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For many gardeners, this quiet space in the year is the perfect time for reflection and serious planning for the season ahead. Gardeners, in general, start each year with optimism and hope but we have a bad habit of not paying enough attention to what is changing in our gardens. Over the course of time, a garden alters ... trees grow and flower beds that were in full sun are now in partial shade, bushes have a normal life span and may need replacing, colors that you've used for years don't really speak to you anymore, foliage seems more important than it did before and the deck/terrace needs more fragrant plants and hanging baskets. All gardens change as they mature and careful editing and/or additions will help you enjoy what you have created even more. Take this time to listen to what your garden would like to tell you!

You may actually find that your garden is exactly right for your way of life. Certain plants become "hot" in gardening circles but that doesn't mean they're right for you and that you should change your garden just to accommodate them. Be selective. If you're attracted to a plant but it doesn't really "fit" perhaps it would work as a container plant. Your garden is a reflection of your style, not someone else's. It's meant for your enjoyment. This special time gives you the opportunity to plan how to make that happen.

Acer Gardens is really excited about our new perennial, annual and shrub offerings for Spring 2025 and we'll be sending out a specific email about them as we get closer to Spring! Weather permitting, we hope to be open the last week in March (we'll send out an email as we get closer to the actual date) and look forward to working with you throughout the season. Plan to come in, look at all the new plants, and talk over your garden plans for the coming garden year! Our current Information Sheets are available on our web site.

Bird Feeding

February is National Bird Feeding Month. Our over-wintering local birds are primarily seed eaters and feeders should be sited in the sun with wind protection available and shrubbery nearby for warmth and protection in the night. Many bird seed mixtures are available but safflower seeds are particularly popular because most squirrels don't like them. Hanging oranges from low tree limbs will attract some birds such as Baltimore orioles, woodpeckers and finches. Many birds also enjoy eating slices of apple or pear... some are said to be fond of peanuts, nuts, pumpkin seeds, popcorn and Cheerios! Consider planting some "magnet" shrubs (in the spring) specifically to bring birds to your garden. Enkianthus, Myrica (Bayberry) and Ilex (Winterberry) will all attract birds and give you the bonus of brilliant fall color. Don't be disturbed if doves arrive ... they are a great dropped-seed clean-up crew ... and even blue jays are useful in that role.

Flower Shows

Winters can be long and gray in New England and gardeners need bright spots to punctuate the season. Look ahead and think about planning a day trip to the CT Flower Show in Hartford. The 43rd annual CT Garden Show will take place from Thursday, February 20 through Sunday, February 23, 2025 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. with a theme of “The Signs of Spring.” There will be well over 300 booths, landscaped gardens and more than 80 hours of seminars and demonstrations (which are free with your ticket) given by over 20 horticulturists and landscapers. Vendors will man booths featuring fresh flowers, plants, herbs, bulbs, seeds, gardening books and equipment. You can even bring a ½ cup of soil to the UConn Co-op booth for free soil testing. Go to www.ctflowershow.com for further information, hours and ticket availability. What a great way to get ready for spring!

The 2025 Philadelphia International Flower Show (www.theflowershow.com) will be held March 1-March 9, 2025 and is themed “Gardens of Tomorrow.” The world’s leading floral and garden designers will explore the merging of nature’s brilliance with human ingenuity resulting in a greener future. The 10-acre Convention Center will be turned into a living canvas blending a joyful hobby and a healthier planet and will also feature garden presentations, design concepts and demonstrations, special events and competitions. The PHS is the world’s oldest and largest indoor flower show and attracts more than 260,000 visitors annually.

Web Site

We keep working on and improving our web site! It’s designed to be as interactive as possible and to give you more information quickly ... and it looks terrific! Read about our services, stay up to date on coming events and future workshops, learn about our plants and products, access our quarterly Newsletter and all the current Information Sheets and join us on Instagram and Facebook (a great way to see what other gardeners are growing). We’re always interested in hearing what our customers would like to see on the web site and we add new features all the time.

Workshops and Talks

Acer Gardens’ Late Fall-Early Winter Arrangement workshops were an outstanding success, capturing the holiday spirit and ensuring a re-run in 2025. Enthusiastic participants decorated wreaths and created holiday containers, made new friends and built holiday memories.

