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When is it really, truly Spring? Why is Winter trying to get back into the act? Where is all this rain coming from anyway? New England gardeners ask themselves that question year after year and, in reality, the answer is always the same: When **you** say it's Spring, **it's Spring!** Never mind the weather reports and forecasts or the annoyance of moving the clocks forward while the birds are still depending on the feeders and the ground is frozen solid. Spring comes on that magical day when you step outside and know that the air and the light are somehow different, that that noise you heard was indeed a bird chirping in its nest, and that those little green things pushing through will grow up to be the daffodils you so carefully planted in the fall! Take each day as it comes and remember that Mother Nature has often been described as capricious, willful and determined to reduce Connecticut gardeners to a permanent state of confusion. (Most of the time we are confused about the weather!) But a New England gardener learns to “go with the flow” and adapt to change and all we really care about is that we'll soon be back in the garden again! No matter how many garden chores are waiting, enjoy the fleeting days of Spring when they come! We've earned them!

Daytime winter temperatures higher than normal in late February have pushed some bushes and flowering trees ahead of their normal schedule. Lawns are littered with fallen branches and twigs from all the rain and wind storms and Spring clean-up is bound to proceed slowly. Many perennials, ready to break dormancy, may decide to take a little longer. Keep an eye out for frost warnings in April and protect tender plants and bushes if necessary, using old sheets or towels but not plastic.

Consider setting up a chart to monitor the sequence and length of bloom from your bushes and flowering trees and to make note of what you see from the house. It is possible to have a variety of bushes flowering from April into October, providing a background for your perennial beds, screening for the vegetable garden and privacy for sitting areas, decks and terraces. Using bushes is an easy way to reduce garden maintenance as many take care of themselves with a minimum of tweaking. Some garden designers like to ensure that inside and outside colors used complement each other and that you always have something attractive to look at from the room in the house where you spend the most time. All gardens change as they mature and careful editing and/or additions will help you enjoy what you have created even more. In fact, the surrounding background landscape also changes over time and may alter the way you look at and use your garden. All these factors affect your over-all garden plan.

Web Site

We will be using the Web Site to post current announcements so please plan on checking it frequently. 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 (a great way to see what other gardeners are growing). In response to your suggestions, we will also be posting more “How To” videos! We're always interested in hearing what our customers would like to see on the web site and what would be most helpful to you. Just remember: we don't have full-time office coverage because

we like to spend the season down in the Nursery with you so you may have to leave us a message! We'll get back to you as soon as we can!

Workshops

The nursery is expanding all its workshop offerings in 2024. Watch the web site and your email for further announcements as the season progresses; we always look forward to hearing your suggestions on possible future workshops and gatherings! At the moment, we are busy planning on the following workshops:

Start the Season Pruning with Bill. Learn What, When and How and make your life easier. Sign up quickly ... this is always a sell-out event!

Containers. Easier ways to keep your containers gorgeous as the gardening year moves along.

A Children's Vegetable Workshop. Bring your child or grandchild and discover, together, how much fun it is to grow easy vegetable/salad combinations.

Growing Succulents. Learn how to add and adapt these increasingly popular plants to your own garden and houseplant collection.

Flower Show

The 2024 Newport Flower Show will be held June 21-23 at Rosecliff in Newport, RI. This year's theme is "At Home", a celebration of the variety of flowers and horticulture that we enjoy in our own homes as well as the relationship between those flowers and the homes they beautify. Features include designer display gardens including cutting gardens, home orchards, pollinator gardens and settings for outdoor living, horticultural exhibits, demonstrations and classes in Botanical Arts and Floral Design and over 85 vendors. The Garden Club of America has elevated the Newport Floral Show to the status of a Major Flower Show, on a par with Philadelphia, Atlanta and Boston. This national and international status allows the show to award the GCA's highest Flower Show awards. Funds raised by the Show are used for the continued restoration and preservation of the Newport Preservation Society's 88 acres of historic landscapes, gardens and trees. For tickets and further information go to:

www.newportmansions.org/events/newport-flower-show

Summer Gardens to Visit

The Garden Conservancy runs self-guided tours of 4,000 private gardens from coast to coast. Most of the gardens are only open to the public once a year, giving you a huge opportunity to visit many exciting, creative and innovative gardens. In 2024, Open Days in Connecticut run from April 28 through October 12; non-refundable, pre-registration tickets are sold on-line on the Open Days website. Some capacity restrictions may apply. Pets are not allowed but children under 12 are free. Open Days are rain or shine events and are not re-scheduled due to inclement weather. Visit www.gardenconservancy.org to search by garden, city, or state. Open Days are also listed for near-by Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts.

National Arbor Day: April 26, 2024

Always celebrated on the 4th Friday of April, National Arbor Day is America's oldest environmental celebration. What better way to mark an anniversary, celebrate a special occasion or pay honor to a family member than to plant a tree? Sited carefully (and well away from power lines), your new tree will be a living reminder of a special day and will increase in beauty as time goes by, benefitting this and many future generations. Stop in and choose a tree ... we're here to help and can advise on the most suitable trees for your chosen location and the best way to plant and care for them.

