

In the Garden



BY SARA KATZ
Master Gardener and Landscape Designer

Ask Sara

Q I have a huge problem with neighbourhood felines digging up my bulbs and plants. How can I discourage them?

– Karen McGregor, Birch Island, Ont.

A Cats do love to dig and roll in soft soil so a covering of chicken wire or hardware cloth, or a thick mulch of bark (kept moist), sharp gravel or thorny branch trimmings may deter them. Spritzed on the flowerbeds, commercial repellants, or a 5:3:1 mixture of flour:dry mustard:minced garlic clove mixed with enough water to make a sprayable liquid, are often effective. And motion-activated water sprinklers will scare them away. Cats dislike the smell of geranium, lavender, lemon thyme, rue and wormwood, so interplant them liberally throughout your beds. You can also try tempting them away with a special patch of catmint and catnip.

Some Like It Dry

Dry summers can mean municipal water restrictions and low levels in wells.

Conserve water by choosing drought-tolerant plants that only need regular watering during their first season. Try grasses such as *Andropogon gerardii* and *Helictotrichon sempervirens*; perennials such as *Hemerocallis*, *Malva moschata* 'Rosea' and *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy'; shrubs such as *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple,' *Cotoneaster apiculatus* and *Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Dart's Gold'; and trees such as *Ginkgo biloba*, *Platanus x hispanica* 'Bloodgood' and *Quercus palustris*.



In the pink

Called pinks (after their zigzag petal edges, perhaps) and carnations, *Dianthus* embrace both biennial types (such as sweet william) and perennials. Drought-resistant, pinks shouldn't be mulched or their roots may rot.

1. NAME: *Dianthus alpinus* (alpine pinks)

CHARACTERISTICS: In early summer, tiny hot pink or crimson flowers bloom above grassy clumps of leaves.

SIZE: Up to 10 centimetres tall; 30 wide.

WHERE TO PLANT IT: Site in full sun.

CARE: No cutting back or dividing is required for this pink.

2. NAME: *Dianthus deltoides* 'Arctic Fire' (Arctic Fire maiden pinks)

CHARACTERISTICS: Red-eyed white flowers dot spreading mats of evergreen foliage all summer.

SIZE: Up to 20 centimetres tall; 45 wide.

WHERE TO PLANT IT: This is one of the few pinks that tolerates shade, but it needs well-drained soil.

CARE: Divide every two years.

3. NAME: *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* 'Fire witch' (Fire witch pinks)

CHARACTERISTICS: Starting in the spring, long-lasting small magenta flowers open above blue-grey evergreen leaves.

SIZE: Up to 10 centimetres tall; 30 wide.

WHERE TO PLANT IT: This self-seeding alpine thrives in well-drained sand or sandy loam in full sun.

CARE: Shear after first bloom to encourage late-summer flowering, and divide every other year.

HARDINESS: To Zone 3, 2 and 3, respectively.

PRICE: All about \$9.50 for a 1-gallon pot.

- Developed column format and annual story lineup
- Sourced product photography
- Chose book and wrote book review each month
- Edited column

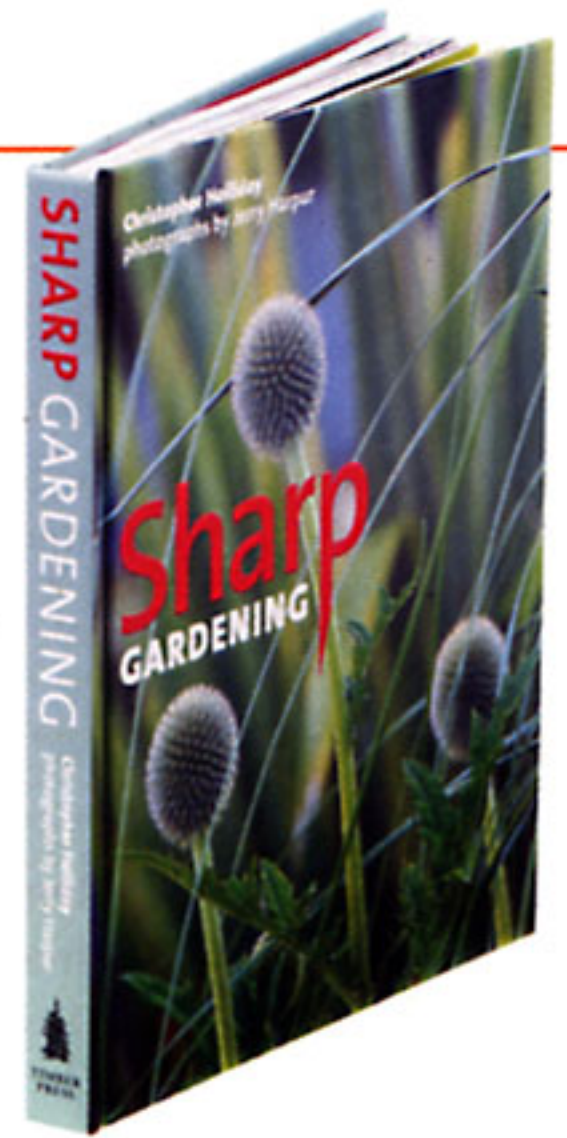


With its crisp, clean style, sharp gardening makes a dramatic impact.

