



# April, May, June 2017

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One of the biggest mistakes you can make as a gardener is to keep on thinking you're in charge! Doesn't Mother Nature understand that we have schedules to follow and plans to fulfill? Can she really believe that we're just going to sit around and wait for Spring to come on her terms? We're ready! Winters do appear to be subtly changing their pattern and gardening in New England isn't always easy but at this time of the year every gardener's heart lifts at the thought of what is to come. Because Spring always comes! It may take its time getting here and it may not stay long but sooner or later it comes. The air will turn soft, the grass and trees will green up and all the bulbs you planted last fall will suddenly remember they're supposed to bloom. No matter how busy you suddenly have to be or how many garden chores are waiting ... enjoy Spring! It doesn't last long but that makes it all the more special.

Although the past winter was, on the whole, mild, wind storms did a fair amount of harm. You may be coping with damaged shrubbery or trees and replacement may be the only solution. The nursery is here to help you solve garden problems; calling ahead for an appointment will ensure that staff is available to help you with your garden planning. Existing photographs are always a plus and will help you integrate new additions into your existing landscape. It is certainly disheartening to lose favorite trees, evergreens and shrubs to the force of nature, but it is also an opportunity to change the "look" of a landscape, expand a vista or try something new. Take a minute to sit and reflect on what you really want your garden to be from now on. This could be the perfect opportunity to head off in a new direction!

## Flower Show

The 2017 Newport Flower Show will be held June 23 – 25 at Rosecliff in Newport, RI. This year's theme is Fete Des Fleurs: Paintings and Parterres and is designed to transport you to France. Rosecliff itself was modeled on the Grand Trianon at Versailles. Show highlights will include designer display gardens, horticultural exhibits, demonstrations and classes in Botanical Arts and Floral Design, and over 85 vendors. Champagne and Jazz Brunch as well as Afternoon Tea will also be available. 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](http://www.newportmansions.org/events/newport-flower-show)

## Summer Gardens to Visit

The Garden Conservancy runs self-guided tours of hundreds of private gardens from coast to coast. Most of the gardens are only open to the public once a year. Open Days in Connecticut start May 14 and run through September 17 with admission at \$7 for an adult. No reservations are required; Open Days are rain or shine events. Visit [www.gardenconservancy.org](http://www.gardenconservancy.org) to search by garden, city or state. Open Days are also listed for near-by Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts.

## 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.

Cut back old growth from yellow and red-stemmed Dogwood bushes.

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

Prune : Roses, as needed, Rhododendrons and Lilacs after they bloom.

Clean-up Hellebore old foliage now to help prevent disease.

Move shrubs and/or perennials only when the ground begins to warm.

**The Plant of the Month** will be available the first of each month, starting in April, at the nursery near the checkout table. These plants are carefully chosen to feature current bloom times and to serve as an accent in your garden. Try something new!

### **April: Iberis (Candytuft)**

Zone : 4-9    Height:    6-12"    Spread: 12-18"

Blooming in late spring to early summer, Iberis is a trouble-free ground cover for sunny sites and walkways, suitable as an edger for flower beds and a great favorite in rock gardens. Clusters of white flowers almost completely cover the foliage. Although it prefers full sun, Iberis can take some afternoon shade.

### **May: Armeria (Thrift)**

Zone: 4-8      Height: 6-12"      Spread: 6-12"

This compact, low-growing plant forms a dense mound with grass-like dark green leaves. Tiny flowers bloom in mid-spring, rising well above the foliage. It spreads slowly, will tolerate a hot, dry site (does best in poor, dry soil) and is seaside/salt tolerant. Shearing off old flowers after bloom will keep the plant tidy.

### **June: Baptisia (False Indigo)**

Zone: 3-9      Height: 3-4'      Spread: 3-4'

Grown in full sun and well-drained soil, this long-lived, tall plant produces intense blue flowers that are virtually pest-free. After flowering, the spikes fill out with foliage and resemble small shrubs. These rabbit-resistant plants can anchor a border, take average soil and are highly attractive to butterflies and bees.