The nursery will be expanding all its workshop and talk offerings in 2025. Watch the web site and your email for further announcements as the season progresses. Remember: we always look forward to hearing your suggestions on possible future workshops and gatherings!

Acer Gardens’ Theme of the Year: Stretching the Seasons

Here in Connecticut, our gardening seasons have clear limits and Acer Gardens would like to help you stretch those limits (at either end) by using lesser-known plants that bloom early, or late, within those boundaries. For instance, Spring will come and we will all enjoy crocus and daffodils and tulips but each of those groups have early and late bloomers to choose from! Some spring **Ephemerals (Primrose, Trillium, Bleeding Heart and Dutchman’s Breeches)** will bloom very early and vanish for a year! Some **Alliums** start to bloom just as spring is ending but before the June explosion begins. Each season features bloom stars worth exploring and growing!

Have you Discovered Hellebores?

Did you plant Hellebores last year? If you did, you will shortly be enjoying the very first of the early spring flowers, some of them often peeping through the last of the snow. Blooming at a time when flowers are few and far between, Hellebores should be planted where you see them from the house. Sometimes called Lenten Rose, Hellebores are long-blooming, low-maintenance, deer and vole resistant and tolerant of dry shade although they will thank you for providing evenly moist soil. Shelter them from cold winds and grow them around deciduous shrubs and trees which will provide some welcome shade in the summer months.

The range of colors available in Hellebores is outstanding and it's hard to choose! They rarely need division and are happiest left to establish clumps. Give them a light application of a balanced fertilizer in early spring and water well during extended dry periods. Once established, they are drought- tolerant.

Because they bloom so early, Hellebores combine well with other light shade loving plants such as Ferns, Tiarella, Pulmonaria and the earliest Daffodils. Many gardeners site them on gentle slopes, the better to enjoy the inside of the flowers. After flowering, remove the faded flower stems to encourage next year's growth. You'll be glad you did!

Forcing Flowering Branches

Look ahead to Spring! Branches of Forsythia, Witch Hazel and Pussy Willow can be cut and forced in February. Crab Apple and flowering Cherry, cut in March, will usually bloom in 3 weeks. Count back 6 weeks from the time a flowering shrub would be in bloom in order to establish the earliest time you can force a plant. Cut the branches and bring them into a cool spot and plunge the stems into warm water. (Many people put the bottoms of the stems on a cutting board and smash the cut end with a hammer first.) After a few days, move the vase to regular house temperatures and keep it filled with water. You might actually want to re-cut the bottom of the stems. Change the water every few days. Once the blooms appear, display the branches in a warm area and enjoy the blooms!

Keeping Winter Blooms Going

As you enjoy the bulbs you have forced, remember that paper whites will not bloom again and should be discarded.

When the amaryllis bloom is finished, cut off the stem but keep caring for the plant. Give it a bright, sunny location in the house and fertilize regularly. In summer, when all danger of frost has passed, put the amaryllis out in a protected part of the garden where it will receive about 5 hours of sunlight and some afternoon shade. Fertilize lightly until August and leave the plant alone until Labor Day. Then, cut off the leaves, and place the pot in a **dark** cellar, withholding all water, and store in the dark for at least 2-3 months. They need to rest about 8-12 weeks and are happy being pot-bound. Gradually bring them upstairs, water, and place in the light. Before you know it you will see new leaves and a developing bud.

Poinsettias prefer a day temperature of 67 degrees and like a humid environment. The bright, indirect light of an east window suits them but avoid drafts. Put the plants outside for the summer, trim back and repot in late summer and, well before frost, bring them back into the house as the daylight begins to shorten.

Seasonal Reminders

In the middle of February, or whenever “the thaw” comes, re-apply Wilt-Stop to your evergreens and rhododendrons. Try to spray during a dry period when the temperature is above 32 degrees.

If you are using deer repellents remember that deer quickly get used to certain scents and are lazy about changing established routes so it’s a good idea to change repellents often. Re-apply repellents after heavy rain or snow.

Clean, oil and sharpen all your garden tools and shovels now. You’ll be too busy in the spring! Some gardeners paint a splash of red on handles so that they can find their tools easily if they are dropped in the grass or at the edge of a bed. Treat yourself to a new pair of gardening gloves and an effective gardening hat. Remember last July?

