of your containers is important. Unless you're growing seedlings or very small single plants, you don't want to use containers that are particularly small. This will restrict the root system and negatively impact the plant's growth. Remember, smaller containers retain less water than larger spreads of soil, so your container garden will require more frequent watering. You may want to look into layering some pebbles, mulch, or shavings over the soil to help keep in moisture.

Do It Yourself Project —Starter Pots

Growing plants from seed is simple and rewarding and saves money. It allows you to experiment with unusual plants that you may not otherwise be able to.

Many gardeners save money by making their own starter pots.

What you will need:

- Newspaper
- Small Bottle
- Pair of Scissors
- Soil
- Seeds

Step 1: Basic cutting: Use your bottle as a guide to see where you should cut the newspaper. I like to cut several pages each time.

Step 2: Wrap the paper around the bottle

Step 3: Folding the bottom of the pot: Fold excess paper towards bottom of bottle. It is useful in this step if bottom of bottle is slightly curved.

Step 4: Flatten the bottom: Remove pot from bottle. If you look inside the pot the bottom will be raised. Use fingers or knuckles to press bottom flat.

Step 5: Fill with soil: This is what makes the pot steady. Without soil it will fall apart in a few seconds.

Step 6: Final planting: Plant your seed, water, and try to remember which kind of seed in which pot or make nice-looking tags. It is useful to put the pots together as this will create a great climate for growing plants. When you water the plants the water will gradually spread into surrounding pots helping to make looking after your pots easy.

The Dirt on Dirt

Good growing soil is fine textured and free of pests, diseases and weed seeds. It should be low in fertility and soluble salts and capable of holding and moving moisture. But beware, soil straight from your backyard just won't do the job. Typical backyard soil is too compacted and full of weed seeds. Native soil may not drain as well as potting mixes, and it can develop a crust that prevents seedlings from pushing through the surface. And it is not pasteurized, which can cause diseases in seedlings. One recipe for a good basic pasteurized soil for starting seedlings is a mixture of 1/3 pasteurized soil or finished compost, 1/3 sand or perlite and 1/3 peat moss.

Although organic matter is extremely beneficial for houseplants, you should screen it and allow it to air dry to reduce the possibility of creating a nuisance in your home. Many of the insects that live in compost will not survive if it is thoroughly dried. To be on the safe side, you might want to pasteurize compost before using it on houseplants. Be warned – baking compost stinks!

You can use your oven to pasteurize a small quantity of seedling soil. Put slightly moist garden soil or compost in a heat-resistant pan and cover with a lid or foil. Place in a 250-degree oven with a food thermometer, to ensure that the mix reaches a temperature of 180 degrees for a full half-hour. Avoid overheating it, as the structure of the soil may be damaged.

Sand, peat moss, and perlite are available at most nurseries and garden stores, and a mixture of 1/2 peat moss and 1/2 perlite or sand works well, too.

Don't forget to clean any previously used pots in preparation for planting. Scrape old dirt from containers, and then rinse them in a solution of one part chlorine bleach to 10 parts water to kill remaining plant disease microorganisms that could invade your tender young seedlings.

Community Gardening

Community Gardens in the City of Toronto

The Community Gardens Program of the City of Toronto is cultivating a dynamic community gardening movement across the City. Working in partnership with a wide variety of community groups, the program draws on the collective heritage of gifts from Toronto's distinct cultures. Community gardens benefit everyone by creating safe and healthy recreational activity within our parks system, and on other city-owned lands.

While there is often a small charge per plot, many Community Gardens will wave the fee for those on limited incomes.

Community gardens are safe, beautiful outdoor spaces on public or private lands, where neighbors meet to grow and care for vegetables, flowers and native plant species. The gardeners take initiative and responsibility for organizing, maintaining and managing the garden area. This participation builds skills and creates positive community development that is widely accessible to a diverse range of people. Partnerships between the City, other levels of government, and community organizations have already created additional community benefits, through fostering youth employment, volunteer activity, and the restoration of natural areas.

Please see the City of Toronto's website for more information on this and other programs:

www.toronto.ca