### **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, 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:

**Alpine Mix:** An excellent growth medium for alpiners 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:** A bacteria (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*) used to control gypsy moth caterpillars.

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

### **Seasonal Reminders**

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 frequently.

Check the nursery web site to access relevant Information Sheets. Information Sheets are also available at the Checkout Shed.

## **Weed, weed and weed again!**

### **Aftercare for Bulbs**

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 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. Bulbs still need sun and water to form next year's flowers.

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 at most. If you plant your Tulips among perennials slow to break in the Spring, the growing foliage will help to disguise the dying tulip foliage.

### **Spring Pruning**

Buddleia, or Butterfly Bush, should be cut back to 12"-18" by mid- April, even though they will be showing signs of new growth. Deadheading the faded flowers all summer will keep the bush blooming well into the fall.

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.

Azaleas and Weigela bloom on wood at least one year old. After bloom, these bushes should be 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.

### **The Water-Wise Garden**

CT is still officially in a serious drought and gardeners planting or caring for gardens need to plan accordingly.

Try grouping plants into “water usage” areas so that watering needs will be consistent. Improving the soil with compost and other organic matter and using regionally suitable plants (both native and adapted) will help your garden thrive. Light mulch will help capture rain water, suppress weeds and encourage deep root growth. In fact, keeping up with the weeding actually reduces the number of root systems competing for water!

Water deeply once a week to encourage better root systems ... deeper roots are more drought resistant. Use soaker and drip hoses to minimize water loss through evaporation. (Overhead sprinklers lose too much water to evaporation, especially on hot days.) If possible, capture water from downspouts with rain barrels. Water in the early morning when there is less heat to cause evaporation. Use a rain gauge to give you some idea of how much water has fallen naturally but remember that different areas of your garden may have different absorption rates due to soil content and planted material.

Many native plants do well in drought conditions as they have long since habituated themselves to local conditions. Any tendency to invasiveness can be easily controlled by pulling up self-seedlings. The New England Wildflower Society has some recommendations for natives guaranteed to thrive. Choose from:

Aquilegia Canadensis	Eastern Wild Columbine	Sun/partial shade
Aruncus dioicus	Goatsbeard	Sun/partial shade
Aster novae-angliae	New England Aster	Sun
Boltonia asteroides	Boltonia	Sun
Echinacea purpurea	Purple Coneflower	Sun
Monarda didyma	Bee Balm	Sun/partial shade
Oenothera fruticosa	Sundrops	Sun
Phlox maculata	Wild Sweet William	Sun/partial shade
Tradescantia subaspera	Spiderwort	Sun
Vernonia altissima	Tall Ironweed	Sun
Veronicastrum virginicum	Culver’s Root	Sun

## **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. Place the divisions 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.

### **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.

### **Butterflies and Milkweed**

The earliest spring butterflies need to find nectar, shelter and warmth in your garden ... even a flat rock where they can bask in the sun will provide the warmth their wings need to fly. Butterflies love the nectar provided by many spring-blooming perennials. Early arrivals will feed on:

Chives

Crabapple

Mertensia (Virginia Bluebell)

Muscari (Grape Hyacinth)

Peony

Phlox subulata (Creeping Phlox)

Privet

Salvia

Spicebush

Syringa (Lilac)

Last summer, Monarch butterflies were here in CT in very limited numbers. As the season went on, fewer and fewer Monarchs were visible in our gardens. The Monarch caterpillar must feed on Milkweed, a common wildflower which can spread aggressively. You can still use Milkweed in open meadows where it can be free to colonize but perhaps use a substitute Milkweed plant in your garden to help attract

Monarchs. Consider planting *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly Weed). Its bright orange, yellow or red flowers appear in mid-to-late summer and will provide the food the Monarch caterpillar needs. Easily kept under control, these plants require full sun and good drainage. You'll be helping the environment and providing food for the Monarchs at the same time.

Please reference the Information Sheet on **Attracting Butterflies** on the web site.