Starting in April, **The Plant of the Month** will be available on the first of each month at the nursery. These plants are carefully chosen to feature current bloom times and to serve as an accent in your garden. Let your garden reflect the calendar!

April: **Mertensia virginica (Virginia Bluebells)**

Zone: 3-8 Height: 1 ½ - 2' Spread: 1 – 1.5'

This showy blue flower says “Spring is here”! Easily grown in well-drained soils in shade or partial shade, Bluebells are best left undisturbed. The flowers actually start as pink buds but quickly open to blue, pendulous flowers which will bring many pollinators including bees and the first butterflies. The plants will increase in size each year and form a colony with no care from the gardener. The plants go dormant during the summer and can be overplanted with annuals.

May: **Cerastium (Snow-in-Summer)**

Zone: 3-7 Height: 6 – 12” Spread: 1’

Cerastium is a low-growing, silver-leaved ground cover, happiest grown in full sun. Noted for its tolerance of a wide range of soils, the plant produces white flowers in late spring. Plants spread rapidly by runners and will self-seed if spent blooms are not removed. Many gardeners grow Cerastium in rock gardens and stone wall pockets.

June: **Kniphofia (Red Hot Poker)**

Zone: 5-9 Height: 3-4’ Spread: 2-3’

This unusual plant gives your flower bed a two-toned appearance: emerging flowers red but mature to yellow! Flowers bloom from late spring to early summer and mark an easy transition from spring bulbs. Deer, in general, avoid this plant but hummingbirds and bees are drawn to it. Deadhead faded flowers and divide every 2-3 years in order to minimize over-crowding.

Acer Gardens’ Theme of the Year

Most gardeners will admit to being slightly overwhelmed with the number of plants available. Some become popular almost by chance; some become over-used simply because they are so dependable. This season, Acer Gardens is going to showcase Underused Plants and Shrubs. There’s always more than one choice for a specific need or problem area and we’ll take a look at “what else is out there”. There are bound to be surprises along the way!

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

Spring garden chores (see the information Sheet on the Acer Gardens website) can seem daunting but don’t be overwhelmed by the list. Each garden is different and not all chores are necessary.

Clean up and rake off the garden beds; get rid of dead foliage. Remove dead or dying branches on trees and shrubs which were injured by disease, storms or animals.

Cut down grasses and any perennials you left standing in the fall.

Fertilize your garden beds and don’t plant anything new until the soil is completely friable ... grab a handful of soil and squeeze it. If water runs out or the soil compacts into a clump, it’s too soon to work it.

Pay attention to soil temperature. Planting into cold ground is too big a shock to many plants and it's worth waiting a week or two until the soil has really warmed before you start planting. Most plants quickly make up any lost time!

Weed, weed and weed again!

Clean-up old foliage on Hellebores as new growth emerges.

Trim down Caryopteris and Spireas to about 18" even if they are showing growth.

Prune: Roses, as needed; Azaleas and Mountain Laurel after they bloom.

Wait to trim down Buddleias until late April because of the danger of a passing frost ... they'll quickly make up any time lost!

To ensure late season blooms, cut Montauk Daisies down to about 6" in mid-June.

Spring Products

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

Succulent/Alpine Mix: An excellent growth medium for alpines and succulents. Use in containers or mix into soil to promote good drainage.

Soil Moist: Reduces watering by absorbing and slowly releasing water into the soil. Useful both in containers and garden beds.

Acer's Super Grow 18-6-18: The nursery's own water soluble plant food with micro-nutrients.

BT Thuricide: An organic bacteria (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*) used to control gypsy moth caterpillars and cabbage worms on vegetables.

Milky Spore: A bacteria designed for the natural control of lawn grubs.

Seasonal Reminders

Give your Rhododendrons and Azaleas a generous feeding of Holly Tone.

April and May are ideal times for pruning evergreens. Remove dead, diseased or undesirable wood but remember to pay attention to the basic shape of the evergreen.

Photograph your bulbs as they begin to bloom and keep them as a permanent record. The photos will be helpful next fall as you plan where to plant new bulbs.

Cut back Gaura, Lavender, Perovskia and Montauk Daisies when you start to see bud break.

If cutting Tulips for the house, do not use more than a few inches of water in the vase and add 1 tsp. of bleach to the water; change the water regularly. Keep cut Lilacs out of direct sunlight to discourage wilting.

Deer quickly get used to a specific repellent so it's a good idea to rotate the products you use fairly often.

Check the nursery web site to access relevant Information Sheets on attracting hummingbirds and butterflies.

Fertilizing and Mulching Basics

All plants need nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, nutrients essential to helping plants make healthy leaves, develop strong roots and digest their food. Although these elements are usually present in the soil, the wise gardener knows that soil changes over time and the nutrients must be replenished. The home gardener must choose between granular or water soluble fertilizer. Granular fertilizer delivers food slowly but lasts a long time. Water soluble fertilizers are faster acting but must be applied more frequently.

Most bushes and trees like an application of granular fertilizer in early spring. Annuals like additional boosts of water soluble fertilizer throughout the growing season. Wait until the ground has really warmed up before you fertilize perennials, annuals and vegetables. Roses are always hungry and will benefit from the application of light soluble fertilizer every week during their blooming season. Don't apply fertilizer on wet or windy days ... it will only be wasted.

