



January - February - March 2023

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Yes, a New England winter can be long and gray and wet ... but what an opportunity! What better gift than this quiet time to use for reading and thinking and planning for the coming season and your garden's future. Let the garden catalogs pile up and then take the time to look through them and plan. Read books written by the great garden writers and see how they move their thinking from landscape to landscape, how they re-arrange and adapt their personal garden spaces to meet changing weather conditions. Take the time to dream of what your garden could be. You may not be able to manage it all but the essence of gardening is to do a little at a time, working towards a goal. Keep the goal realistic so you can enjoy the ride!

This is the perfect time to consider changes to your own garden: new additions to flower beds, new colors and new foliage choices. Plan your garden's over-all look for this coming season including container placement, cutting gardens, hanging baskets, perennial beds and ground covers. Location is everything! You may want to screen unsightly views with evergreens or flowering shrubs. You might want a new focal point, or a hidden garden to stroll to. If you have a view, do you take advantage of it? Make sure your terrace or deck includes some fragrant plant material ... many flowers bloom at night. Repeating plants, shapes and colors adds coherence to plantings and actually simplifies the design process. You may have some un-used space (that no-longer-needed swing set for example) which could make a new seating area or display a stand of flowering bushes). You might want to connect parts of your garden to each other by re-arranging some landscaping. The trick lies in re-assessing your basic plan to make sure it meets and adapts to your current wishes ... that's where the dreaming part comes in!

You may actually find that your garden is exactly right for your way of life. Certain plants and colors 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. Have you always wanted to grow something really "different"? Tuck it in somewhere and see how it does. Your garden is a reflection of your style, not someone else's. It's meant for your enjoyment.

Acer Gardens is really excited about our new perennial, annual and shrub offerings for spring 2023. In late February/early March we will be sending out an email describing some of our exciting new plant/shrub/tree offerings for the coming season. We can hardly wait for you to see them! Weather permitting, we hope to open the last week in March (please call 860 526-9056 for the actual date as we get into March) 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 attract 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!

The National Wildlife Federation (www.nwf.org) has a series of articles available on its web site on how to create a wildlife habitat in your garden. Providing food, shelter and water for wildlife, as well as a protected place to raise their young, can help you qualify to become an official Certified Wildlife Habitat.

Gardens and Flower Shows

So far, this winter has been largely gray and wet and gardeners are looking for bright spots to punctuate the season! The Connecticut Flower & Garden show will be held in Hartford from February 23-26 with the theme of "Gateway to Spring!" More than 40,000 gardening enthusiasts attend each year, enjoying exhibits full of fresh flowers, plants, herbs, bulbs, seeds, books and gardening equipment featuring creative and practical ideas for house, apartment and condo dwellers alike. The show offers over 80 hours of seminars and demonstrations covering a wide range of topics. For further information and ticket availability go to www.ctflowershow.com.

Acer Gardens will not be staffing a booth at the CT Flower Show this year. We have decided to concentrate our energy and focus on getting the nursery ready for the long and exciting gardening season which lies just ahead.

The 2023 Philadelphia International Flower Show will move back indoors this year and be held March 4 – March 12 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center. This year's theme is "The Garden Electric", inspired by the spark of joy that comes while giving or receiving flowers. Exhibits will focus on how flowers convey emotions that transcend language, culture and country borders. The Show will incorporate favorite outdoor elements of the last 2 show years to create a fresh approach to enjoying every aspect of flowers and gardening. Even dogs are being welcomed back with enthusiasm! The web site (www.theflowershow.com) will feature videos of the exhibits and interviews with many recognized gardening experts.

With the excitement of the holidays over, many gardeners look out at winter and long to see gardens and things in bloom. Fortunately, your computer can take you visiting all over the country! Go to www.ilovegardens.com and see the listings for every state. Some famous viewable gardens include CT's New Canaan Nature Center (www.newcanaannature.org), Massachusetts's Arnold Arboretum at (www.harvard.edu), Rhode Island's Blithewold Garden (www.blithewold.org), Pennsylvania's Longwood Gardens (www.longwoodgardens.org), New York's Botanical Garden (www.nybg.org), Wave Hill (www.wavehill.org), the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (www.bbg.org), Chanticleer Gardens (www.chanticleergarden.org) and San Francisco's Filoli (www.filoli.org).