Towards the end of March, weather permitting, cut ornamental grasses down to the ground. Use strong garden twine to tie the grass together about 12” off the ground. Cut below the twine and the grass will be already bundled for removal.

Caring for House Plants and Ferns

Remember to turn your houseplants regularly to keep them from growing and leaning towards the light source. Do not water your plants on a strict schedule but only as the plant needs it. Overwatering kills more plants than underwatering! Houseplants slow down their growing in the winter so do not over-fertilize ... use the least amount you can get away with.

Many herbs make wonderful houseplants and will thrive indoors. (Although it is indeed a Mediterranean plant, rosemary needs to be misted regularly or it will not do well in the house.) Sage, thyme, bay leaves and parsley will all flourish ... the more you cut them to use in your cooking, the happier the plants will be. Give them as much sun and light as you can and don’t over water. Feed them well during their growing season, keep the foliage dusted and clean, hydrate the air and repot as needed.

Hanging Spider Plant babies can be easily rooted. Cut off the baby and float it on top of a small glass of water. Keep the water topped up and you will have roots very quickly. Plant in a good soil mixture and keep watered.

Succulents are favorite houseplants because they are easy-to-please and survive dry indoor winter conditions with relative ease but many are native to cool, arid locations so too much sun and heat can cause problems. The fleshy leaves and thick stems allow the plants to hoard water but it is the strong, distinctive leaf shapes that attract the gardener’s eye. Give them the brightest light possible and add sand to the potting soil for good drainage. They do need to be watered, just not as often as tropical houseplants. Every 1-2 weeks for watering is about right, depending on the size of the pot, the light around it and the temperature of the room. Let the soil dry out almost completely and then ... water sparingly! In this case, less is more and they are very unforgiving plants if you forget them one week!

Ferns have been popular indoor plants since Victorian times because they require little care, thrive in low-light conditions and add visual interest to a room. Foliage ranges from the delicate to the dramatic with many stops in between. Ferns have a few requirements but they are easily met, especially in New England:

Indirect lighting ... an east window is preferred.

Room temperature of 65-75 degrees F during the day, 10 degrees cooler at night.

Consistent watering with the soil evenly moist, not wet.

High humidity ... pebble-lined trays with water work well. Mist foliage often.
Fertilize lightly, once a month, from April through September.
Repot every few years, in the spring, with soil that is 50% peat moss.

Assessing Your Winter Landscape

You can always add more color to a winter landscape by using plants, trees and bushes noted for their berries or bark (planting in the spring will give your choices plenty of time to “settle in” before winter comes.) Berries are the prominent feature in Hollies, Winterberry and Chokeberry. Paperbark Maple and River Birch give exfoliating bark in colors ranging from cinnamon to orange. Some Japanese Maples (‘Coral Bark’) intensify their color in cold weather. Miscanthus grasses give interesting foliage and seed heads all winter long and provide birds with a safe refuge. Japanese Andromeda gives year-long interest. Think about planting evergreens where you can see them from the house. Evergreens add structure and stability to the winter landscape but some shrubs are also evergreen. Prunus laurocerasus (Cherry Laurel) is an evergreen shrub that actually thrives in light to heavy shade the rest of the year! Birds love this shrub because it produces creamy white flowers in spring. Useful as a hedge or screen or foundation planting, Cherry Laurel’s many cultivars feature a wide range of growth habits, sizes and shapes. Avoid planting them in excessively wet areas.

As a bonus, fill a winter-safe outside container with evergreen cuttings or a small evergreen (plant it in the garden when spring comes) and position it near the outside door you use the most.

Red Twig Dogwood brightens many a winter landscape with its bright red branches and should be placed where it can easily be seen from a window. The bush will tolerate partial shade but its red bark is brightest when planted in full sun. They prefer moist areas and thrive in low spots or along streams and ponds. Their widely- spreading root system makes them ideal for banks or slopes. For maximum color, prune out 1/3 of the older branches every 3 years ... the new branches will give the brightest color.

Yellow Twig Dogwood grows well in full sun to partial shade. Like its cousin, Red Twig, it prefers soil that is consistently moist and rich in organic material. Dig in compost when you plant and water regularly as the plant establishes. This bush looks best planted in masses against the wall of a building. Thinning out 25% of the stems each year will help keep stem color at its best.