Decorative mulches are an essential part of low-maintenance landscapes, offering many benefits to your plants and soil. They reduce the amount of water lost through evaporation, keep the soil cooler during the heat of the summer, suppress weed growth and help control erosion. Decomposing over time, mulches add nutrients and organic matter to the soil. There are a few general rules:

Do not place mulch directly against plant stems or tree bases.

Apply mulch layers no more than 1-3" thick.

Thoroughly water newly installed wood or bark mulches.

Don't automatically renew mulch every year --- assess your needs realistically.

Aftercare for Bulbs

Don't forget to deadhead Daffodils and Tulips as they stop blooming. Cut the flowers off but let the stems and leaves turn brown before you cut them down. Bulb experts advise against braiding the leaves. You want all that nutrition from the leaves to go back into the bulbs. Many Daffodils will happily naturalize and spread over years but, in this climate, most tulips have a limited life span of 2-3 years. Adding early-blooming, spreading plants to your bulb areas is a good thing to do as the growing foliage will cover up the fading bulbs and give your garden a second wind. If you plant your Tulips among perennials slow to break in the Spring, their growing foliage will help to disguise the dying tulip foliage.

Dividing Perennials

Most perennials need periodic division in order to maintain plant vigor and strong flowering. Some plants should be divided every few years; some can go many years without division. When a perennial clump looks crowded in its space and produces fewer and smaller flowers, it is time to divide. It's a good idea to keep a record of when you divide so that you can gauge a plant's progress.

In general, most perennials should be divided in the spring which allows enough time for the new divisions to bloom and become established before winter. Here in Connecticut we are able to divide easily until mid-May. Some perennials produce pop-up seedlings that are perfect for transplanting. Grasses are best divided in early spring because they do their aggressive growing in the hot days of summer. Peonies and Iris should be divided in the fall.

Many plants (Black-eyed Susan and *Leucanthemum* e.g.) benefit from frequent division and almost seem to need it to thrive. Simply dig up the plant and...with your fingers...gently separate the plant into multiple sections. Plant at once, setting the new plant at the same soil level as before. Tamp the soil down around the plant so that water can pool; protect the new plant from strong sun until it is established.

Some plants should be divided into large segments as early as possible. These include *Lamium*, *Brunnera*, *Dendranthemum*, Asters, *Sedum*, *Hosta*, *Monarda*, *Helenium* and Cone Flowers. Pulling pieces from the outer edges of the clump makes for easy dividing but you will probably still need to divide the core of the plant too. Place the divisions in the ground so that their “best side” is displayed well.

Division of *Hostas*, *Daylilies* and *Grasses* calls for real strength and is often done after a good, soaking rain. The best tool for this is a sturdy garden shovel. Cut the dug-up plant in half or thirds with a sharp knife or a shovel and plant at once.

Spring Pruning

Remember that most *Hydrangeas* (not *hydrangea arborescens* ... ‘Annabelle’ and ‘Samantha’), flower on old wood. Remove any dead or broken branches in spring but do not prune. Fertilizing with a product containing 18-5-9 will encourage flowering. Spent blooms should be removed after flowering. Any light pruning should be done directly after bloom before the bushes set next year’s flowers.

Lilac bushes should be pruned each year, after blooming. Remove all spent blossoms. Trim and clear out larger stems from the center to increase air space. You can leave some small suckers/shoots at ground level to develop into larger stems. This will encourage a wider bloom area. Lightly shape the bush until you like the way it looks but don’t give it an un-natural “flat top”.

Mature *Rhododendrons* seldom need pruning but, if you must, prune right after they bloom as they set next year’s flowers very quickly. Look for the little green leaf buds on the stem and cut ½” above them. Let the natural shape of the plant dictate your pruning ... it’s not supposed to look “organized”.

Most *Azaleas* and *Weigela* bloom on wood at least one year old. After bloom, these bushes should be very lightly hand pruned in order to maintain the natural shape of the bush. Carefully remove selected old wood every 3 years, allowing the bush to rejuvenate itself.

Pruning Clematis

Clematis vines are fast growing and hardy but they should be pruned properly in order to give you consistent flowers at the right time and you do need to know which of 3 groups your vine falls into. (If you didn’t save the white plastic information tag you may have to write down when your vine flowers this year and use the information as next year’s pruning guide.)

Group 1

Varieties flower in the spring on growth from the previous season. They need very little pruning but if you want to “tidy them up” do it very quickly after they have stopped blooming.

Group 2

These vines bloom in early summer, on last year’s growth, with a re-bloom in late summer or early fall on new growth. In early spring, cut away any broken branches and trim the tips of the branches. Thin out some stems to leave room for new growth.

Group 3

These vines flower on new growth in both summer and fall. In spring, cut the vine back to 12-18". It's a good idea to leave 2-4 buds on each stem. As the vine grows, train the new growth onto a support.

