



GROWING GARDENERS

NEWSLETTER FOR SOUTH EASTERN ALBERTA



THE DIRT THIS MONTH

02 PLANT OF THE MONTH: WILD BERGAMOT

Native species to know
and love

02 TREE TROUBLE

The damage, the cause
and the solution

03 GARLIC HARVEST

How to successfully
harvest and store garlic

04 THYME FOR TEA

Home-grown herbal tea,
from garden to cup

05 PLANTS + POLLINATORS

Upcoming event for
plant-curious people

06 CFCA GARDEN CLUB

Growing Gardeners +
CFCA info

CFCA's Growing Gardeners Newsletter aims to support gardeners of all experience levels in Medicine Hat and area. To sign up for our mailing list, email CFCAGarden@gmail.com.

NATIVE PLANT OF THE MONTH

WILD BERGAMOT

Monarda fistulosa

Wild Bergamot (a.k.a. Bee Balm) is one of the showier flowers native to the prairies. This herbaceous perennial is low-maintenance and attracts hummingbirds and butterflies with its lovely pom-pom-like flowers.

Type: Perennial

Family: Mint (Lamiaceae)

Height: 24 - 48 cm

Flower: Purple, Pink

Bloom: June, July, August

Light: Full sun, part shade

Soil: Dry to moist

Supports:



Start From: Easily grown from seed or division.

Benefits:

- Dried leaves and flowers make excellent tea
- Deer resistant
- Slowly spreads by rhizomes

Note: Has nothing to do with Earl Grey tea (see p. 4).

TREE TROUBLE

We've been seeing a concerning number of trees around town with dying crowns this year.

THE DAMAGE

Poplar, Birch and Aspen trees with chlorotic (yellowing) leaves, sparse foliage and dead branches, especially at the top/centre. Small D-shaped holes in the trunk, sometimes with bark peeling away.

THE CAUSE

The Bronze Borers (*Agrilus anxius* and *A. liragus*), serious insect pests of Poplar, Birch and Aspen. The larvae of these native species bore into the bark to feed and overwinter. The adults emerge in June/July to eat leaves and lay eggs.

THE SOLUTION

Maintain healthy trees to prevent infestation. Remove damaged branches or seriously infested trees to avoid spreading. Contact an arborist for advice. Unfortunately, removing the tree is usually the only option. Consider replacing with a different tree species not affected by borers.



Image Credit: Purdue University. (November, 2017). *Bronze Birch Borer*. Purdue Extension Entomology. <https://extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/E-50/E-50.html>

Reference: TWC Staff, MAC. (2020). *Monarda fistulosa*. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=mofi
Image Credit: Genevieve Mathieu. (2024).



GARLIC HARVEST

July is typically when garlic, planted last fall, is ready for harvest. These are some best-practices for pulling, curing and storing those beautiful bulbs.

Scapes

The first sign that garlic is nearly ready is the scape. A garlic scape is a long, slender, **flower stem** that forms around the same time as the bulb is filling out. Softneck garlic, not commonly grown here, does not do this. Leaving scapes to mature into flowers **takes energy away** from the underground bulb, so cut them once they form one full curl. Garlic scapes are considered to be a **seasonal delicacy**, and can be made into scape pesto, stir-fry, pickles and more.

Yellow Leaves

A few weeks after scapes have been removed, the **lower leaves** of the garlic will begin to **dry out** and turn **yellow**. This is the time to stop watering to make it easier to cure the garlic (more on this later).

Test Bulb

Use a potato fork, or broadfork, to loosen the soil next to a couple of **plants** then pull them out to see how the bulbs look. If it's **too early**, the bulb will be **small** and underdeveloped. If it's a bit late the cloves will be starting to open up, **splitting** the "skin" and making the bulb less storable.

Once we see plump, firm cloves, it's time to harvest! **Loosen the soil** to prevent ripping off the leaves and leaving the bulb in the soil when pulling.

Cleaning

Gently remove any **big clumps of soil** by hand. Washing with **water is not recommended** as it can prolong the curing time and cause problems in storage. Once the outside of the bulbs is dry after curing, it is easy to gently **rub away remaining dirt**.