## **The Bee-Friendly Garden**

With the bee population in decline, gardeners are looking for ways to attract these busy pollinators to their gardens. Bees are attracted to flowers by sight and smell so growing some of their favorite plants is the easiest way to lure them in. Single, daisy-shaped flowers make it easy for the bees to access pollen; even shrubs and trees can provide food for the bees.

Here is a partial list of some bee-friendly plants:

### **Annuals**

Agyranthemum (Daisy)  
Alyssum  
Cosmos

### **Perennials**

Agastache  
Coreopsis  
Echinacea  
  
Geraniums  
Hollyhocks  
Iris reticulate  
Lavender  
Leucanthemum  
Monarda (Bee Balm)  
Sedum

### **Herbs**

Mint  
Rosemary  
Sage  
  
Thyme

### **Shrubs**

Buddleia  
Enkianthus  
Holly  
Honeysuckle  
Roses

### **Trees**

Crab Apple  
Fruit Trees  
Magnolia  
Maples  
Willows

### **Fruits/Vegetables**

Blackberries  
Cucumbers  
Peppers  
Pumpkins  
Raspberries  
Squash

## **Planting Gardens with Bird Appeal**

If you want native birds flying around your garden, plant native flowers, bushes and trees! Birds would rather stick with their tried-and-true favorites: plants that feature seeds, berries and insects. Native plants offer all these as well as a wide choice of building material for birds ... twigs, dead leaves and bark strips 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. This plant family includes Sunflowers, Asters, Black-Eyed Susans 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 and you may have trouble if you want to cut some branches for flower arrangements! 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. Any Blueberry bush must be covered with netting or the birds will do all your harvesting for you!

Adding some trees (even young saplings) will provide sheltering branches to the bird population: oaks and maples offer insects for the birds as well as welcome shade. Cypress bushes provide welcome shelter and over-wintering birds will be grateful for the protection and hiding places found in its deep branches. Feeding birds in the summer is a personal choice ... having water available for them will be very welcome.

### **Timing Flowering Shrubs**

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.

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

## **Growing Great Plants**

### **Alchemilla mollis (Lady's Mantle)**

Zone: 4 - 8

Height: 12 – 18"

Spread: 1-2'

A natural for adding foliage texture to the garden, this beautiful plant forms mounds of velvety soft green leaves which can catch raindrops. Sprays of chartreuse flowers in early to mid-summer are a nice filler for cut arrangements. This easy-care perennial grows in sun or part shade; shearing back after bloom will keep the clumps tidy. Lady's Mantle is tough and low-maintenance and is just the right size to plant along paths or at the front of the border. The plant attracts butterflies and is both deer and rabbit resistant. It may be divided in spring or early fall and can self-seed.

### **Bearded Iris**

Zone: 4 - 9

Height: 8 – 36"

Spread: 18"

These dramatic plants come in a wide array of colors, many of them fragrant, blooming in late spring and early summer. Their requirements are simple but clear-cut: 6 hours of full sun every day, "dry feet" (good drainage) and good air circulation around the plants. Applications of a low-nitrogen fertilizer are appreciated in early spring and also a month after bloom. Snap spent blooms off to keep your plants tidy and plan to divide every 3-5 years. Iris work well as mass plantings or in mixed beds – their strong leaves add dramatic impact long after the blooms have faded.

## **Fast-Filling and Long-Blooming Perennials**

There are different reasons for changing the look of a perennial bed. Sometimes gardeners lose interest in a particular color or want a different emphasis. Physical limitations may dictate the amount of time available for gardening. Life brings changes and people may be away a good part of the summer or be occupied with visitors, children or grandchildren. A harsh winter may cause plant losses. Or, it may just be time to spruce up a particular area and bring in a more modern, easy-going look. Whatever the reason, a gardener often wants rapid results and is not always willing to wait for plants to fill in over a period of years.

