



KNOW YOUR PERENNIALS

SAGE ADVICE FROM THE OWNERS OF RIDEAU WOODLAND RAMBLE

BY SARAH BROWN



Above Dunn, who has been collecting artworks for the garden for more than three decades, says he now tries to limit himself to “powerful” pieces. “I enjoy garden art, but it can move from whimsical to tacky when you get too much of it,” he explains

THEY HAVE PORTRAYED THEIR GARDEN CENTRE as a phoenix that rose from the ashes of the calamitous 1998 ice storm. When Dave Dunn and Rob Caron surveyed their seven-acre wooded property in the aftermath, they were shocked by the devastation but realized that it might — just might — be an opportunity. Both avid gardeners, the two had dreamed of opening a garden centre but were loath to cut down mature trees to open up the space needed. Now Mother Nature had done it for them.

Open since 2000, Rideau Woodland Ramble garden centre near Burritts Rapids boasts lushly landscaped trails, flower gardens, and a pond, all of them beckoning guests to relax and wander, contemplating the perennials, shrubs, and trees; seeing where they thrive; and gathering inspiration from how Dunn and Caron have carefully placed them. The two were honoured last year by the Canadian Garden Council, which named the Ramble its Destination Garden Centre of the Year. It was a prestigious award, bringing new visitors from eastern Ontario and far beyond. At the same time, the Ramble was included in a newly minted tourism initiative called the 1000 Islands and Rideau Canal Garden Trail, a garden-tour circuit taking in nine spectacular public and private gardens running along the St. Lawrence River from Gananoque to Prescott and north to Rideau Woodland Ramble.

Dunn and Caron live on the property, which gives the garden centre a very personal feel — the trails and gardens are their backyard. “That’s why we don’t label the plants in the woods,” says Caron. “This is our home, and we want it to feel that way.”

Top The conifer garden in its full late-summer glory leads to a large pond. Dunn’s sizable collection of statuary includes practical artworks, such as the bird bath (foreground), as well as more fanciful metalwork pieces



Know This Before You Buy Plants will thrive only in the correct light, soil, and moisture conditions. Watch your garden over four seasons, jotting down which areas get sun, shade, and part shade. Where is it wet or dry? Is the soil acidic or not? Knowing this basic information will allow nursery staff to help you choose flora that will thrive in your garden.

TOP TIP Treat all plants as living things with their own particular needs. If you learn about them and respond, you will be rewarded. But remember, you can kill your plants with kindness. Don’t overwater, and don’t rely on sprinkler systems alone — they don’t know whether the soil has dried out sufficiently to demand another drink. **Save the Date** The Ramble posted all its plants for the current season in February, giving experts and newbies alike lots of time to research and read about what will be in stock come spring. The opening date is weather-dependent but usually occurs around April 20. 7210 Burritts Rapids Rd., 613-258-3797.



Above left A vast collection of hostas lines a shady path that also highlights small trees and shrubs, including Japanese maples and rhododendrons

Above right When they saw their portrait, Dunn (left) and Caron jokingly labelled it “Rideau Woodland Ramble Gothic”



Left Built in 2000, the glass-enclosed pavilion boasts a tiny art gallery filled with Dunn’s nature-inspired paintings. Tea, coffee, and homemade cookies tempt visitors to rest awhile and contemplate all they’ve seen before buying their perennial finds

HOT PLANTS Hardy perennials, pretty daylilies, and flowering shrubs — six of the most-anticipated plants coming to the garden centre in 2016



Daylilies (*Heemerocallis*)
This very adaptable perennial is always on-trend. It tolerates tough growing conditions, and the range of colours, shapes, and characteristics is astounding. The Ramble sources all its daylilies locally from Almonte’s Whitehouse Perennials.



Star Magnolia
Also known as *Magnolia stellata* ‘Royal Star,’ this particular magnolia is an often-overlooked flowering shrub that is hardy in our region. It showcases fragrant star-shaped white flowers in spring before the foliage appears. These showy flowers have a huge visual impact early in the season before everything gets blooming.



Dwarf Ginkgo ‘Mariken’
This compact, bushy selection was discovered as a witch’s broom growing in a ginkgo tree in the Netherlands. An excellent find, its fan-shaped leaves turn bright yellow in fall. Because ‘Mariken’ remains small, it makes a high-interest architectural feature for either a small garden or a container.



Helsinki Variety Rhododendrons
This is a rhododendron variety that’s tough enough for the harsh Ottawa climate. It flowers in May but remains pretty for the rest of the summer courtesy of its dense dark green foliage. Rhododendron x ‘Helliikki’ is shown in this photograph.



Japanese and Korean Maples
The Japanese maple is a small tree with large leaves that turn bright red in spring. Those leaves mature to a rich purple and retain their colour well, even during the summer. Crimson fall colours and scarlet winged seeds add extra interest to this garden standard. The *Acer palmatum* ‘Bloodgood’ is shown in this photograph.



White Fringetree
White fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) is an ornamental native valued for its showy (and very fragrant) floral display in late May and early June. Although slow to grow, it eventually becomes either a large shrub or a small tree.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIE OLIVER; HOT PLANTS COURTESY OF RIDEAU WOODLAND RAMBLE