Layering A Garden

The concept of "layering" in a garden is not new (remember that old rule: "tall plants in the back, short ones in the front") but, increasingly, garden designers are using layering to organize both large sweeps of flowers as well as create a garden that is attractive to wildlife and, at the same time, emphasizes specimen plants or bushes. Multiple layers don't necessarily mean a "formal" look ... you can create layers by using drifts of plants in an informal arrangement and vary the look by pulling the back layer forward in places. Plants can be set underneath each other (especially effective if you don't like the look of plain dirt or mulch or want to cover "bare legs".) Vines and climbers add vertical interest and often give almost continuous bloom. You can layer a perennial bed or part of a garden and site it near a sitting area or create a private area for rest and relaxation. Using plants in this manner means you don't have to see everything at once but can "discover" the garden as you spend time in it. Most of all, a layered garden is attractive ... either as a sitting area or a larger garden area ... for you and your visitors.

Large shrubs, or even small trees, will form the back layer and attract birds at the same time so they can find hiding places. (Be careful not to create too much shade as that could limit your plant choices.) Then add smaller bushes and tall perennials to form a middle layer and bring in the butterflies.

Finally, put in a variety of small perennials, bulbs, and annuals for your eye to focus on against the backdrop. This layer is the easiest to change as the season advances and you need to refresh the garden. Contrasting foliage will provide a backdrop and, chosen carefully, will serve to showcase the blooming flowers and hide any bare spaces.

The Shady Side: Under-Used Ground Covers

Partially shaded areas, especially those under deciduous trees, are often difficult for the gardener to deal with. Ground covers are often used to cover these problem areas and to bring them into the general landscape of the garden because they can serve as traffic barriers and visual guides as well as define space. Whole hillsides have been covered in plants acting as ground cover ... everything from heathers, junipers and roses ... but to most gardeners a ground cover serves to deal with a difficult area in an existing garden. Decide if you want an evergreen look or are content to see your ground cover die back in the winter. Consider the height of the plant you choose in relation to the space you are covering. A good ground cover should spread by itself and develop into a dense cover, inhibiting weeds.

Low growing ground covers will fill the spaces between pavers or flagstones, replace small patches of hard-to-mow lawn and eliminate the need for mulch. Ground covers can eliminate lawn completely in small, confined spaces. Planted around shrubs, ground covers serve to retain moisture, control weeds and define the shape of a garden bed. Almost none of them want to be fussed over (some can even take limited foot traffic) and therefore make few demands on a gardener's time. Adding organic matter to the soil before planting will give your ground cover a good base. Spring or early summer planting allows the ground cover plants to establish themselves and settle in. When planting under trees use shallow-rooted plants. Pachysandra, Myrtle, Ivy and Vinca all give a very traditional look but there are many other dependable groundcovers, including:

Partial Shade Ground Covers

Ajuga	Forms dense weed-suppressing mat
Asarum (Wild Ginger)	Spreads via rhizomes
Epimedium (Barrenworts)	Needs good drainage
Galium (Sweet woodruff)	Spreads rapidly
Iris cristata (Dwarf crested iris)	Naturalizes
Lirope (Lilyturf)	Deer-resistant

Setting Up a Cutting Garden

Gardeners work very hard on their flower beds and the “look” of their landscapes but are sometimes reluctant to cut flowers for the house. A separate Cutting Garden can be the simple answer to the problem especially if you plan ahead. A 3’x6’ bed filled with 20 plants would be a good start for flowers all summer long. It could be placed on the side of the vegetable garden for easy access and protection from predators. You will need full sun and fertile soil and should plant in rows for easy care and access. Cut your flowers in the early morning and plunge the stems into water before arranging them later.

A carefully chosen mix of annuals and perennials can give you bloom from spring to summer to late summer. Think about the colors you want to use in your arrangements and plan for a mix of heights, texture and foliage. Choosing longer stemmed flowers will give you more arranging options. Mixing perennials and annuals will increase your options and give you a wider color range. Save a little room for an impulse plant, one you fall in love with and have to have! Research how much space a plant needs. Pansies need about 8” and look bright and cheerful arranged in a teacup; Dahlias sprawl over 3’ and will fill a large vase. You may find that staking many of your plants will help prevent rainstorm damage and actually help your cutting process. Fertilize every few weeks and water well. As the season winds down, you may choose to replace some of the plants with later-blooming varieties such as Zinnias and Mums. Here are a few suggestions:

Annuals

African Daisies	Marigold
Cosmos	Salvia
Dahlias	Zinnia

Perennials

Aster (assorted)	Lavender
Astilbe	Leucanthemum (Shasta Daisy)
Chrysanthemum	Lobelia
Coreopsis	Lupine
Dianthus (Pinks)	Phlox (Summer Phlox)
Echinacea (Coneflower)	Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan)
Gypsophila (Baby’s Breath)	Veronica (Speedwell)

Foliage

Coleus
Dusty Miller
Ferns
Hosta
Ornamental grasses

Salt-tolerant Plants

Those who garden on the seashore know that they face some unique challenges, especially wind and salt spray. Native plants and grasses long-ago developed their own defenses against salt and wind: silver-gray foliage and small-leaved plants tend to shed water quickly. In fact, after a particularly bad or prolonged storm, it's not a bad idea to spray off your garden with plain water from the hose! However, many perennials and bushes are also very tolerant of salt spray and appear to have adapted to the ever-changing seashore climate.