Large blocks of color add impact to a garden and the best and easiest way to achieve that goal is to use perennials that are in bloom for extended periods of time and do not require too much maintenance. Although experienced gardeners know that few plants look their best the first year they are planted, turning to fast fillers allows the gardener to replace existing areas with long-blooming perennials that routinely form big, dependable clumps quickly. Meeting their light and moisture requirements will help speed them along! Almost all are sun lovers and like evenly moist soil. Deadheading faithfully will help to extend bloom times. Some individual cultivars may actually need a little cutting back as the season progresses. Many native plants are also ideal fast-fillers.

<b>Perennial</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Bloom Time</b>
Achillea	Yarrow	June through August
Agastache	Hyssop	July to first frost
Aruncus	Goat's Beard	April to May
Aster	Aster	July to August
Boltonia	Star Flower	August to October
Centranthus	Jupiter's Beard	All summer
Coreopsis	Tickseed	June to frost
Echinacea	Coneflower	June to August
Gaillardia	Blanket Flower	June through August
Gaura	Wand Flower	June to September
Geranium	Cranesbill	May to August
Helianthus	Sunflower	Fall
Heliopsis	False Sunflower	Mid-summer to early fall
Hemerocallis	Daylily	June to September
Kalimeris	Japanese Aster	June through September
Malva sylvestris	Rose Mallow	June to October
Monarda	Bee Balm	June to August
Nepeta	Catmint	June to September
Perovskia	Russian Sage	July to September
Persicaria	Knotweed	June to October
Phlox paniculata	Garden Phlox	July to September
Potentilla	Cinquefoil	June to August
Rudbeckia	Black-Eyed Susan	July to September
Scabiosa	Pincushion Flower	May to September
Sidalcea	Miniature Hollyhock	July to September
Stachys	Lambs' Ears	Early to Mid-spring

## **Garden Walk-throughs**

In response to many on-going requests, Sharon will be starting a series of informal walk-throughs in her garden over the coming summer months. She will discuss why she makes the choices of what to plant and how she decides on the general "look" of her garden. This is your opportunity to ask questions and learn how a garden develops over time to accommodate both the site and a gardener's changing preferences. Please watch your email for the announcements of these eagerly anticipated events.

## **The Advantage Of A Layered 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.

### **Adding Texture to the Shade Garden with Ferns and Hostas**

A sheltered shade area, with a seating area protected by trees and plants, provides a sense of enclosure and stability to gardener and visitors alike. Gardeners earn their rest periods so create an oasis and make time to sit in the shade and enjoy what you have created. You might even be able to make the time to read a gardening book!

Although there are certainly some perennials which give bloom in the shade, many gardeners depend on the contrasts between bold and delicate foliage textures to give a shade garden interest and depth. Large masses of plants are very effective in shade gardens, helping to create curving shapes and draping over paths. Ferns and Hostas give a wide range of options, especially with some of the exciting new cultivars. To get the best results, provide moist, well-drained, organic soil and filtered or dappled sunlight. Morning sun can often be tolerated. You can choose to:

Vary the color of green but use leaves similar in shape

Bring a sense of drama to a shade bed with bright, variegated or green-striped leaves

Shift focus from plant to plant and add interest with feathery leaves

Depend on the occasional vertical element to add excitement and punch up the mounding shapes of many shade plants.

New introductions include:

#### **Ferns**

##### **Athyrium filix-femina 'Minutissimum' (Dwarf Lady's Fern)**

Zone: 4 – 8'

Height: 12"

Spread: 12"

This dwarf version of Lady's Fern is easy to grow and will tolerate more sun and drier soil than most ferns. Wind shelter is appreciated and clumps should be divided every few years. This Fern shows well in rock and woodland gardens when placed in the front.

### **Cheilanthes lanosa (Hairy Lip Fern)**

Zone: 5 - 8                      Height: 8"                      Spread: 15"

This "nook and cranny", soft-textured plant is a great choice for rock walls and shaded trough gardens. Commonly found on cliffs, it does require good drainage. Drought tolerant, this Fern is deer and rabbit resistant and will live happily in filtered shade.

### **Cheilanthes argentea (Silver Cloak Fern)**

Zone: 5 - 9                      Height: 4 - 6"                      Spread: 6"

An excellent Fern for areas where rain and water are limited. Fronds are a rich green on top with a striking silver-white under-coating. Deer resistant, this plant has a prostrate, creeping habit, requires good drainage and will take sun to part-sun exposure. It can be used in containers.