Planning Now will Save Gardening Time Later

Here in southern New England, winter gives us a special present every year: Time! Across the country, many gardeners battle snow and ice on a daily basis. Others are so warm they spend most of their time watering! We have the luxury of being able to take some extra time to plan for the gardening season to come.

What did we learn from last year’s gardening experience? What did the problems we encountered teach us? What new directions are calling us? The vital part of the planning experience is how we apply what the problems we have met teach us. If you find that certain types of plants out-perform others in your garden perhaps you should plan to grow more of them. Are you tired of certain plant material? Plan now to rejuvenate your flower beds and add new colors and shapes. Winter shows you the bones of your garden ... draw the shapes on paper, pick up a pencil and see how you could change those shapes. This is the time for dreaming of what could be because each new gardening year offers an almost clean slate to draw on. Few things are more personal than your own garden and the on-going pleasure it brings. It deserves the extra attention you bring it in the planning season.

Looking through the garden photos you took last season can help you decide which areas of your garden need improving or re-arranging. Garden books are a great source of inspiration and this is the perfect time to read or re-read some of your favorites. Seeing how other people have solved problems can often help us find solutions to our own garden dilemmas and, indeed, help us to recognize problem areas. Sometimes just looking at your garden in a new way will lead you to the answers you need. Your local library carries some interesting garden DVDs and they are worth watching.

One time-honored way is through the use of repetition so that your eye will see the whole rather than the pieces. Repeat key plants and shapes throughout the garden, planting 3 together. Repeat a common color in plant material. Working with the natural shape of your landscape, and incorporating your existing trees, you can use paths to move from place to place. Scale is important. The larger the space, the bolder you can be! Keep “accents” confined to planters until you can judge if you like the “look” you have created. There’s a lot to be said for getting a large pad of graph paper and drawing on it the outline of your house, deck, patio and over-all property. Add existing flower beds and then, with a different color pencil, start playing with outlines and shapes. Selecting plants with multiple seasons of interest helps build the backbone of an ever-changing landscape. Let your garden create interest whether you’re inside or outside. It’s fun and, very often, only small changes will make you happy.

Often-Asked Questions

I’d like to spend a little time this winter organizing my garden records. Any suggestions? What information should I really keep?

First, decide what you want to keep track of! Some gardeners just save the white plastic labels or empty seed packets. You could set up a simple chart on the computer, divided into annual, perennial, shrub, tree and bulb sections, and note what you planted when. (This will help you establish a pruning/fertilizing schedule.) You could also divide your garden notes by section or flower bed to help you maintain an inventory of which plants/bushes are growing where.

Consider setting up a chart to monitor the sequence of bloom from your bushes and flowering trees and to make note of what you see from the house; photograph your bulbs as they begin to bloom and keep them as a permanent record. In the fall, you’ll know where to plant new bulbs!

I’m always so tempted by new varieties and cultivars but can I really trust the description “deer resistant”?

Unfortunately, “deer resistant” doesn’t mean “deer proof”! (Only daffodils own that adjective!) “Deer resistant” means that, given other available options/choices, deer will probably give it a miss or take one nibble and move on. (Young deer will try anything so don’t leave your lunch lying around ... you can only wait for them to grow up.) Deer get used to repellent smells quickly so keep changing the ones you use. If you can’t fence, try grouping deer resistant plants together. Deer are basically lazy and will probably feel unwelcome and move on.

Some of my plastic pots are odd-sized and I’d like to use them again. Should I clean them?

Plastic pots are easily cleaned by soaking them in a bucket containing a solution of 1 part household bleach to 9 parts of water for 20 minutes. Then put the pots in a solution of dish detergent and water, using a scouring pad on stubborn stains. Rinse and dry.

I feed the birds all winter. Will they stay around to eat bad bugs and insects?

When we garden, we grow plants that attract bugs and insects. Hungry birds are our first line of defense ... organic pest control! Nearly all birds eat insects. Ground feeders, like robins, are particularly fond of worms and caterpillars. In this area we see different birds at different times. Birds migrating through in the spring feed on the insects on spring-blooming trees. Summer residents are fond of the bugs that reproduce during the warmer months. Other birds staying through the fall and winter eat insect eggs and larvae. Growing a wide variety of plants will entice an assortment of birds to stop by for a snack.