They include:

Ground covers

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi	Bearberry	Low-growing, evergreen ground cover.
Juniperus conferta	Creeping Juniper	Evergreen ground cover with silver-blue foliage
Liriodendron muscari	Lily Turf	Evergreen with broad, grassy leaves

Shrubs

Clethra alnifolia	Summersweet	Spicy, summer flowers with dark green foliage
Myrica pensylvanica	Northern Bayberry	Aromatic with glossy foliage and waxy berries
Rosa Rugosa	Beach Rose	Sprawling, with summer flowers and fall hips

Perennials

Coreopsis	Tickseed	Fine-textured foliage. Abundant flowers for sun
Echinacea purpurea	Coneflower	Compact, with long-blooming showy flowers
Lavandula angustifolia	Lavender	Silver-gray leaves with fragrant summer flowers

Expanded lists of suitable plants are found in Acer Gardens' Information Sheet on **Seaside Plantings**, available on the web site or at the nursery.

Often-Asked Questions

What do I need to do to my bulbs after they stop blooming?

Deadhead Daffodils and Tulips as they stop blooming. Cut the flowers off but let the stems and leaves turn brown before you cut them down. Bulb experts advise against braiding the leaves. You want all that nutrition from the leaves to go back into the bulbs.

Adding spreading plants to your bulb areas will cover up the fading bulbs and give your garden a second wind. Many Daffodils will happily naturalize and spread over years but, in this climate, most tulips have a limited life span of 3-4 years. If you plant your Tulips among perennials slow to break in the Spring, the growing foliage will help to disguise the dying tulip foliage.

Some of my bulbs need to be divided and replanted elsewhere in the garden. When can I do that?

As soon as the flowers have faded but before the foliage is gone is an ideal time to transplant bulbs. Deadhead the bulbs, then dig out the entire clump. Either transplant the plant as it is or divide it into several smaller clumps and replant the clumps. Water the newly transplanted clumps and let them continue the process of preparing for next spring! In this climate, some bulbs have a shorter life than others. Tulips rarely last more than 3 years unless they are species; crocus last 5 years but throw off little corms which can be separated and planted.

There are robins all over my property in early Spring but I'd like to attract more of our native birds. How?

If you want native birds flying around your garden, plant native flowers, bushes and trees featuring seeds and berries.! Native plants offer all these as well as a wide choice of building material for birds ... twigs, dead leaves these as well as a wide choice of building material for birds ... twigs, dead leaves and bark strips these as well as fallen needles from evergreens.

Planting Daisies (and their relatives) is an easy way to start a bird garden as their seeds are irresistible to many of our local birds. Relatives of the daisy family include Sunflowers, Asters, Black-Eyed Susans, Liatris and Coneflowers. Adding bushes with berries to the general mix in your garden will attract a wide range of birds but they will strip ripe berries fast. Mature Viburnums fruit heavily and will keep the birds busy for weeks in late summer. Cardinals will devour the large red berries found on a Kousa Dogwood tree. Oaks and maples offer insects for the birds as well as welcome shade in the heat of the summer.

I have a lot of late-breaking shade trees. What can I plant for early color before the hostas and ferns take over?

Many early-blooming native perennials do well in partial (not dense) shade. They will form colonies and naturalize at the edge of woodlands but are typically ephemerals and will have vanished by the hot summer months. These will all bloom in April or May. Low maintenance, they require little on-going care other than regular watering during their first season. Don't fertilize or winter-protect. Consider using:

Dicentra cucullaria (Dutchman's Breeches)	Zone 3-7	Partial shade
Tiarella cordifolia (Foam Flower)	Zone 4-9	Full shade
Arisaema triphyllum (Jack-in-the-Pulpit)	Zone 4-9	Full shade

I understand that Mason Bees are the best and earliest pollinators in the garden. How do I attract them?

Mother Nature's best and hardest-working pollinators, Mason Bees are usually the first arrivals in your garden ... and they come prepared to work! They are non-aggressive as they do not live in colonies and therefore have no queen to protect. Very large, they carry more pollen on their body hairs than ordinary bees and can visit as many as 2,000 blossoms a day, belly-flopping onto the plants! They do like special housing but a visit to the Audubon Store will provide their accommodation and they will be a most welcome addition to your garden.

My Daylilies have formed big clumps! Can I divide them in the Spring?

Absolutely! Dividing daylilies in the Spring gives them time to establish themselves before blooming season. The easiest way to divide Daylilies is to wait for a soaking rain, dig up the clump, lay the clump on its side and pry or cut off good-sized pieces with a garden fork or large knife. Be careful! Daylily roots really cling together! Plant the new divisions 6-8" deep. Forgiving plants, Daylilies will bloom with just morning sun but they'll take all the sun they can get! The better the soil the better the bloom so add compost when you plant. Regular waterings will help their growth, especially during the first season.

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 over a long period of time. They will blend well with other perennials, bringing a new look to established beds.

What's the best way to plant a potted plant?