### **Thelypteris decursive-pinnata (Japanese Beech Fern)**

Zone: 4 - 10                      Height: 12 - 24"                      Spread: 12 - 24"

This fast-spreading fern is a perfect space filler under large shade trees. Lush, lime-green foliage has a graceful form; the plant will form large colonies in moist or dry shade and naturalizes well in mixed woodlands. Deer-resistant, this plant grows quickly but needs regular watering.

## **Hostas**

### **Hosta 'Blueberry Muffin'**

Zone: 3 - 9                      Height: 14"                      Spread: 2'

This strong grower forms a medium-sized mound of rounded, blue leaves which pucker in unusual patterns. This plant features light lavender blooms in early summer. Like most blue Hostas, the leaves will slowly transition to green as the summer heats up.

### **Hosta "Cool as a Cucumber"**

Zone: 3 - 9                      Height: 14"                      Spread: 2'

Attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds, this Hosta forms an arching, cascading clump showcasing its variegated leaves ... green with wide, white centers. It is tolerant of drought, heat and humidity. Provide well-drained soil.

### **Hosta Rainforest Sunrise'**

Zone: 3 - 8                      Height: 8"                      Spread: 18"

This small, mound-shaped plant delivers a major impact! The leaves emerge a solid light green but quickly develop dark green borders with gold centers. Lavender flowers bloom in mid-summer. Hummingbirds and butterflies find this plant irresistible. Heat, drought and humidity tolerant.

## **Hosta Stained Glass'**

Zone: 3 - 9

Height: 15"

Spread: 3'

This Hosta develops huge, long brilliant gold leaves with wide, dark green margins and exhibits good sun tolerance. The prominent veins on the leaves give it the look of stained glass. Fragrant, pale lavender flowers appear in late summer.

## **Often-Asked Questions**

### **My tulip flowers were wonderful last year but the leaves looked wimpy. What should I do?**

Trimming foliage too early may be the culprit. Fading foliage looks as though it should be cut back at once but, in reality, that faded foliage is still gathering energy from the sun and sending it back to the bulb. Let the foliage turn brown completely before cutting it off. Planting spreading perennials in with the tulips will help cover and disguise the faded leaves.

### **We love to watch hummingbirds. Is there one flower guaranteed to bring them to the garden?**

Salvia! Hummingbirds will stand in line to get at the flowers and have been known to almost fight each other for the chance! The red and gentian blue cultivars are particularly popular as hummers are attracted to deep colors.

### **I like to plant roses here and there in my mixed flower beds but I hate to look at their brown knobby knees! How can I keep them covered?**

Use companion plants (paying attention to the height range of the cultivars you choose) which have an open look to them but still form clumps with upright foliage. You might use lavender, Campanula (Bellflower), Nepeta (Catmint), Phlox paniculata (Garden Phlox), Perovskia (Russian Sage), Salvia, Geranium 'Rozanne' or any of the Mints. Alyssum is a good choice because it will attract hover flies which eat insects known to prey on roses. Keep the underplantings about 12" away from the rose bushes as roses don't like root competition. You could also tuck in Landscape Roses which are short to begin with, throw blooms all summer, require very little maintenance and are increasingly popular for all those reasons.

### **Is there a preferred way to plant tomato seedlings?**

Unlike most other plants, tomato seedlings actually like to have half of their stems covered with soil at planting time. The stems will not rot but will grow even more roots and develop a strong root system to take in water and nutrients. If you are going to stake your plants, do so at planting time to avoid any future root damage.

### **I have a shady area near one of my best sitting spots that needs a quick fix. What flower will add some bright color?**

The wide range of types and colors available makes **Begonias** the answer! They start blooming in early summer and will continue until hard frosts. They are happy with filtered light under trees but need to be shaded from afternoon sun. Give them rich, well-drained soil and good air circulation, especially if you place them in containers. Some Begonias have mounding shapes; some have trailing, bell-like flowers which are well displayed in hanging baskets.