Looking out my windows at all that gray can be discouraging! What can I do in future to brighten my winter garden look?

Don't be discouraged! Careful pre-planning can help to give you reasons to enjoy the winter landscape ... and there's always next year to aim for!

Focus on particular items. Tree bark, especially dogwoods and birch, can bring texture and color to winter. Many trees and shrubs, (crabapple, holly and some viburnums), have berries which last well into the winter months and should be sited where they will be seen from the house. Evergreens are available not just in the familiar greens but also in blues and yellows.

Add to your hardscape. Does your garden have a focal point? Winter is a good time to assess your personal landscape and decide if you need a focus . Now might be the time to add a bench, bird-bath, trellis or even a small metal sculpture.

Use weather-proof containers. Weather-proof containers can be filled with small evergreens (re-plant in the garden in the spring) or cut evergreen boughs, Japanese Andromeda and holly in different colors. Remember to water as needed.

I wasn't able to plant a lot of bulbs this past fall ... anyway to rectify that this spring?

Many gardeners missed out planting lots of bulbs due to the weather this past fall. Acer Gardens will have pre-potted, ready-to-bloom bulbs available this spring. Muscari, daffodils, alliums, hyacinths and tulips will all be ready for you to take home and enjoy. You can pop them into containers or plant into the ground.

What is Planting by the Moon?

Long used by farmers, planting by the moon is increasingly popular as it attempts to integrate the moon's cycle and its pull on the earth's tides and water with the planting of vegetable seeds, flowers and bulbs. During the two weeks the moon is waxing (growing), plant flowers and vegetables that bear crops above ground. During the two weeks the moon is waning (shrinking), plant bulbs and vegetables that bear crops below ground. Tests at Northwestern University have proven that seeds will absorb the most water at the time of the full moon and grow better.

I'm interested in adding some native plants but how do I accommodate their growing needs?

Using natives is the plant version of "shopping local"! Natives need what other plants need ... the right plant put in the right place. The three factors to consider are light, soil type/moisture and space. Full sun is anything more than 6 hours of sun daily; anything less than 6 hours is some version of shade. Soil drainage can be determined by digging an 8" deep hole, filling it with water, letting it drain and then filling it again. If it drains in less than 12 hours your site is well-drained. Finally, don't put fast spreading plants next to slow-growers! Plan for the size of mature plants, get them off to a good start the first year and divide when appropriate. Many will blend in nicely with established plants and all have already adapted to this climate.

Crocus

New England springs arrive quietly, taking us by surprise. All is gray and gloomy and then, suddenly, we catch a flash of bright purple or yellow and there it is! The first crocus! Wasn't a sign of it last Thursday and now, buds and foliage have emerged at the same time, blooming in those bright colors. Indeed, the crocus is considered a sign of cheerfulness. People all over the world delight in the crocus. Native to the Alps, Southern Europe, Mediterranean countries, central Asia and China, botanists feel that the crocus probably began its travels from either Greece or Turkey around 300 B.C. Eventually reaching Europe and England, its travels continued as even the colonists brought crocus bulbs with them on the Mayflower so that they would have something growing to remind them of home.

A member of the Iris family, there are 80 species of crocus ... planting a mix of species and giant crocus will extend the show. Small and easy to tuck into beds and rock gardens or along pathways, crocus are neat of habit. After blooming, the foliage dies away and vanishes until next year but, on a sunny day, you may find an early-arriving pollinator bee sleeping inside the crocus flower! Give them well-drained soil, enjoy their all too short stay and look forward to their return next Spring.

Getting Ready for Spring

Clean-up and rake the garden beds. Dead leaves blow around all winter and lodge in bushes and plants. You need to remove these before mice and voles decide to move in! Take this opportunity to cut down and clear off dead Daylily and Hosta foliage and tidy up anything you overlooked in the fall.

Remove winter mulch from flower beds gradually. Any bulbs coming up now will not be bothered by a late frost.

Cut down any perennials you left standing in the fall. (Cut back Gaura, Lavender, Perovskia and Montauk Daisies later when you start to see bud-break.) Watch for frost-heaved plants and push them gently but firmly back into the ground.

