



Congratulations Sean

The North Halton Compass would like to congratulate our columnist Sean James on his recent Ontario Volunteer Service Award for his fifteen years of dedicated service to the Milton and District Horticultural Society.

Sean is pictured with then Minister of Tourism, Cam Jackson and Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh.

Photo by DONNA DANIELLI

Givin' you the dirt

By SEAN JAMES

On the value of Design

When it comes to house plants, I'm not much of a gardener. For the life of me I can't keep an African Violet alive long enough for it to bloom. By comparison, I regularly get phone calls from my Dad during which he just chuckles because he has brought another violet into bloom. Not being much of a gardener himself, he takes a great deal of deserved pleasure in doing something I cannot.

My house plants are survivors. If they make it through the winter, they get to remain part of my collection. Plants in my window include many cacti and succulents, (drought tolerant, fleshy leafed plants,) philodendrons, dracaena, passionflower vines and a couple of coleus for colour. I don't do ferns, or perhaps the other way around. The cacti are perfectly adapted for my brand of neglect as are the philodendrons. The coleus and passionflower vines are very vocal when they need attention. Their leaves wilt so noticeably that even I think to get them a drink. I also have a couple of spider plants for cleaning the air.

I never fertilize in winter but neither should you. House plants in our climate don't get enough light to grow very much in the winter.

Fertilizing would only stimulate growth that the plant would have difficulty sustaining. That growth would also be weak and prone to disease and insect attack.

When I do get diseases or insect infestations, I carefully measure how much I really like that plant. If it's worth keeping and if it can't wait until spring, I look into biological controls such as predatory mites for controlling spider mites. The big fear is that a pest such as spider mite will invade the other plants.

Surprisingly enough, I do very well with certain orchids although I confess I have none in the window right now. Orchids require less care than an African Violet. Generally, soak the pot overnight in the sink once a week. Keep it in bright, indirect light. They love it in a washroom because of the humidity.

When spring finally arrives, my plants are moved out under a shady tree for a week or so and slowly moved into the sun. This is so they don't sunburn. A summer outside usually overcomes my neglect. And then I bring them in before the frost...and the cycle of torture begins again. Isn't there something in the Geneva Convention about that?

Thought for the month

I have a campaign that may not

excite many people and nurseries. Invasive species are regularly sold in my industry. Sometimes we don't realize the danger until it is too late, as with Purple Loosetrife. The concern here arises with certain varieties of Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*) which seed very aggressively into our wild areas. It is important to note that of trees, only a Norway Maple can grow under a Norway Maple thus pushing out our native species.

There are many different, aggressive types of Norway Maple including the Crimson King Maple, which many people erroneously refer to as a Red Maple. Some types are not so invasive like the Harlequin Maple, a beautiful variegated form.

There are so many nicer trees. Many available choices are native and suited to the climate better. Many are longer lived. Norway Maples have a tendency to strangle them selves with girdling roots. Norways are very difficult to landscape around since they cast a very dense shade, and a very deep drought.

Think twice before planting a Norway Maple. Look at Oak, Black Locust, Sugar Maples and so many of our other choices before looking at invasive species. Don't be afraid to mention this to nursery people. The more people on the bandwagon, the greater the impact.

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