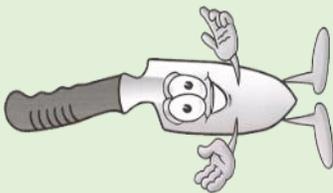


# Trowel Talk!

November, 2017



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## ***Squashing the winter food blahs***

My first experience growing members of the gourd family was with zucchini and was wildly successful. If you've ever read science fiction's "The Day of the Triffids" you'll know what I mean. Luckily our zucchini didn't turn that nasty.



Photo: Monique Paré

### **Pictured above, a ripe buttercup squash**

Many years later we courageously resumed our interest in this handsome family. We have concentrated on pumpkins and winter squash -- butternut, buttercup, and acorn. They are serving us well. Pepper, hubbard, spaghetti and mature vegetable marrow are all beautiful, tasty alternatives each with their own unique shape. Eventually we'll grow some of these too. At our place there is a basic requirement for any major family gathering -- pumpkin pie with whipped cream or ice cream or all is not right with the world.

Winter squash are easy to grow. Seeds can be started indoors in mid to late April. Once all danger of frost has passed, seedlings can be transplanted leaving a distance of at least 1.5m between each planting. Don't forget to harden them off first.

How you prepare the planting site is important. Soil can be filled into circular mounds or into long ridges. It's a good idea to put two or three seedlings into the top of each hill in cases of accidents; four-legged, bushy-tailed accidents being one possibility. Soil building done in the late fall will be well worth the effort. Working in compost, well-rotted manure and leaf mold will provide a nutritious environment for your plants the next spring.

Once the seedlings are established they will gradually form their own ground cover. Nevertheless, it's a good idea to help them out by laying down some mulch. Before you do that, you

can put down another layer of compost and manure. Mulch will slow down the weeds and help retain moisture.

If you're short of space it's possible to grow squash vertically as a climber or to plant one in a wooden half-barrel. Plants in containers will need to be watered and fertilized more frequently. Dwarf varieties do well in confined spaces. 'Jack-be-little' is just one.

Eventually your plants will crawl all over the place and you'll begin to see the fruits of your labour. When the first frost comes leaves die back, but produce will be fine. You can let squash sit for a while to harden, and then cut away foliage leaving a short "handle". However, lift pumpkins from the bottom if you want the handles to stay on.

Pumpkins and squash store well. A relatively cool room in the basement does nicely. Here they will keep for three or four months without spoiling. Or, you can cut them up, parboil and freeze them. Pumpkins and squash are rich sources of vitamin A and their natural blandness is easily enhanced blended with savory soup or sweet and spicy fillings for "pumpkin" pies.



Photo: Monique Paré

### **Pictured above, a hybrid acorn squash**

There is something wonderful about being able to cut open a small perfectly-formed acorn squash in January, and see bright summer colours right there before your eyes. Did I mention baked acorn squash? It's delicious!

*Edythe Falconer*  
**Master Gardener**

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*There are two groups of squash. Summer squash ripens through the summer and usually has a soft exterior. Winter squash ripens almost all at once, late in the summer or early fall. The skin is hard. Winter squash is better for storing than summer squash.*

## November TO DO List

- Make sure all outdoor faucets are drained and garden hoses are drained and stored.
- Turn over any water basins and bird baths or store them indoors.
- Store any ornaments or statues, that can't weather freeze and thaw cycles, indoors or cover them with a plastic garbage bag (secured in place with a bungee cord).
- Bring any ornaments, birdhouses, trellises, etc. that need repairs or freshening up to a spot where you can access them later for a winter rejuvenation project.
- Continue to water recently planted trees or shrubs until the ground freezes. Their root system is not well enough developed to secure a winter's supply of moisture.
- If you have gardening or plant ID questions, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

## Tip of the Month

My veggie garden hasn't been tilled for four years and the soil is very rich and healthy.

When I started gardening, I was taught that rototilling or double-digging a garden was the way to get organic matter mixed in and to ensure light, friable soil. Today's science tells us that turning over the soil is actually bad for it. The mycorrhizal fungi and micro-organisms that make the nutrients and trace elements available to the plants are in that top layer of soil. If we constantly work the soil, we are disturbing those organisms – in effect, we are burying them and cutting off their air supply. New ones will colonize but instead of having a continuous, dynamic, healthy soil, you are constantly starting over.

## 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](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca)

- monitored daily

- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

### CLINICS:

No clinics are scheduled until next spring.

### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

**From Shade to Sun – Converting a Garden** – January 4 – 7:00 pm

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by Greely Gardeners Group (Guest fee: \$3)



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



In 1953, Ruth Stout wrote a book entitled “No Work Gardening”. She was one of the original advocates for ‘no till’ gardening. She realized that the plants that self seeded in her garden didn't care if the soil was tilled or not. She advocates the use of a straw mulch to keep weeds at bay. Any weeds that do sprout are hand pulled and left in place to decompose and return the nutrients that they stole back to the soil. (Note – this is for weeds that haven't formed seeds yet.)

In Ruth Stout's method, instead of hoeing a trench for seeds, seeds go on top of the soil and a sprinkle of sand or a light layer of straw mulch is used to cover them. There in a YouTube video of an [interview with Ruth Stout](#) and she demonstrates planting a potato by simply putting a seed potato on top of the soil and covering it with a good chunk of straw mulch.

This method does rely on the addition of organic matter – both the straw mulch that breaks down over the season and the

application of manure or finished compost in the fall. By applying it in the fall, the worms will pull it into the soil and it will continue to break down before and after freeze-up. When it is planting time, the fresh nutrients will be available to your plants. No additional chemical fertilizer should be needed.

