

Uncle Thomas's Gardening Column

It doesn't look much like spring as I set about to write this. According to the calendar, it's the first day of spring, but it still looks like January, and to my old bones, it feels like January. Was talking to George Ackerman the other day and although he's been tapping, the sap's not running too good. I remember a year like that back in the fifties. Some farmers pulled their spiles and put their stuff

a way without getting so much as a gallon of syrup. Well one old chap, a neighbour of mine, took a long time to get around to doing things, so he didn't pull his spiles like the other fellows did. He was the only one around who got to make any syrup that year, for the sap ran about a month late.

I've been telling you about shrubs and hedges and such, and planning your flower beds around these permanent plantings. And I've been suggesting that you think of the birds. Well, I was asked what plants and shrubs the birds would be attracted to. I've done a little research (you're never too old to learn) and here's some of what I found out.

Doves, Sparrows, Juncos and Towhees will eat off the ground beneath the feeder, and are partial to everything from cracked corn to millet and smaller seeds, depending on the size of the bird. They are also partial to wild fruit, insects and tree seeds, with the doves also adding waste grain and even nuts to their diet. Orioles are especially beneficial to your garden, having an appetite for caterpillars and small insects. But as you know, they tend to live all summer, in the tree tops. Well they can be coaxed down from on high, by nectar, the same used to feed the hummingbirds, and by fruit. Whatever you plant to attract the hummingbirds, should also be planted near the trees that the Orioles are nesting in, so you can get pleasure from watching them feed as well.

Other birds that might be of interest to folks who are having trouble with an excess of spiders, are Chickadees, Titmice and Nuthatches because they eat small insects, spiders and their eggs and larvae, aphids and leafhoppers. They are quite easily attracted to a well treed yard.

Now I've talked a lot about permanent plantings, like perennial beds, shrubs and hedges, and you may be thinking that I see no place for the lowly petunia or the marigolds, asters, bachelor's button, begonias, geraniums and all such annuals as have become popular over the years. Without these annuals, our gardens would become pretty dull places, for what could be prettier than a border of brightly coloured petunias with their trumpet like flower and their multitude of blossoms. With shrubs and perennial plantings and the use of hedges and fences, you can widen the range of annuals used in your garden, one enhancing the other. Annuals that do best in partial shade and in a spot sheltered from

the winds, no longer need to be planted next to the wall of your house where you had to go outside to see them, but can be planted in the protection of a flowering shrub in plain view of your window, where you can watch them bloom.

I would recommend that you buy a good gardening book, that describes the type of soil that the plant does best in, be it perennial, annual, tree or shrub, and when planning your garden, arrange the plantings into compatible groups. You may find, on testing your soil, that you need to change the ph of the soil in one area to accommodate a particular plant. That being the case, plant annuals or perennials that require a similar ph in the same area.

Well as you can see, I could go on forever about gardening. When I was a lad, we didn't know about such fancy things as ph levels in the soil, but we did know that wood ashes spread on the garden, helped to keep potatoes scab free. Now instead of tasting the soil to determine whether it is acidic, one can buy an inexpensive soil test kit that is quite adequate to the job for most gardeners.

Gardening is an adventure that never ends. A garden is a legacy that, with planning can be passed on to future generations to preserve, complete or enhance as they will. It gives both to the gardener and to all who see it and can be a source of health and well-being to those that work in it. And unlike many activities that we do for our livelihood, and time spent in it brings instant rewards as well as long-term. Happy gardening.

Award winning

Command Performance Choir

to give Concert at Mount Tabor Playhouse

Plan to attend the performance of the Command Performance Choir, at Mount Tabor Playhouse on Saturday, May 7th. Reserved seats will go on sale at The Heritage and Books on the Bay, in Picton and at Mount Tabor Playhouse Friday, April 15th. This is a benefit concert in aid of the Choir and the renovations to Mount Tabor Playhouse.