Trimming

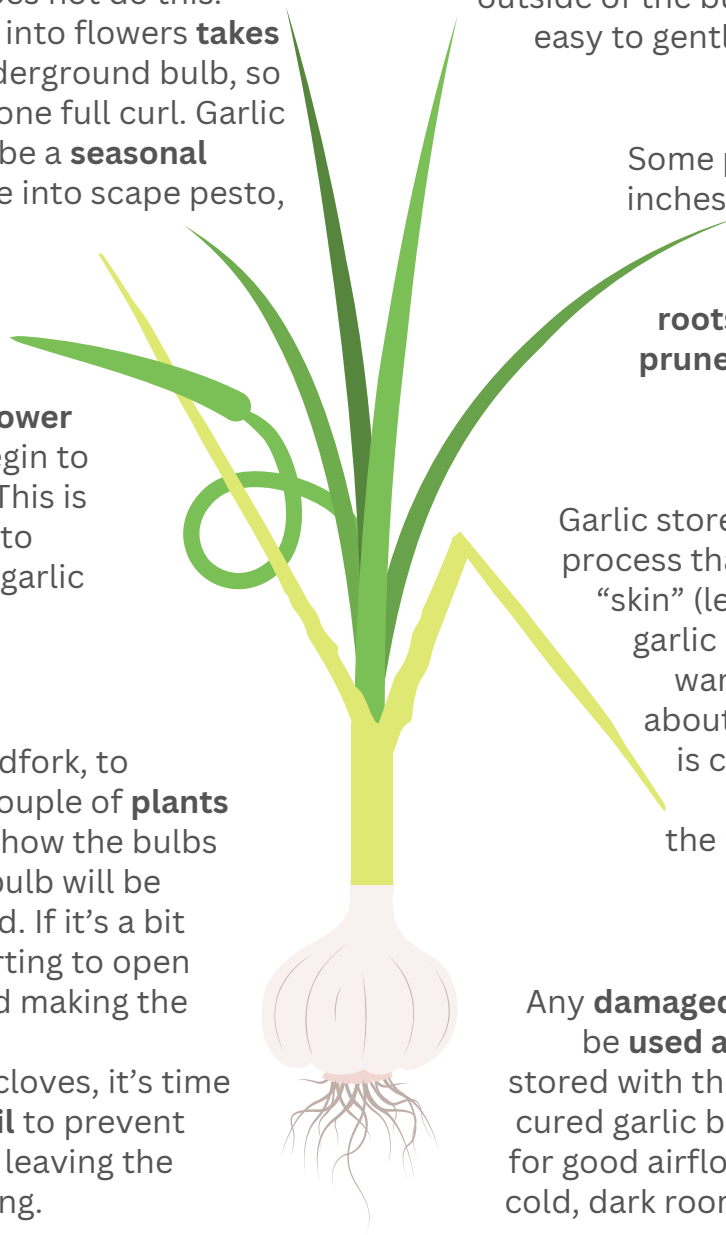
Some people **cut off** all but a few inches of the **stem/leaves** before curing, others leave the leaves. **Trimming** the **roots** to about 5mm with **sharp pruners/shears** can also happen before or after curing.

Curing

Garlic stores best after being cured, a process that **dries the outer layers** of "skin" (leaves) for **protection**. Hang garlic bulbs out of direct sun in a warm, dry, breezy location for about 2 weeks. Signs that curing is complete are that the outer layers are **fully dry** and the "**stem**" in the center of the bulb is **rigid**.

Storage

Any **damaged** or over-ripe bulbs should be **used as soon as possible** and not stored with the rest of the harvest. Place cured garlic bulbs in a re-used **mesh bag** for good airflow. For long term storage, a cold, dark room, like a **root cellar**, is best.



Home-Grown Herbal Happiness

THYME FOR TEA

While “true” black or green tea plants are not hardy in our climate, there are many herbal options that can not only thrive in our gardens, but also make a beautiful brew. We wanted to talk about a few delicious, easy-to-grow favorites we may have in the garden already!

Plant Parts

While dried **leaves** of plants come to mind when we think of herbal tea, **flowers**, **fruit**, **seeds** and **roots** can also be used.

