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## Flower Power In The Dead Of Winter

### Local Nurseries Preparing Flowers And Plants For Spring

By Hannelore Volpe



We are now in the winter country. During this recent long cold snap, the mercury plummeted faster than a rock off a cliff. On really frosty days, your cat, dog and kids all wear a similar pained expression when you say, "Go play outside!" The problem is, it looks like a winter wonderland, but nothing is growing out there.

So I figure flower therapy is needed - along with blossoms and green grass - plus or minus a few dandelions - to cheer our spirits.

It is reassuring to know that local nurseries will soon start or have already set to work.

At our house, we used to hurry spring along by starting a few hundred flower and plant seedlings by the living room window. What a joy it was to see the first timid leaves appear and then watch the plants grow and luxuriate in the sunshine. Two or three months later, they were ready to plant in the outdoor bathtub, the flower beds and the hanging baskets.

But of late, we have streamlined. Now our gardening efforts are confined mainly to the outdoors and we start visiting local nurseries for most of our flowers and vegetable plants by late May.

Last summer, I even found the papyrus of my dreams at the Kennedy Fruit and Garden Inc. greenhouses, south of town.

In the meantime, we bring home pots of spring flowers or cheerful bouquets to remind us that spring will indeed come.

And not just residents, but municipalities too turn to local greenhouses for their plant materials. For the past couple of years, the Otter Greenhouses in Port Perry have provided The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville with the lovely flowers and hanging baskets you see along Stouffville's Main Street and in other parts of town. These plantings have gotten "wow" reviews from residents and parks managers from other municipalities in York Region.

At this greenhouse, the owners, former Stouffville residents Murray Otter, Ken Otter and Donna Hoover, and nine employees are already putting in long days of intensive work.

While plants will be started in April, the "planning and ordering for your baskets and bedding plants is all done before Christmas every year," wrote Darlene Otter (Ken's wife) in an e-mail.

"There really isn't a better place to spend the coldest months of the year than in the greenhouse!", said Darlene.

Once the Victoria Day weekend comes and goes, it's the municipality's turn. Planting and daily watering, pruning and maintenance commences. Themes and designs for the baskets and beds are created by the town's parks supervisor, and professional horticulturalists, Maureen O'Halloran and Cassandra Cain. For many years, members of the Stouffville Horticultural Society pitched in with the flowerbeds at the town's 6240 Main Street premises (also home to Latcham Gallery) as well as other locations.

Flower bed plantings around town are changed spring, summer and fall to keep the beds "looking fresh, vibrant and new," said Mike Richardson, the town's manager of facilities and parks.

At the Leisure Centre last year a tribute to Canada's fallen soldiers was created with large numbers of donated poppies.

This year, more hanging baskets on the railings around the creek are planned. The town's famous roundabouts will look different too as the summer progresses with the addition of different, hardier plants.

"At the end of the day, the love and effort that you put in them is as important as the quality of the plantings that you get," said Mr. Richardson.

In previous years, Sicilia Gardens Inc. on 10th Line, supplied many of the town's plant materials. But the end of an era has come for this 50-year-old family business, run by Corrado and Giovanni (John) Moncada for many years. It was closed at the end of the season last year due to health reasons. John is now in a different field, as sales representative with the Royal Le Page Real Estate.

Another local nurseryman, Marinus John Jansen, has seen the industry evolve over his lifetime, as it became more "computerized and mechanized", as he described it.

His Richview Nursery in Vandorf closed in July. When asked why, he said, "I am 88!"

Formerly located in Richmond Hill, it provided that municipality's plant materials every summer. Mr. Jansen was also a guest speaker at the Richmond Hill Garden & Horticultural Society, bringing news of the latest trends in plants and gardens.

But numerous local nurseries, garden centres and stores are getting ready so that we have a colourful abundance of flower and vegetable plants to choose from around the Victoria Day weekend.

So hang on, everyone - it's only three months to go!

Potted flowers and vegetables adorn the back deck of the Volpe home.

Hannelore Volpe photo

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