

PRODUCT OF EDEN SQUASH BABIES

Unusual living sculpture art exhibit winding down at K-W Art Gallery

KAROLYN FOURNIER

It has been a long summer for artist Mary Catherine Newcomb. A graduate of University of Waterloo and York University, this local sculptor has been exhibiting her work across Canada for over 27 years.

Her most recent exhibit is nearing its end as the summer growing season winds down. "Product of Eden" is a 400 square foot garden erected at the entrance to the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery.

The garden from afar looks like an ordinary vegetable garden in two large, raised beds. Upon closer inspection, the visitor will be surprised to discover the fruit developing under the large leaves are all uniquely formed squash bearing human-like characteristics.

The medium in this living sculpture is jumbo pink banana squash, an old heirloom variety. As the fruit develops on the vine, it is encased in a mould made from fibreglass and resin created by Newcomb.



The artist has diligently cared for these "squash babies" daily all summer long: pruning, weeding, watering and carefully keeping an eye out for damaging insects and disease. This outdoor exhibit is truly a labour of love, a season long commitment to nurture nature while dealing with nature's challenges. In June, a plastic sheet was pulled across the frame to protect the garden from hail. Throughout the season, Newcomb, like other gardeners in the region, was chal-

lenged with ways to keep furry visitors from enjoying the vegetable sculptures. With a keen eye she watched for boring insects and squashed (no pun intended) bugs and beetles.

As the season progressed, she experienced human emotions to the natural cycles of life and death of the project. Some fruit succumbed to disease and deformity, other fruit grew and prospered. She has protected the developing fruit with umbrellas and culled out weak

fruit and vegetation. Like other gardeners, she has found tranquility and comfort in working in the garden.

As harvest time approaches, it is time to put the garden to bed. Join Mary Catherine and the others who watched the development of this garden sculpture to say farewell to the squash babies on Saturday, October 2 from 10 am until noon. Enjoy a cup of coffee and take pictures. The plants will

be removed and the soil from the beds will be distributed free of charge to anyone who would like some for their garden. Please bring your own containers for soil.

Admission to this art exhibit is free.

Project supported by Region of Waterloo Arts Fund & K.M. Hunter Foundation

Visit Mary Catherine's blog at <http://productofeden.wordpress.com/>.

OUT IN THE GARDEN

Stars of the Autumn Garden

I've had my eye out for naked ladies in my garden for the past month and they finally appeared last week. Now before all you men (my husband included) come rushing over to take a peek, I should clarify that I'm talking about autumn crocus (Colchicum). This perennial plant is nicknamed 'naked ladies' because they bloom without leaves. Leaves are produced in the spring, sometimes mistaken for tulip foliage. These leaves die back during the summer and blooms appear in late summer and fall. It is a fresh burst of pink colour in the sometimes drab fall garden. Naked Lady corms can be planted now or in spring, but won't bloom until next fall.

Most annual plants have now bloomed themselves to death due to the long summer we've enjoyed. It is okay to remove and throw them on the compost pile. Tuck in a few colourful mum (Chrysanthemum) plants if you need to brighten the empty spots.

An annual plant that I see thriving and excelling this time of year is coleus (Solenostemon). This foliage plant is available in a wide variety of bright colours and since its colour is not dependent on blooms, it is a garden workhorse from spring until fall. If your garden lacks colour this time of year, perhaps add coleus to your spring wish list for 2011.

Other perennial plants to grow for fall colour include stonecrop, heuchera, lavender and ornamental grasses. September is a great time to add new perennials to your garden. The plants will adapt nicely and set down great roots without the stress of hot sun and drought.

Stoncrop (Sedum) is popular in landscape design as it is heat and drought tolerant, needs little or no maintenance, attracts butterflies, and adds interest to the winter garden. The upright stoncrop is easily recognized by its thick, waxy leaves and pinkish flowers.

Coral bells (Heuchera) is also heavily used by landscapers. This flowering foliage plant has colourful leaves available in lime green, red, orange, burgundy, brown and purple.

My lavender bloomed earlier this summer and because I cut off the spent blooms, I have been rewarded with a fresh, fragrant bouquet of purple flowers this fall. It's always nice to have some cut flowers available to bring inside as we see less and less of the sun.

Another staple in fall landscapes are ornamental grasses. Available from short to tall, solid, striped or variegated leaves, the seed heads provide food for birds and winter interest. A favourite fall grass, the purple fountain grass is a perennial plant, but not hardy in our cold winters.

Shrubs are known as the backbone to any garden. Some of my favourite fall superstars are hydrangea, burning bush and tiger eye sumac.

Hydrangea (H. paniculata 'Limelight') blooms green in August and flowers mature white with a pink blush in September. Leave blooms for winter interest and prune in spring.

Burning bush (Euonymus elata) and Tiger Eye Sumac (Rhus typhina 'Bailtiger') are must have shrubs for adding red and orange colour to small city gardens in the fall. Tiger Eye emerges chartreuse green in spring, with ferny foliage that adds delicate texture to the summer garden. Not to be mistaken with the sumac that grows wild at the side of the road, this sumac has been hybridized not to spread invasively. It does share the same orangey-red fall colour as the roadside wonder.

Happy gardening!

Karolyn Fournier works at Colour Paradise Greenhouses and Garden Centre in Mannheim.

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