Visiting famous gardens by computer is an easy way to get new ideas and to see how other gardeners have organized their specialties. Even if you can't grow everything the gardens feature because of climate restrictions you are bound to get a fresh perspective. Tropicals can be grown in containers or as houseplants; landscapes can be miniaturized and adapted to smaller areas or used as inspiration for extending a garden.

Consider computer visits to:

The Huntington Botanical Gardens (www.huntington.org)

207 acres feature more than a dozen garden areas including camellias, lily ponds, subtropicals, herbs, roses, palms and even a children's garden. Many of the plants are exotic ornamentals. Located in Southern California, the parking lot actually features survivors of California's first commercial avocado grove!

Winterthur Museum (www.winterthur.org)

Henry du Pont's Winterthur is the leading museum of American decorative arts and its 60-acre naturalistic garden is outstanding. The web site will take you on a tour of the gardens featuring summer and fall color and the Enchanted Woods, a fairy landscape designed for children. The yearly bloom calendar is a well-designed and useful reference paper.

What a great way to get ready for spring!

Web Site

We keep working on 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, monthly Did You Know columns 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: even in the winter, we don't have full-time office coverage because we're probably working in the greenhouses growing and nurturing all those little green shoots so you may have to leave us a message!

Workshops

Acer Gardens' Late Fall workshops were an outstanding success, capturing the holiday spirit and ensuring a re-run in 2023. Enthusiastic participants created beautiful wreaths and decorations.

In response to your on-going requests, the nursery will be expanding its workshop offerings in 2023. We expect to add more workshops directly focused on current and seasonal garden needs. Watch the web site and your email for further announcements and remember: "The more you learn, the better you grow!"

Acer Gardens' Theme of the Year

We don't garden in the easiest climate available! Both The River and The Sound influence our weather, Mother Nature sends storms up from the South and over from the West, The Atlantic has its say from time to time and La Nina and El Nino make sure that we understand how important they are! The Connecticut Gardener needs all the help he/she can get! In recognition of this, Acer Gardens' Theme of the Year is **Tried and True ...** a celebration of all those plants, shrubs and trees that we depend on to make our lives a little easier. There comes a time when you need to know that the plant is on your side and will do its best for you no matter what weather comes our way ... as the season progresses we'll be featuring the best of the best, plants you can count on to thrive in this climate. Some of them have been around a very long time but new cultivars have improved their on-going performance and made them even more valuable to us and even more adaptable to how our lives change over time. We'll be calling them to your attention all year ... in the nursery and in the Newsletter. Enjoy them, tuck them in and let them do their best for your garden!

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. Many gardeners find that forcing flowering bushes is easier than forcing spring-blooming trees. 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. Change the water every few days. Once the blooms appear, display the branches in a warm area.

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 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, like a humid environment and don't mind an occasional misting. The bright, indirect light of an east window suits them but avoid any drafts. Put the plants outside for the summer, trim back and repot in late summer and, well before frost, bring them into the house as the daylight begins to shorten.

Seasonal Reminders

In the middle of February, 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 a sharp hat!

Caring for House Plants

The benefits of growing house plants in your home have been talked about for years. Scientists have recently shown that these benefits extend far beyond helping you "feel good" about winter! Some plants (orchids and succulents) release oxygen at night and refresh the air in a room. Plants release 97% of the water they take in, increasing the humidity of the air around them and helping to decrease the incidence of dry skin. Some plants actually help your general health by removing toxins from the air.

Many herbs make wonderful houseplants and will thrive indoors. Although it is a Mediterranean plant, rosemary needs to be misted regularly or it will not do well in the house. Sage, thyme, bay leaf 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.

Succulents are easy-to-please and survive dry indoor conditions with relative ease. 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. Some flower in midwinter. Give them the brightest light possible (south facing is ideal but a window facing west will do) and add sand to the potting soil for good drainage. Let the soil dry out almost completely and then ... water sparingly! Succulents are not happy with soggy roots! Don't fertilize until the days really lengthen and light levels have increased in the spring. These plants don't mind the dry air and low humidity that comes with indoor heating so don't put them on a bathroom windowsill!