Once you have decided where your new plant is going to live (after carefully matching its requirements to the new site), dig a hole twice the size of the root ball and work in some compost. Gently remove the plant from the pot. If the plant is root-bound, tease out or cut the sides of the root ball. Place your new plant in the hole and adjust the soil so that it sits at the same level as it did in its nursery pot. Fill in around the plant with soil and tamp down gently but firmly. Water well ... in fact, plan to water every few days for the first few weeks to help the new plant settle in. Add a little mulch around the plant but don't let it touch the stem.

I love to tuck in annuals here and there but I'm never sure when it's safe to plant them. What's the rule?

Gardeners are always anxious to get plants into the ground but annuals need a slightly longer runway than most perennials. Annuals have different designations and will thrive if you follow these simple rules:

Hardy annuals are frost hardy and can be set out when a light frost is still likely.

Half-hardy annuals will survive a very light frost and can be set out in moderate spring weather.

Tender annuals cannot come through any frost and prefer warm nights. Do not set them out until nights are regularly in the 50s. If in doubt, ask someone at the nursery ... better safe than sorry!

I'm confused ... are all geraniums the same? Do they all need lots of sun?

That bright flower we see in cheerful pots ... Geranium perlargonium ... blooming cheerfully all over New England all summer long is an annual. When summer ends, its day is over and it is usually discarded. However, the perennial form ... Geranium (Cranesbill) ... is a long-lived, pest resistant plant which thrives in evenly moist soil and needs little direct sun. A pollinator magnet, it works well as a ground cover or edging plant and is in bloom for long periods, especially if you cut it back after its first blooming period. It comes in a wide range of colors, including blue! And next year, it will be back!

When can my houseplants go outside?

As the weather begins to warm, many gardeners itch to get their houseplants outside for the summer. A good rule of thumb is to wait until nighttime temperatures are consistently above 60 degrees. Many houseplants are native to tropical or sub-tropical climates and will need time to adapt to a new environment.

Before your plant goes outside check to see if it needs re-potting into the next larger pot size. This is also a good time to see if your plants need light pruning or reshaping. Add a little fresh potting mix to each plant as some of its soil will have decomposed over the winter. When the plants go outside, place them in a partially shaded spot for at least 10 days. Once they have adjusted to more light, the plants can be moved to a sunny location in the garden or onto the patio. You may need to water the plants daily and change your fertilizing schedule. It's a good idea to inspect the houseplants periodically in case bugs or insects are causing problems.

Our new condo doesn't really have a garden area ... can I still attract hummingbirds?

Hummingbirds, like most birds, have almost no sense of smell and are attracted to flowers by color, not fragrance ... as long as they can see the blooms and reach them, they will come! They prefer blossoms which are tubular, pendant and highly visible (red, orange and dark purple colors are great favorites) since the birds feed by sight. In fact, they feed 3-5 times an hour and eat 7 times their body weight every day. To attract them, try one or two large container gardens, planted with Salvia, Cuphea and trailing Petunias ... adding deep-colored Coleus will bring the hummers in a hurry!

Are there any plants which really repel bugs, especially mosquitoes?

The best approach is to rely on a series of steps in your war against mosquitoes but nothing is really fool-proof ... except staying indoors! Some plants are generally distasteful to mosquitoes ... planting them around your deck/terrace and other sitting areas in the garden is one way to keep them at bay. Fragrance plays a big part too. They hate mint and lavender! Most importantly, don't let water collect and stand ... it will attract mosquitoes in a blink! Try some of these:

Lavender	Monarda
Nepeta	Lantana
Mint	Allium
Scented geranium	Rosemary
Marigold	Basil
Lemon grass	Sage

Enjoying Flowering Shrubs All Season Long

It is possible to have a variety of bushes flowering from April into October, providing a background for your perennial beds, screening for the vegetable garden and privacy for sitting areas, decks and terraces. Using bushes is an easy way to reduce garden maintenance as many take care of themselves with a minimum of tweaking. They work well in a variety of settings, especially as a transition plant between the garden and woodlands or as a specimen plant. Gardeners are also using new, compact forms of bushes within flower beds or at the back of a bed. Many of them have foliage down to the ground and provide texture even when they are not in bloom. Some can also be grown in large containers although watering will have to be carefully monitored. Here's a broad list of some possible choices; individual cultivars may have slightly different bloom times.

Bush	Bloom Time	Bush	Bloom Time
Corylopsis spicata	March	Viburnum	May – Oct.
Forsythia	April	Spirea	June
Azalea	April	Clethra	July - August
Rhododendron	May	Abelia	July – Sept.
Lilac	May	Buddleia	July – Sept.
Daphne	May	Hydrangea	July – Sept.
Deutzia	May	Callicarpa	August
Weigela	May – Sept.		

By their very nature, window boxes are a more permanent part of your garden landscape than containers but they share the same requirements. If plants will thrive in a container, they will also thrive in a window box. The same design rules ... Thrill, Fill, Spill ... apply but you will have to space them out differently as you will be looking at your window box head on. Choosing plants that match your sun exposure is the key to success! Your window box, like your containers, will need frequent watering so good drainage is critical. That frequent watering will also call for slow-release fertilizers or the application of a diluted liquid fertilizer every few weeks. At the end of the season, many gardeners tuck in small bulbs for next Spring. Adding Pansies the following Spring will give you a head start on the growing season!