– Christopher Holliday

Spikes, spears, spirals, rosettes and giant fronds – in a stunning array of greens that range from rusty to slate to lemon-lime to waxy blue grey – are the stars of *Sharp Gardening* (Timber, 2005,

hardcover, \$40.50) by British author Christopher Holliday. Their big impact belies the little watering, weeding and work they require. And their oversize scale and spectacular shapes – with lots of spots, stripes and veins – pair up perfectly with pared-down, contemporary style and urban spaces. Two cautions: While many of Holliday's picks will survive a Canadian winter (if their roots aren't soggy), others are for hot climates only and some are invasive and should be passed over. – Jo Calvert



TO DO THIS MONTH

Perk up summer salads, sandwiches, desserts and drinks the way upscale restaurants do – with edible flowers, such as chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), fragrant Johnny-jump-ups (*Viola tricolor*), sweet lavender (*Lavandula*), peppery nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*), clove-scented pinks (*Dianthus*) and colourful squash (*Cucurbita*), often deep-fried or stuffed, and the petals of minty bee balm (*Monarda didyma*). Use only homegrown edible flowers free of pesticides and herbicides. Pick them just when the morning dew has dried. Shake out any insects, remove stems and large stamens, then spray with water and dry on paper towels. For the best colour and flavour, add flowers just before serving. Visit the Montreal Botanical Garden website at www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin/en/info_verte/feuille_fleurs_comes/tableau.htm for a list of edible flowers.

Sara's Pick



It's smart to collect rainfall from downspouts for watering. Some municipalities offer subsidized rain barrels; if yours doesn't, make your own with a metal or plastic garbage can or pail and this leak-proof barrel tap that connects to a hose. Lee Valley, www.leevalley.com, \$14.95.

ON THE NET

To learn how and what to deadhead for more flowers, and how to make your own herb markers, visit www.canadianliving.com.

**BY FRANKIE FLOWERS***a.k.a. Frank Ferragine of Toronto's "Breakfast Television" and "CityNews" on Citytv*

- Developed column format and annual story lineup
- Sourced stock photography each month
- Edited column

Green Gardening 101

Want to make your garden a little greener this year? A balanced ecosystem with people and plants living in harmony is your goal. When you get there, you'll save yourself some work as well, since an organic garden is good at taking care of itself.

➤ **MAKE YOUR LAWN MORE ECO-FRIENDLY** When seeding or overseeding, reduce the percentage of Kentucky bluegrass and replace it with hardy perennial ryegrass and drought-tolerant fescue.

➤ **CHOOSE THE RIGHT PLANT FOR THE RIGHT PLACE** Select plants that are hardy for your growing zone, and suit the soil, rainfall and hours of sunshine. My tip? Choose plants that are native to your area. They will be naturally resistant to pests and disease, and won't be nutrient hogs.

➤ **THINK LIKE DARWIN** Go with survival of the fittest. If a plant died the first time you tried it, don't replant the same thing – select a better option.

➤ **LOOK FOR HEALTHY PLANTS** At the nursery, check that plants are free of insects and disease, and choose ones with strong stems and healthy foliage.

➤ **AND PICK THE RIGHT POTS** Buy plants in biodegradable pots, such as those made from bamboo, coconut, rice or wheat fibres. If these aren't available, shop at stores that have a return-and-recycle program.

➤ **FEED THE SOIL NATURALLY** A great organic garden is built on a good base. Recycle uncooked fruit and vegetable scraps (no meat or dairy products), leaves, and grass and garden clippings by adding them to your compost bin.

Once it's "cooked," use the finished rich, dark, crumbly compost to feed your flowerbeds right through the growing season.

➤ **REUSE** Dig coffee grounds into garden beds to add nitrogen to the soil.

➤ **MULCH** A good layer of mulch is worth its weight in gold. Apply mulch to reduce weed growth, retain moisture in the soil and keep roots cool.

➤ **PRACTISE PREVENTION** Take the time to smell the roses. Once you're up close, you can spot early signs of disease and insect infestation before you've got a big problem. And keep your beds free of dead or decaying plant material.

➤ **WORK WITH NATURE** Invite all things good into your garden by welcoming beneficial bugs, birds, bats and toads.

FRANKIE'S FAB 5

Virtual Pathways to Green Volunteering

- ➊ **EVERGREEN** (www.evergreen.ca) Help bring nature to the city – and your community parks, schools and homes.
- ➋ **PLANETVOLUNTEER** (www.planetfriendly.net/volunteer) Link up with eco-volunteering opportunities across Canada.

➌ **PLANT A ROW, GROW A ROW** (www.growarow.org) Share the harvest of your veggie patch with your local food bank.

➍ **WORLD WILDLIFE FUND CANADA** (www.wwf.ca) Organize a neighbourhood plant sale, register the event (click on Become a Community Panda at the website) and donate the profits to help protect Canada's wildlife and wild places.

➎ **NATUREWATCH** (www.naturewatch.ca) Join up with other "citizen scientists," amateur naturalists, school groups, Scouts and Guides, and help monitor local wildlife such as frogs and – every kid's favourite – earthworms.