Remember to turn your houseplants regularly to keep them from growing or leaning towards the light. Do not water your plants on a strict schedule but only as the plant needs it. Fertilize lightly once a month.

Growing Ferns Indoors

Growing ferns sounds difficult ... but as long as you meet a few basic requirements it's actually no harder than keeping orchids growing. Many of the ferns which grow happily in your garden make attractive house plants. Ferns have been growing and thriving for 300 million years under many conditions. They are low-maintenance house plants but they do have some definite requirements: light and moisture.

Humidity is essential for ferns. Misting your ferns is essential for success (some people pop them in a shower!) Standing the fern pot on a tray of pebbles and keeping those wet is a definite plus! Most ferns live happily in the understory of forests and rain-forests so they need to be well-hydrated and prefer an evenly moist soil with regular watering. Don't let the soil dry out. Bathrooms and kitchens are ideal fern homes.

Ferns are not deep shade plants. They need bright, filtered light to grow well so a room with east windows is generally ideal. Keep them out of strong sunlight. During the growing season, feed your ferns occasionally with weak fertilizer but let them rest in the winter. Most fern house-plants will happily summer outdoors.

Try these:

Boston Fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*)

One of the most effective plants for removing air pollutants, Boston Ferns need room for their beautiful fronds to hang down and must never be allowed to dry out. Mist them daily for the best performance.

Asparagus Fern (*Asparagus densiflorus*)

Although not a true fern, this dense, bushy plant certainly looks like one! Its lace-like foliage arches as it grows. Happy in indirect light, Asparagus Fern prefers evenly moist (well-drained) soil and should be misted from time to time. Keep it away from heat and drafts.

Button Fern (*Pellaea rotundifolia*)

The ideal bathroom plant, Button Fern likes a bright spot without sun and hates soggy soil. The soft, velvety leaves love humidity. Both leaves and stems will darken with age.

Does Your Landscape/Garden need a Tune-Up?

Taking the time to plan your gardening year during the winter months has many advantages ... one of the biggest is that this is the ideal time to take a good look at what you really need in your current life. Have you recently down-sized to a smaller home? Have you just bought your first home and did it come with a garden that doesn't suit your life-style? Have you simply out-grown some aspects of your garden? You may need to spend a little time "right-sizing" the landscape you live in. A small-space garden can be as appealing as an expansive one. You don't have to give up your favorites ... you just need to choose the right varieties for the space available. Keep these principles in mind:

Choose plants that reflect your current garden situation. Don't automatically buy 5 when you really only have room for 3!

Focus on patio living and let the landscape be the backdrop. Fewer but larger containers create a focal point. Self-watering containers can make your life easier.

A smaller garden will feel more spacious if you don't pack the plants in. Let some mulch show.

Replace high-maintenance flowers with easy-care bushes, evergreens and ornamental grasses ... chosen carefully this will automatically give you winter interest too and add a new dimension.

Take a Good Look at Your Foundation Plantings

Foundation plantings serve a purpose: they soften the hard lines of a house where it meets the ground, anchor the corners of the house and create a welcome to the front door. If your house sits on an expanse of lawn without mature trees around it, shrubs and evergreens will give the feel of maturity to your personal landscape. But everything grows and before you know it, your foundation plantings may need some attention/replacement. Echoing existing shrubs in foundation plants creates a sense of unity in your personal landscape. You may not have to replace everything but it's a good idea to keep these concepts front and center as you think about new selections:

Think in terms of mature height. Dwarf shrubs may work better in your space so that windows don't get obscured. Try not to add shrubs that get leggy.

Location is everything! Know your exposure. Sun? Shade? A mix? Choose wisely.

Designers tend to stress entryway plantings, using evergreens for year-round visual interest.

Corner plantings will frame your house visually and should be taller than the rest. Don't plant too close to the house.

The remaining plantings can also include grasses. Do not plant too close to the house or they won't get rainfall. Think about choosing shrubs that don't need a lot of pruning and care.

Mulch foundation plantings to add to the visual impact.

Many gardeners are using curved foundation beds to mark entryways and walkways and layering their plantings.

Often-Asked Questions

My African Violets are limping along but they're so pretty in bloom. How should I care for them?