What looks better than a beautiful hanging basket bursting with blooms and drawing every eye? It's not the friendliest environment for plants and they will take a bit of extra work and attention but it's worth it for the effect. Following a few simple rules will make your life easier:

Hanging baskets need a lot of watering ... sometimes once a day.

Use a potting mix with slow-release fertilizer mixed in. Add liquid fertilizer once a week.

Give the basket a haircut when it gets leggy, as it will.

If your basket hangs by chains, be sure they are strong enough. A wet basket is heavy!

Keep baskets away from traffic patterns in the garden ... collisions are no fun!

Whether you use one kind of plant or a combination, remember the over-all look.

Dependable choices include:

Shade

Begonia

Coleus

Impatiens

Sun

Lantana

Calibrachoa

Petunia

Scaevola

Verbena

The nursery is also offering a wide selection of new hanging basket containers, some of them pre-planted. Feel free to bring pictures of planted baskets which have caught your eye and let us help you add spark to your garden by using your own self-chosen plants.

Plan Now for That End-of-Season Show

Looking ahead and planning for the future is part of the gardening year. By June, the garden is so full and lush that it seems odd to be thinking about late summer and fall but now is exactly the right time to think about how to fill that late summer garden with dependable, care-free color. Growing and combining Asters with other traditional Fall bloomers will give you a wide range of colors, shapes, sizes, and heights ... and they'll keep blooming until the killing frosts come!

Asters

Asters bring a steady presence to the fall garden. Available in a wide-range of size, shape and color, their long period of bloom (late summer through fall) and wide height range make them invaluable in mixed beds. Mingling well with other fall perennials, Asters establish themselves easily, thrive in average soil and will take sun to partial shade. Some bloom in clouds of pale colors; others flaunt deep shades of purple. All combine well with native plants. Cutting the plants back in early June will prevent "Aster sprawl". Divide the plants every 3-5 years to keep them under control and remove unwanted seedlings as you spot them.

Dahlias

The wide range of dahlias and the huge variety of colors they come in make them an ideal choice for perennial beds and containers. In this climate, dahlias should be planted late-April through May when the ground temperature has really warmed. They need a sunny location and well-drained soil in order to thrive and are happiest with 8 hours of sunlight a day. If you are planting tubers, do not cover the soil with mulch as it will keep the warmth of the sun from reaching the tuber and helping it to sprout. A low nitrogen fertilizer within 30 days of planting can be repeated 4 weeks later but avoid over-feeding. Dahlias tend to have shallow roots so hand cultivation/weeding is a must. Be on the lookout for slugs and aphids early in the growing season.

Japanese Anemone (Windflowers)

With a long blooming season (6 weeks or more starting in late August), Japanese Anemones produce masses of white, pink or purple flowers held well above their slender stems. The clumping plants appear delicate but, once established, require minimal maintenance and will naturalize to form colonies. Happy in full sun to part shade, these salt tolerant plants prefer evenly moist, well-drained soil ... do not let the soil dry out ... and are attractive to late butterflies but deer and rabbit resistant.

Sedum (Stonecrop)

Easily grown in dry to medium well-drained soil, in full sun, Sedum is a clump-forming perennial which produces tiny flowers from September through October and often well beyond. A great favorite for drying, the flowers last a long time and can be left on the plant to add interest to the late fall garden. Bees and butterflies are very fond of the nectar produced by these plants. Mature plants are easily divided in the spring.

Cimicifuga (Bugbane)

This amazing flower brings height to the autumn garden with plumes of tiny, star-like white flowers rising from dark-green foliage from September through October and often into November. (Some cultivars bloom in mid-summer.) Easily grown in partial to full shade, Cimicifuga is happiest in rich, moisture-retentive soil and forms attractive clumps. Planted in groups, this perennial adds height and late bloom to the fall garden but single plants can also make a statement.

Ornamental Grasses

Late season ornamental grasses help your garden's fall landscape by adding soft colors and textures as a backdrop to more brilliant colors. As the fall season progresses, most ornamental grasses turn golden and, uncut, provide a source of food and shelter for over-wintering birds. Many grasses have dwarf cultivars and are suitable for adding to flower beds or even containers. They require sun but tolerate a wide range of soils. Try:

Muhlenbergia capillaries	(Pink Muhlygrass)
Panicum virgatum	(Switch Grass)
Pennisetum alopecuroides	(Fountain Grass)
Miscanthus sinensis	(Maiden Grass)

The Vegetable Garden

Acer Gardens is your “go to” place for vegetable seeds and starter plants. Knowledgeable staff will be happy to help you choose what you need to make your vegetable growing a pleasure and to answer questions.

Plotting your garden on graph paper will help you establish boundaries and maximize your available space. Remember to rotate your crop’s positions from year to year to keep the soil fresh. If you are using rows be sure to leave access routes for weeding and fertilizing. More and more vegetable gardeners are going vertical in an effort to maximize available space ... tomatoes and cucumbers in particular benefit from this concept, as do peas and some squashes and melons. Hanging baskets can also be utilized for vegetables. Acer Gardens continues to offer an outstanding selection of seed varieties of popular gourmet vegetables.

