
The Dirt: November Gardening Resources & Tips

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Gardening Resources & Tips from the MMGA

November 2025 Thankfulness



November provides us the luxury of “falling behind”. We cleaned our garden, planted spring bulbs, and left stems and seed heads to help wildlife survive the winter ahead. We now get to slow down, be contemplative, walk through woods on a crisp day as dried leaves crunch beneath our feet. We leave the leaves, of course, knowing they provide shelter and food for pollinating butterflies, bees, moths, and other critters.



November also allows us time to be thankful, and we would like to thank the contributors who make this publication possible. We thank Kathi Gariepy and Hadley Berkowitz for their monthly columns, Carolyn Alessi for her editorial expertise, Kathy Donelly for her research contributions, and Nancy Kedersha and Chip deVillafranca for keeping things running at circulation. We thank each

of the multi-talented Master Gardeners who write the featured gardens essays, allowing our readership to be arm-chair travelers to so many unique, green spaces. Finally, thank you to Ann Hopps Morgan, who began it all!

In gratitude, Lynne and Madeline

In this month's issue of the Dirt...

- Featured Garden: Explore the historical and horticultural past of the Ocean House (built in 1748), at the Ashland Historical Society.
- Featured How-To: Want to build a terrarium but don't know how? This article makes it easy (with moss and bug recommendations included)!
- Featured Artwork and Mini How-To: This stunning original artwork is also a visual guide for fall gardens.

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Featured Monthly Garden

Ashland Historical Society
“Ocean House” Project Garden
P.O. Box 145

Ashland, MA 01721
Tel. (508) 881-8183
Email: ashlandhistsoc@outlook.com
<https://www.ashlandhistsociety.com/>

Author Leslie Judge, CMG, began working at the Ashland Historical Society's gardens in 2024 during her internship. She loved the property and gardeners and made it one of her regular volunteer spots. Leslie joined Christine Moscaritolo and Laurel Sparks as a co-project manager in 2025.

Author Christine Moscaritolo, PMG, began working at the Ashland Historical Society gardens during her internship and appreciated the learning opportunities Laurel Sparks provided at the site, as well as the welcoming environment. She has been co-project managing since 2023.

Author Laurel Sparks, PMG, started the project garden at Ashland Historical Society and was sole project manager for the first 4 years. She loves seeing the progress made possible with Christine, Leslie and the current workers!

The Ocean House was originally built in 1748 by Colonel John Jones, a prominent figure in Ashland's early settlement era, and it became the home of the Ashland Historical Society in 1991. The Ocean House overlooks Ashland's Main Street to the front and the gorgeous Mill Pond (Sudbury River Reservoir) to the back, providing beautiful vistas and plentiful wildlife. The property includes garden spaces that accompany the historic home, forming a cohesive setting where architectural and horticultural elements meet. The garden spaces are interwoven with the historic home's character, offering visitors a tangible example of how early New England properties balanced house orientation and plantings to support micro-climates, shade pockets, and seasonal color. The Ocean House and its gardens anchor the Ashland Historical Society's programs and outreach, connecting residents and visitors with the town's architectural and horticultural past.



Master Gardeners began maintaining the Ocean House gardens in 2017 and the site currently has three co-project managers, Christine Moscaritolo, Laurel Sparks, and Leslie Judge. The property encompasses four garden areas: a back



oval garden; a rock wall planting area along Main Street; and two border gardens that define the perimeter of the back yard.

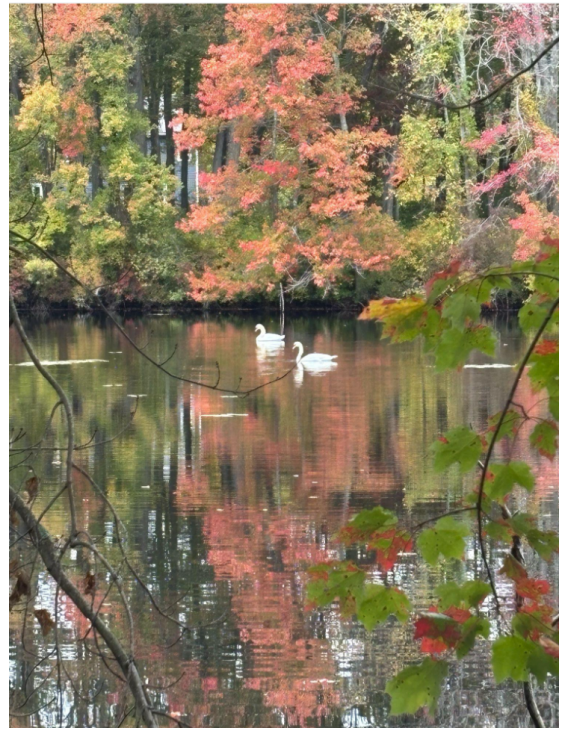
After much trial and error, Master Gardeners are working on a native bed at the border garden at the back of the property (see picture to left, above) and are encouraging the growth of goldenrod (*Solidago*), goose-neck loosestrife (*Lysimachia clethroides*), bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*), pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*), and meadow rue (*Thalictrum rochebruneum*). Monthly work focuses on maintaining and enhancing these planting beds while contending with ever-hungry rabbits, and mitigation of invasives like Japanese knotweed.