Weed! It's amazing, but weeds can and do grow in and survive Connecticut winters all the time. The Spring Garden Chores Information Sheet is available on the web site: (www.AcerGardens.com).

Available Spring products at the nursery will include pelletized lime, pre-emergent fertilizer, lawn and garden fertilizer, Milorganite, organic lawn and garden products, grass seed, straw and control products for deer, insects, rabbits, voles, weeds, and disease. Late April/early May is the ideal time to apply lime, if needed, to the lawn; fertilize and use pre-emergent weed control.

Are Hot, Dry Summers Going to be the New Norm?

The long-range forecast for this area is for drier summers and heat does seem to go along with that! Choosing and placing appropriate plants in your garden will help you cope with longer dry spells... but everything starts with good soil. Use native plants where you can; they've already adapted to the climate. In general, established perennial flowers require less water than annuals but grouping annuals and containers together will help the watering schedule. Many gardeners keep an eye on weather reports and water deeply just before the temperatures soar.

Daytime watering evaporates in the heat so always water well before noon ... as early as you can. Most perennials thrive on 1" of water a week so a good rain gauge is a gardener's best friend. Water deeply and less often... you want a self-sufficient flower border. If you water everyday your plants will expect it and will not send their roots deep into the ground. Some gardeners divide their gardens into grids and deep-water a grid a day. Move container plants to more shaded areas for the duration of a drought; in all probability, they will still require watering once a day but they won't have to work quite as hard to keep growing!

Pay attention to what you plant where! Try not to mingle plants needing a lot of water with almost self-sufficient, drought-tolerant plants ... you'll only go crazy trying to figure out a weekly watering schedule.

Acer Gardens Information Sheet on **Drought Tolerant Plants** is available on the web site.

What Do Pollinators Need Us to Provide for Them?

Pollinators have been called "nature's crop dusters" ... without them we would be missing many of our favorite flowers, wildflowers and vegetables. There are a number of ways to attract pollinators and keep them working for you but they are happiest in natural settings that resemble the floral landscapes which attract them in the first place. We tend to think of pollinators as being only bees but butterflies, moths and birds are all doing the same general job.

Winter is the perfect time to choose ways to make your gardening easier on yourself and on your own landscape. Increase the number of pollinator visitors with simple additions:

Garden in the sun. Even late into the fall, you will find bees hanging onto flowers and sunning themselves.

Cultivate native plants. Natives are four times more attractive to native bees than anything else.

Plant in clumps. Clusters of one pollinator-friendly plant will draw more visitors.

Aim for extended bloom. Have at least 3 species blooming in each season.

Select flowers in bright colors. Vary the shapes of the flowers to accommodate different pollinators. Many pollinators find single flowers easier to access than doubles because it gives them an easier "landing pad".

Choose common plants and heirloom varieties which are proven sources of nectar and pollen.

Be careful what you use to control disease and insects; today, there are many safe options.

Help your vegetable garden attract pollinators and beneficial insects by planting basil, cilantro, oregano, marigolds and alyssum to bring the "good guys" to your garden.

Honeybees: Attracted to sweet/minty scents, plants on which they can perch and blooms fully open in the daytime. They prefer flat, shallow blossoms and actually retain a memory of plants they have visited! Try Iris, Mountain Laurel, Violets, Cosmos, Hollyhock, Phlox, Nepeta, Salvia, Lavender and Roses.

Bumblebees: Long-tongued and heavier than Honeybees, Bumblebees are sun worshippers. Twice as fast as Honeybees, Bumblebees carry a great deal of pollen per trip because they are so much larger and are not making much honey. Consider using: Columbine, Snapdragons, Monarda, Monkshood, Candytuft, Agastache, and Buddleia.

Hover flies: Although they are true flies, Hoverflies look like small bees or wasps. (They are often described as “nature’s helicopters” because they literally hover over flowers, dart away and then come back to hover again.) Hover flies are highly effective in eating aphids; they are attracted to small flowers, especially Marigolds and Alyssum.

Butterflies: Although oddly enough butterflies taste with their feet and don’t get much pollen on their bodies, they are still highly efficient pollinators. They like brightly colored red, orange, purple and yellow highly- scented flowers which grow in clusters and are fully open during the day. Growing Asters, Sedum, Sweet William, Marigolds, Coneflowers, Zinnias and Buddleia will be sure to attract them.