African Violets like a rich soil (special mixes are sold) and bright light but not sunlight...an east window is the perfect exposure for them. Don't fertilize too often (again, special mixtures are available.) Use luke-warm water when watering and water only from the bottom. They propagate easily from leaf cuttings, which are usually taken in the spring. (Put plastic wrap over a jar filled with water and secure with a rubber band. Poke a hole in the middle of the plastic wrap and insert a stem cutting. Roots will develop in a short time and the leaf can then be planted.) Winter is difficult for some house plants but they'll come through just fine!

I'm already sick of this winter gray and gloom! How do I plan ahead and get more color into next year's winter garden?

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. Shrubs like Red or Yellow Dogwood will give flaming color throughout winter. 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 (available not just in green but also in blue and yellow tints) where you can see them from the house. 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.

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 sink the pots into the ground.

This year I promised myself to start the spring season with a tidy garage. Some of my plastic pots are odd-sized and I'd like to use them again. How do 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.

Do some vegetables grow better than others in containers or Grow Bags?

Many vegetables do well in pots, especially dwarf cultivars. Remember to choose larger containers than you think you will need and expect that you may have to water more frequently during the season. Try chard, lettuce, radishes, cherry and bush tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, summer squash, pole beans and potatoes. All herbs will do well in containers and, as an added bonus, will help with pest control!

I'm introducing my small grand-child to vegetable gardening? Which ones will grow the fastest?

Radishes, lettuces, bush beans, carrots and spinach will all fill the bill; there are differences within each category, very often based on the ultimate size of the vegetable, so pick the dwarfs! Some vegetables grow very well together such as tomatoes and basil, peas and carrots, squash and corn, potatoes and eggplants; some, like carrots and dill, do not! Picking part of your own dinner is a summer highlight and should help your grand-child love veggies!

I admit to being curious ... what does the Nursery “do” when you are closed for the winter?

Well, we're not watching TV ... we're too busy planning, organizing, re-arranging and growing! Those greenhouses begin to fill up with little green things very quickly and the nurturing process takes a great deal of concentrated attention as the conditions they grow in must be constantly monitored on an almost daily basis. We're always busy updating paper work so that the nursery will run efficiently all through the growing season. Tools and supplies must be readied for the season; sharp eyes watch for unwanted “critters” on the property; any damage to the buildings is dealt with quickly. By the end of March we will be as ready as possible to welcome you back!

Getting Ready for Spring

In late March (or whenever the snow melts):

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. As tempting as it is to get out in the garden and get going, let the weather be your guide. Our last three springs have been cold and wet and some damage can be done by removing protective coverings too quickly.

Remove winter mulch from flower beds slowly. Bulbs coming up now will not be bothered by a late frost.

Cut down any perennials you left standing in the fall ... remember that not everything leafs out at the same time! (Cut back Gaura, Lavender, Perovskia and Montauk Daisies later in the season when you start to see bud-break.) Watch for frost-heaved plants and push them gently but firmly back into the ground.

As perennials begin to emerge, assess their location. Sun and shade patterns change over time and it may be necessary to move some plants to a better spot. Remove any winter-damaged foliage from your perennials in early Spring and check to be sure that some plants (like Brunnera) have not formed a mat that some bulbs cannot break through.

As the soil becomes friable, keep dividing, planting and transplanting. Here in CT, we can divide or move perennials until the middle of May (Rudbeckia, Black-Eyed Susan and Leucanthemum seem to need division to thrive.) Peonies and Iris should be divided only in the fall.

When you acquire a new plant, get it into the ground as quickly as possible and remember to determine the plant's “best side.” Positioning is everything! Experienced gardeners realize that allowing a plant to show its own “natural” shape will give you the best look and the best results ... arguing with a plant is a waste of time!

Weed! It's amazing, but weeds can and do grow in and survive Connecticut winters all the time.

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. (Don't forget to deadhead the daffodils but let the stems and leaves turn brown before you cut them down completely. Don't braid them as that keeps the energy from going back into the bulb.) Photographing your garden as the season progresses is the best record of all your hard work.

Late April/early May is the ideal time to apply lime, if needed, to the lawn; fertilize and use pre-emergent weed control.

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, bugs and diseases.