Many vegetables can be planted as soon as you can work the soil. Leaf lettuces, such as Black Seeded Simpson, are harvested young and re-planting every 2 – 3 weeks will keep you harvesting into fall. (The nursery now carries pre-blended lettuce varieties, including both a Gourmet Mix and a Tasty Gourmet blend.) Arugula, cilantro and spinach will also continue producing on a similar schedule but do not re-plant in the heat of the summer. Radishes, a fast and easy grower, can be planted in short rows at 2-3 week intervals and are easily grown in pots. Spring is the optimum time to direct sow or plant peas, beets, carrots, Swiss Chard, kale, lettuces and micro- greens.

Late May is a good time to plant cucumbers, tomatoes, corn, peppers, melons, pumpkins, and squash. Plant basil near the tomatoes to discourage the insects that feed on them. Alyssum, Nasturtiums and Marigolds planted in the vegetable garden will help fend off many aphids, thrips and beetles and will protect your squash and pumpkin crops. Fennel bulbs and onions can be planted now ... both hold well in the vegetable garden. If rabbits are a problem in your garden, the nursery is now carrying small-sized Tumbler tomatoes which will literally spill over the sides of a hanging basket. Now is the time to plant single bulb shallots. ‘Crème Brulee’ is an outstanding choice, peachy-pink skinned. Plant in early to mid spring and harvest in summer when the tops fall and begin to brown. Dry in an airy place until ready to use.

The wide-ranging herb selection keeps expanding and now includes Stevia (the sugar substitute), Lemon Grass, a wide range of Thymes and Lemon Verbena (the leaves are wonderful in water or iced tea). Many basil varieties are resistant to downy mildew, including ‘Prospera’, ‘Devotion’ and ‘Passion’. Several varieties of Oregano will add a mild chile pepper flavor to Mexican dishes. Most herbs will do well in patio and deck containers but Thai Basil should be grown separately as it actually needs to dry out between waterings.

Herbs can be more than kitchen companions to the vegetables you grow. Think about inter-planting herbs and vegetables in the garden. (Harvesting dinner will be easy!) Try basil and tomatoes, chives and carrots, rosemary and beans. Marjoram, oregano, sage and tarragon enhance many vegetables. Grow dill separately as it can become invasive and needs a lot of spreading room as well as successive plantings.

Acer Gardens’ Information sheet on **Growing Vegetables** is available on the web site and at the nursery.

Saving Space in the Vegetable Garden

As any seasoned vegetable gardener will happily tell you; growing some vegetables on trellises or frames makes a lot of sense! It saves space, draws the eye upward and makes picking easier. You can grow more food with a bigger and easier harvest, reduce disease and insect damage and allow plants (cucumbers e.g.) to grow straight. A-frame trellises and bamboo teepees are good choices for support but arches and arbors have also been used successfully.

Vegetables climb differently. Pole beans are quick and vigorous twiners and love teepees. Cucumbers use tendrils to climb and prefer a trellis. Tomatoes must be tied to a frame. Summer squash is not a natural climber but tying the vines to the support allows the plant to take off! Peas do best tied to upright trellises which allow their branches to “run”. Whichever route you choose, you will find growing and harvesting easier and your back will thank you!

Remember Parsley?

Growing Parsley in the vegetable garden is easy, whether you grow the curly or the flat-leaf type. Getting your plants early in the spring will give you a supply all summer and fall. (Some gardeners grow Parsley. (Some gardeners grow Parsley in deep pots and move them into the shade in the heat of the summer.) Both types of Parsley have an exceptionally long taproot and dislike being transplanted so choose your site well. Parsley will stay tender and sweet if you harvest frequently, using the outside leaves first. As an extra bonus: parsley attracts those beautiful Swallowtail butterflies! In this climate, parsley is best treated as an annual as the leaves are not as tasty in the second year.

You can preserve Parsley for later use by chopping large quantities of the herb, adding enough water or olive oil to make a thick slurry and then freezing it in ice cube trays for use in soups and stews all through the winter. Just pop the cubes into plastic bags and store them in the freezer. The taste is worth it! Many “foodies” are using 1/2 parsley and 1/2 basil to make pesto these days, adding lemon juice and zest to the mixture.

Growing Peas

Picking your own sweet, tender peas is one of the delights of the early harvesting garden! (Many gardeners eat them fresh off the vine and the peas never even see the kitchen!) You can grow short, bushy peas and the long, vining ones as well as snow peas and snap peas. They make great patio plants too! Peas are early vegetable growers, at their best growing in temperatures between 55F and 65F and shutting down completely once the temperature gets into the early 80’s. Peas need about 60 days until harvest so plant them as soon as the soil has thawed and is workable, adding well-rotted manure or compost to the soil at planting time. You probably won’t even need to fertilize but it is important to rotate the pea patch every year. Peas like full sun and, these days, are self-pollinating. Once your pea plants start to bloom, check daily for harvestable peas, picking in the morning. After picking the peas, shell immediately and cool or freeze. Once your pea crop is finished, pull the plants and put in quick-maturing, zucchini plants (pick the squash when it is 4-6’ long) and stand by for another late harvest!

Garden Help

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.)

Acer Gardens
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