Moths: They don’t get much attention, but moths are the night-shift pollinators in the garden. Appearing in the late afternoon, moths are attracted to all the nocturnal, heavily- scented flowers. Many of those flowers open in late afternoon and bloom into the night; most of the flowers have long-throats, deep fragrance and the pale flowers stay visible for a long time. Attract moths with Nicotiana, Gaura, Stock, Honeysuckle, Moonflower, Evening Primrose and Night-blooming Jasmine.

Birds: Flowers attracting birds need to be shaped to accommodate those whirring wings and their stems must be strong enough for perching. Hummingbirds, key to native wildflower pollination, are attracted by red flowers but other birds head for the nectar available in many summer flowers. Birds have no real sense of smell but bright colors, especially red, attract them all summer long. Plant Columbine, Agastache, Salvia, Penstemon, Trumpet Vine and Bee Balm to bring them flying in.

The Beginners Vegetable Garden

Not everyone has the time or space to have a big vegetable garden so if you’re just starting to “grow your own” be realistic! Choose vegetables which will give you a quick crop and which are easy to care for.

Diagram and lay-out your vegetable garden on graph paper. (A raised bed would make care of the garden easier. You can also grow a lot of vegetables in pots/large containers these days due to the introduction of “patio size” plants.)

An easy garden, designed to feed four people, could include Zucchini, Yellow Squash, Tomatoes, Peppers, Lettuce, Cucumbers and Radishes. Adding Marigolds and Mints to the perimeter of your garden will help discourage rabbits and other pests.

Planning for Cool-Season Vegetables

Every year, more and more gardeners discover the pleasure of growing some of the vegetables they eat. A successful vegetable garden needs 8 hours of full sun daily and some protection from excessive winds. Raised beds and containers make good alternatives to full-size gardens although containers will require more watering. Adding organic matter to the soil (compost or manure) will give your vegetables a boost and help drainage. Vegetables can be tucked into gardens easily. Lettuces are ideal for containers or even the front of garden beds. Tomatoes decorate many a patio or terrace, mixed in with herbs; cucumbers can be grown on a trellis or pergola; new dwarf varieties and bush forms of plants allow space-saving techniques. Adding natural insect repellents to herb and vegetable gardens (basil, nasturtiums and marigolds) will help you grow vegetables successfully. Pre-grown vegetables are best suited for container growing and will give you a head start.

Probably the most important concept for a vegetable gardener to live by is: “Rotate the Crops!” Failure to do this can result in declining harvests and plants that do not thrive and grow to expectation. Plotting your garden on graph paper will help you establish boundaries and maximize your available space. If you are using rows be sure to leave access routes for weeding and fertilizing. Square foot gardens (4’ x 4’) have proven very helpful for smaller vegetable gardens. Divide the area into 16 squares and space plants accordingly. Use stakes or a trellis to send vines upright and save space.

Winter is the perfect time to decide what you want to grow in the vegetable garden ... and how. Container vegetable gardens are increasingly popular. As the sun begins to lose power towards the end of the growing season, containers can be moved around the garden to take advantage of more daylight hours. Many vegetable plants can be planted in with perennials!

Many vegetables can be planted as soon as you can work the soil. Known as “cool season vegetables”, they include Swiss Chard, Spinach, Kale, Leeks, Onions, Cilantro, Peas, Cabbage, Broccoli and Cauliflower. Leaf lettuces, such as Black Seeded Simpson, Arugula, and Mache are harvested young and re-planting every 2 – 3 weeks will keep you harvesting until the heat of the summer.

Our Information sheet on **Growing Vegetables** is available on the web site (www.acergardens.com) .

Garden Help Lines

As the season kicks off, questions can arise and Uconn’s Cooperative Extension System is available to answer questions on many garden topics including plant insects and diseases. They can be reached at 1-877-486-6271 or (www.ladybug.uconn.edu/index.html)

The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station will answer inquiries on lawn problems (860-683-4977), soil testing (203-974-8521) and plant disease issues (203-974-8601).

Re-Opening Day

Acer Gardens expects to open, weather permitting, the last week of March. Watch the web site for the exact date as the time gets closer. We look forward to seeing you back at the nursery as we start a new and exciting gardening season together! See you soon!

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor & Writer