Most recently, the gardening team took on the project of adding new fencing to the back oval garden to improve the aesthetics of the bed and to better define the planting area. Using funds awarded by an MMGA grant and supplemented by the Ashland Historical Society, willow fencing was purchased and installed to create a historically appropriate look to this 18th century home garden.

The Master Gardeners who work at the Ashland Historical Society site are a dedicated group who love this location and its beautiful surroundings. We would like to give a special thank-you to Lynne Frank, Barbara Dallis, and Joe McConnon. This year, with their invaluable help, we were able to cut back and remove vines and invasive plants from the water line, creating a view of the water from the house and gardens. We also shoveled a mountain of leaf mulch, a day that will live in infamy! Observing the evolution of the garden spaces over

the growing season and the years is satisfying and enjoyable for all. The Society's leadership is a great partner to the MMGA gardeners, highly valuing our work and supporting our efforts wholeheartedly.



Massachusetts Master
Gardener Association Presents

Winter Gardening Know-How

Topics Include

- Winter Pruning: Why, When, and How to Prune your Shrubs
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Join us **ONLINE**

Nov 5, 12, 19 & Dec 3 2025 7-8:30 PM

Registration closes November 2, 2025

To learn more and sign up, click to visit
our website. Questions? Email us at
KnowHow@MassMasterGardeners.org

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Featured How-To
Build Your Own Terrarium



Author Madeline Chamberlain is a Senior Principal Master Gardener and Communication Director. She co-manages the Ohrenberger Native Plant Garden in West Roxbury. Madeline lives in Boston with her husband, son (a self-professed Friend of Bees), rabbit, and turtle. When she's not gardening, she's teaching high school English and learning Japanese.

Ever since the invention of the **Wardian Case**, gardeners and nongardeners alike have been captivated by the thought of having their own tiny indoor woodland. In recent years, magazines and social media feeds have been rife with charming terrariums and deceptively simple directions for creating a little mossy magic for your coffee table or bookcase. Unfortunately, a lot of these how-tos do not lead to long-term success. I'm hoping I can help you out a little on that front. While my directions aren't fool proof, they are the result of quite a bit of dabbling over the years.



Here's what you'll need:

Jar. Trust me when I say this— the larger the better. I appreciate the allure of a tiny jar filled with moss, but I can honestly tell you that only my large terrariums have survived. My most successful one was (and still is!) a 2.5-gallon behemoth.

Drainage layer. Quarter- to half-inch gravel works well here. You'll need enough to cover 2 inches to the bottom of the jar. This is where the water will go and eventually evaporate and do the whole water cycle thing.

Screen or mesh. I bought a roll of fiberglass window screen years ago and used it to cover drainage holes in plant pots. Cut it in a circle to fit over the drainage layer. This will keep the drainage separate from the substrate.

Substrate. You can make your own using chunky horticultural charcoal, orchid bark, perlite and a little potting soil. But I cheat. I usually get enough substrate when I buy the next item on this list.

Detritivores. You read that right. Besides drainage, the best thing to assure long-term success for your terrarium is a gang of little creatures who will eat all the inevitable decomposing matter in your terrarium. I prefer **springtails**. You might want to go a whole other level with pillbugs. But trust me. Buy the

detritivores. Plus, they come with their own substrate because who's going to mail you an envelope of loose springtails?

Moss. Moss is what will pull everything together in your little landscape. As you browse your website of choice, be sure to check the light requirements. A low-light moss is your best bet. Sure, pillow moss looks the most majestic, but this is varsity-level moss. It requires light! And trimming! And love! This might not be the level of care you're envisioning for your little world. And by the way: do not grab moss from outside. Not only is it not clean, it also needs a cold winter dormancy period, something your house doesn't have.



Plants. This is the fun stuff, and I probably don't need to tell you what to buy. Just be sure to check the light requirements and make sure the adult size will fit in your jar.

Supplemental lighting. Even low-light plants need some light. You can easily purchase discrete supplemental lighting that will

keep everything growing, but also aesthetically illuminate your terrarium.

Distilled water. You're making an ecosystem; you want the water to be as pure as possible.

Where do I buy all this stuff? The jar seemed easy, but then you lost me at springtails. Rather than visiting an online plant shop or even a terrarium shop, I prefer to use herpetoculture or vivarium supply stores. My rationale is that their primary goal is to keep the frogs/snakes/turtles alive, so I know what they're selling me is sterile. I can't name names here, but I can tell you that there's an online herpetoculture shop in New England that has a great selection.