The nursery's specially developed Supergrow Fertilizer is available in two formulas: 18-6-18 is designed for steady feeding throughout the season and is the exact mix used on our nursery plants. 17-5-10 is pelleted for slow release and designed for container use. Custom blended and screened topsoil is also available along with bagged cedar mulch.

The **Spring Garden Chores** Information Sheet is available on the web site (www.AcerGardens.com.)

Creating a Pollinator-Friendly Garden

Pollinators have been called “nature’s crop dusters” ... without them we would be missing many of our favorite flowers and wildflowers. 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 contributing to the job.

The Bumblebee population is declining. Many gardeners are going out of their way to attract Mason bees because they are incredible cross-pollinators, gathering pollen and nectar on the same visit. (Do not confuse them with Carpenter bees ... Mason bees are a different species and are gentle and friendly.) Arriving early in the season, they are invaluable for pollinating fruit trees. They are not interested in eating your house! Very sociable (they never come alone), Mason bees are happiest living in special houses, readily available at garden supply stores/catalogs.

A few simple additions to your gardening could increase the number of pollinator visitors:

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 types of flowers blooming in each season.

Select flowers in bright colors. Vary the shapes of the flowers to accommodate different pollinators.

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

Provide ground cover and shade as well as shallow dishes of water.

Help your vegetable garden attract pollinators by planting flowering herbs in the vegetable garden.

Do not use pesticides.

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 Violets, Cosmos, Hollyhock, Phlox, Nepeta, Salvia, Allium, Sedum and Lavender.

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: Monarda, Monkshood, Agastach and Buddleia.

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, Monarda 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 and the pale flowers stay visible for a long time. Attract moths with Nicotiana, Gaura, Stock, Honeysuckle, Moonflower and Evening Primrose.

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 most by red flowers but other birds head for the nectar available in many summer flowers. Birds have no real sense of smell but bright, deep colors attract them all summer long. Plant Agastache, Salvia, Penstemon, Honeysuckle Vine and Bee Balm to bring them flying in.

Providing extended seasonal blooms for pollinators just takes a little planning. Bees and butterflies will be attracted to many different flowers over the course of the gardening season and will spend a great deal of time in the garden if you provide a selection of their favorites. For example:

Spring: Aubretia, Hyacinth, Pulmonaria, Crocus, Hyacinth, Lilac, Primrose

Summer: Baptisia, Buddleia, Bee Balm, Cosmos, Echinacea, Honeysuckle, Hosta, Lavender, Nepeta, Valerian

Fall: Asters, Chrysanthemum, Dahlias, Goldenrod, Hyssop, Sedum, Vernonia, Zinnias

The **Creating a Pollinator-Friendly Garden** Information Sheet is available on the web site (www.Acergardens.com). You might also like to take a look at the **Butterfly Magnets** and **Attracting Hummingbirds** Information Sheets.

Native Plants You Can Count On

Many native plants, or wildflowers, will do well in a cultivated garden as long as their soil, sun and moisture requirements are met. Choosing plants that have long since habituated themselves to your local conditions gives you a head-start. (Mixing sun plants with woodland plants will not help you succeed so plan accordingly!) Natives tend to be quick-growing and long-lived, disease resistant and pest free and easily withstand dramatic climate changes such as drought and blizzard. Once established, they need very little fertilizing and watering. Any tendency to invasiveness can be easily controlled by pulling up self-seedlings.

In the wider conservation picture, natives' growth habits and root structures keep soil in place and store water. The plants are pre-programmed to produce fruit, nectar, seeds and nuts at various times of the year in sync with the local fauna. Making space for native plants in your garden almost guarantees a procession of birds, butterflies, insects and mammals seeking food and shelter. Visually, growing natives connects the boundaries of your garden to the wider natural landscape.