Growing

Herbs grown for their **leaves** need **less sun** than those grown for flowers, fruit, or seeds. Some favorite herbs for tea are perennials in the **mint** family, like **lemon balm**, **catnip**, and **stinging nettle**. These have a **tendency to spread**, and do well grown in containers or in a spot where they are kept in check. Flowers like **chamomile**, **lavender** and **calendula** are easy to grow annuals. Many gardeners grow herbs for cooking that also make great tea, like **thyme**, **sage**, **oregano** and **rosemary**. **Echinacea** is a native flowering plant that has many benefits for pollinators, in herbal medicine and tea.

Harvesting

The best time to harvest most things is in the **morning**, before they have a chance to get warm. Use **clean, sharp tools** to avoid damage. **Wash gently** to remove dirt and insects and **keep cool** until it's time for drying.

When to harvest:

Leaves: Younger leaves are best, before the plant flowers.

Flowers: As soon as they bloom, before they get old.

Seeds: Once the seed heads are fully ripe, brown and dry.

Drying + Storage

The simplest way to dry herbs is to tie them in small **bundles** and **hang** them upside-down in a **cool, shady** spot with **good air flow**. An oven at its lowest setting can also be used, or a **food dehydrator**. Once fully dried, stems can be discarded and the dry herbs can be **stored in a sealed container**. Make sure they are fully dry or they will get moldy.



*Note: For any **Earl Grey** tea fans, I have to mention that its unique **bergamot** flavor comes from the **peel** of a **citrus fruit** (bergamot orange) and has nothing to do with the flowering plant we call Bergamot.*

Plants+

july 13th
2-4 pm



Pollinators

Launch Party

Explore the fascinating world of flowering **plants** and the **insects** (and other animals) that **pollinate** them through this **interactive display**.

Join us at the **Nature Centre** for a casual afternoon to enjoy some **snacks, crafts** and **more!** For more information, call 403.529.6225.



MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM
Managed by the Society of Grasslands Naturalists

GROWING GARDENERS EDUCATION PROGRAM

2024 will be our 3rd year offering Growing Gardeners Education Program, CFCA's free garden club. We are excited to continue to provide ecologically-responsible advice and hands-on learning to gardeners of all experience levels in Medicine Hat. We are grateful for our partnership with the Root Cellar Food and Wellness Hub and their lovely community access garden, which is the venue for Growing Gardeners Education Program. Follow us on social media to get up-to-date information about Garden Club, workshops and other local events. To get this newsletter sent directly to your inbox every month during the growing season, or to receive a copy of the 2024 Garden Planner, email CFCAgarden@gmail.com.



The poster features a green border and a central white area. At the top, a floral arrangement with a sunflower and various vegetables is positioned above the text "Growing Gardeners Education Program". Below this, a wicker basket filled with fresh vegetables like green beans, tomatoes, and cucumbers is shown. To the right of the basket, the text "WEEKLY WEDNESDAY Garden Club!" is written in large, bold, green letters. A green box on the right contains the text: "Join us to learn garden skills while helping to grow food in the community access garden! Registration not required. Children are welcome if accompanied by an adult." At the bottom, logos for "fcss Family and Community Support Services", "FoodConnections.ca", and "COMMUNITY GARDENS ROOT CELLAR" are displayed.

Growing Gardeners Education Program

WEEKLY WEDNESDAY Garden Club!

Join us to learn garden skills while helping to grow food in the community access garden!
Registration not required.
Children are welcome if accompanied by an adult.

Location: In The Root Cellar Food & Wellness Hub garden, behind 440 Maple Ave. SE)

fcss Family and Community Support Services

FoodConnections.ca

COMMUNITY GARDENS ROOT CELLAR

ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION (CFCA)

Community Food Connections Association is a non-profit organization based in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Launched in 2003, we have been working to support food security in the community through education, programming, partnerships and policy support for improvements in food, nutrition, health and local agriculture.

Our programs include the Good Food Club, Community Kitchens, the Local Food & Producers Directory, Medicine Hat Community Gardens, and Growing Gardeners Education Program. To find out more, head over to our website, FoodConnections.ca, or social media accounts:

 [@COMMUNITYFOODCONNECTIONS](https://www.facebook.com/COMMUNITYFOODCONNECTIONS)


COMMUNITY
Food Connections
ASSOCIATION

[@CFCA_MH](https://twitter.com/CFCA_MH)  + 