Ok, I got all the stuff. I have a circle of mesh, a pile of moss and I'm worried the springtails are judging me. Now what? First off, clean everything in water and dish soap. The jar, the mesh circle, any tchotchkes you've found, even the gravel layer. If your trusted seller says the plant material is clean, you can believe them. If you splurged and bought a cute fern from the plant shop down the road, gently remove all the soil from the roots and submerge it in water

overnight. You can even add a tiny amount of bleach. This will prevent unwanted guests.

The rest is straightforward. Add the drainage layer and then the mesh circle. Top with substrate. Consider creating high points and low points. Artfully arrange the moss and the plants. It's okay to have surface area that doesn't have plants. Sometimes a little area of fine gravel or stones looks nice. Spray the whole thing with distilled water to make sure it's moist and slap the lid on. Wherever you place your terrarium, be very honest with yourself about the light it will receive. I can't stress the supplemental lighting enough— especially if you decided to get fancy and buy that pillow moss.



Upkeep is simple. Turn your terrarium every few days so it gets even light. Mist it with distilled water if it looks dry. Trim any dying plant matter (the springtails can only eat so much) and ever zealous moss. But most of all, enjoy your own little enchanting world.

Featured MG Artwork

"Last Light"
by Margie Florini, CMG



Pictured above: "Last Light", acrylic on canvas, by Margie Florini, CMG

"Last Light" is that time of day and year when the sun sits closer to the horizon creating lovely, golden light which signals that Fall is here. My neighbors and friends continually ask questions about their gardens and "the best way to put them to rest for the winter." While there are many tried and true methods or philosophies regarding garden clean-up, I encourage folks to leave their perennials and ornamental grasses standing for the following reasons:

- Flowers and stems look beautiful as they age to golden bronze and rusts. These dried leaves, stems, and flowers protect the entire plant from the cold and wind as winter comes in.
- Plants and seed heads will feed and protect wildlife in the garden.
- Dried plants and seed heads will catch the snow and create wonder and beauty in the winter garden.
- As the cold season progresses, one may choose to cut away tattered and damaged leaves and stems but try to wait until mid-March, when we can cut the stems down in varying heights (6" to 24") to leave hollow/pithy stems for nesting pollinators.

Seasonal MMGA Learning Resources

Ask us your questions in person! Trained volunteers staff Ask-a-Master-Gardener (AAMG) tables at dozens of events throughout the growing season.

- The AAMGA is coming to a community near you, so check our [AAMG Calendar](#) for dates and times.
- Belong to a local organization that would like to host an AAMG? Contact

Outreach@MassMasterGardeners.org

Why guess? Test! Get your soil pH tested - for free!

- Visit a soil testing clinic near you: [Soil Testing Calendar](#).
- To request an MMGA Soil Testing event for your organization's event, contact SoilTesting@MassMasterGardeners.org



Year-round MMGA Learning Resources

Have a plant problem? Email our volunteers your questions...and they'll get back to you. Please include your name, phone number, and as much detail as possible, including photos.

- Massachusetts Horticultural Society at MHSHelpline@MassMasterGardeners.org
- New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill Hortline@NEBG.org

Speaker's Bureau: If you're a member of a garden club or other organization, check out our lecture topics here. If you need information on how to schedule a talk for your group, contact our Speakers Bureau Manager at Speakers@MassMasterGardeners.org.

Credits

Featured Articles & Columns

- Featured Garden: Leslie Judge, CMG; Christine Moscaritolo, PMG; Laurel Sparks, PMG
- Featured How-To: Madeline Chamberlain, SPMG
- Featured MG Artwork: Margie Florini, CMG

Photos (in order of appearance)

- Fern in leaves, by Lynne Larson, PMG
- Ocean House, Ashland Historical Society (five pics), by Leslie Judge, CMG
- Terrarium (large jar), by Mississippi State University Extension
- Springtails, by New England Herpetoculture
- Terrarium plants, by The Spruce
- Terrarium layers, by Mississippi State University Extension
- "Last Light" original artwork, by Margie Florini, CMG
- Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), by Lynne Larson

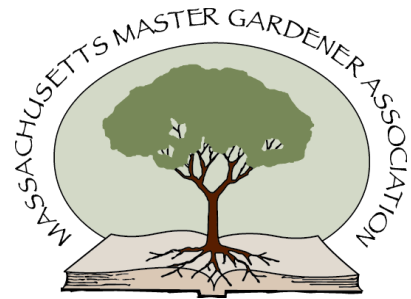
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- Circulation: Nancy Kedersha, PMG, and Chip deVillafranca, CMG



Who We Are

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is an independent non-profit organization whose mission is to share research-based horticultural knowledge and experience with the public. We meet that goal through Master Gardener Certification, outreach, education, volunteering, and public gardening programs for the advancement of best practices in sustainable, regenerative horticulture.



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