The New England Wildflower Society has some recommendations for natives guaranteed to thrive in this climate. Choose from:

Asclepias incarnata	Common Milkweed	Sun/partial shade
Aruncus dioicus	Goatsbeard	Sun/partial shade
Aster novae-angliae	New England Aster	Sun
Boltonia asteroides	Boltonia	Sun
Cimicifuga racemosa	Black Snakeroot	Sun/partial shade
Echinacea purpurea	Purple Coneflower	Sun
Eupatorium maculatum	Joe-Pye Weed	Sun
Hibiscus moscheutos	Marsh Mallow	Sun
Lobelia cardinalis	Cardinal Flower	Sun/partial shade
Monarda didyma	Bee Balm	Sun/partial shade
Oenothera fruticosa	Sundrops	Sun
Phlox maculata	Wild Sweet William	Sun/partial shade
Tiarella cordifolia	Foamflower	Shade
Tradescantia	Spiderwort	Sun
Vernonia noveboracensis	Tall Ironweed	Sun
Veronicastrum virginicum	Culver's Root	Sun

Tried and True Perennials for Long Blooming Periods

Many gardeners find that a little bit of advance planning will give them a lower maintenance landscape. There are a number of perennials that are easy-to-grow and also offer a long blooming period; some will bloom for several months! Faithful deadheading can often extend bloom even further. As the end of the flowering period is signaled by diminishing bloom, shearing the plant back by ½ will often result in the dividend of another blooming. Dividing the blooming period into three segments gives lots of choice:

Dicentra formosa	Bleeding Heart	May - August
Gaura	Wand Flower	May - September
Scabiosa	Pincushion Flower	May - September
Geranium 'Rozanne'	Cranesbill	May - September
Agastache	Anise-Hyssop	July to first frost
Achillea	Yarrow	June - August
Coreopsis	Tickseed	June to first frost
Echinacea	Cone Flower	June - August
Gaillardia	Blanket Flower	June - August
Kalimeris	Japanese Aster	June - September
Nepeta	Catmint	June - September
Perovskia	Russian Sage	July - September
Phlox paniculata	Garden Phlox	July - September
Potentilla	Cinquefoil	June - August
Rudbeckia	Black-eyed Susan	July - September
Sidalcea	Miniature Hollyhock	July - September
Aster	Aster	August - October

Cool-Season Vegetables

Every year, more and more gardeners discover the pleasure of growing some of the vegetables they eat. A successful vegetable garden prefers 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 also 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 ... many new cultivars of Cucumber and Zucchini are designed for upright growth. Growing on stakes also frustrates many common predators!

Many vegetables can be planted as soon as you can work the soil. Known as “cool season vegetables”, they are tolerant of root disturbance and benefit from getting a jump on the season. They include Swiss Chard, Spinach, Kale, Leeks, Onions, Cilantro, Peas, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Carrots, Beets, Celery and Radishes. 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 comes.

As a general guide:

Sow or plant in cool weather: Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Lettuce, Onions, Parsley, Parsnips, Peas, Radishes, Spinach, Swiss chard, Turnips.

Sow or plant in warm weather: Beans, Carrots, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Melons, Peppers, Squashes, Tomatoes.

Sow or Plant to Give 1 crop per season: Corn, Eggplant, Leeks, Melons, Peppers, Potatoes, Squashes, Tomatoes.

Re-sow for additional crops: Beans, Beets, Carrots, Lettuce, Parsnips, Radishes, Spinach, Turnips.

As the season progresses and the temperatures rise, be sure to include a few flowers and herbs to help attract the pollinators so necessary to a successful vegetable garden. Attracting honeybees, bumblebees, butterflies and moths is made easier if you include some plants of Basil, Bee Balm, Black-Eyed Susan, Cosmos, Alyssum, Marigold, Oregano and Zinnia.

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

Planning a Beginner's Vegetable Garden

Just decided to grow your own? You won't believe how good a freshly-picked veggie tastes! You'll want to grow everything but common sense should tell you: "Take it Easy and Plan Properly!" Diagram and lay-out your vegetable garden on graph paper. A raised bed would make care of the garden much easier. Allow enough room between rows for easy access and weeding. Rows running north to south will take full advantage of the sun. An easy garden, designed to feed four people, could include Zucchini, Tomatoes, Peppers, Cabbage, Bush Beans, Lettuce, Beets, Carrots, Swiss Chard and Radishes. Adding Marigolds and some herbs to the perimeter of your garden will help discourage rabbits and other pests. Fencing is always a good solution to the "Critter" problem but not always feasible and it needs height to work. Keep good records and next year's garden planning will go more smoothly!

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 sometime during the last week in March. Check the web site for the exact date as the time gets closer. We look forward to seeing you back at the nursery! See you soon!

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor & Writer