**Towards the end of the summer most of my blooming vines have really slowed down. Is there a vine that blooms late in the season?**

Clematis paniculata, commonly known as Sweet Autumn Clematis, is your answer! This vine needs only a half day of sun, average garden soil that drains well, and a trellis or fence to lean on. Once established, they can grow more than 15 feet in a season and will cover anything in the way! Sweetly scented flowers appear from August until frost.

**I like to read about the perennials I grow but I'm not always sure how to pronounce their names. Is there a reliable source online?**

Yes, indeed. One of the best is at [www.finegardening.com](http://www.finegardening.com). Hit the Pronunciation Guide button, select the appropriate letter of the alphabet and the phonetic pronunciations will come right up. The site contains well over 1,000 entries and is added to constantly.

**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 50 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 large plants go outside for the summer go they may need additional staking to better cope with wind. 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 on 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.

### **Using Variegated Plants**

Green is the predominant color in northern gardens with brightly colored blooms standing out against the background. Sooner or later, flowers run out of bloom time and the gardener falls back on foliage, texture and shape to make up for the loss of color. Variegation in plants occurs primarily in tones of white, cream or yellow and using variegated plants as accents will provide a strong contrast to the surrounding greens. White flowering plants with white and green foliage provide an elegant look and are especially effective in shady areas. The range of cultivars in both Hosta and Pulmonaria is extensive.

Variegated plants for sunny spots include some cultivars of Lysimachia, Artemisia and even some grasses. Plants with lots of white or yellow in their leaves seem to need more sun but others may lose their variegation if exposed to too much sun.

Choosing which plant to use, and how, calls for careful consideration. A garden full of variegated plants would look chaotic but used as an accent an individual plant can brighten an entire area.

## **Garden Containers**

It's time to think about containers again! This year, the nursery is featuring several new lines of unusual containers. Acer Gardens will have many pre-planted containers for you to choose from but, of course, you can bring your own empty container to the nursery and staff will be happy to help you design something just right for your garden. Maybe it's time to try a container featuring just one color but using varying shades of that color. Looking at a color wheel will give you some idea of complimentary as well as dramatic colors which might fit into your over-all garden plan. Containers can be used to lead the eye along a path, to frame a view or to cover-up a temporary "hole". The possibilities are almost endless! You can change the look of your containers at will by changing the plantings. Troughs and containers have the advantage of portability and can be moved around the garden as the season advances or as "holes" develop.

Many gardeners find that elevating a container by placing it on a pedestal gives the container greater impact in the garden and really shows off trailing flowers. Placing more containers around the elevated one can create a further dramatic effect and make a real statement. Be sure the pedestal is securely anchored so that it won't blow over and that the container itself is heavy and won't wiggle.

Accurate watering is key to growing good containers as is a good ratio of plant to pot. Think about where your containers will be placed as you choose your plants. Containers for decks and terraces will be in view 24/7 so they can be made to reflect how you choose to entertain or become extensions of the larger garden. A container sited for the "wow" factor can be filled to over-flowing with wild colors and luxurious blossom and you should feel free to depart from your normal style. After all, if it doesn't work it's easy to change. Be sure that all your container plants share the same sun, soil and water requirements and set up a realistic fertilizing schedule. Many gardeners photograph their containers as the season advances and keep them to use as guides for next year.

## **The Vegetable Garden**

This year, Acer Gardens has further expanded its vegetable and herb selections. For instance, Kale is now available in both blue and red varieties! Nursery staff will be happy to help you choose what you need to make your vegetable growing a pleasure.

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. If you are using rows be sure to leave access routes for weeding and fertilizing.

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. 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. Spring is the optimum time to direct sow or plant peas, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, cabbage, leeks, carrots, parsley, onions, Swiss chard, kale and micro-greens. Try the rainbow beets ... an intriguing mix of colors!

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 fend off many aphids, thrips and beetles and will protect your squash and pumpkin crops. Fennel bulbs and 'Florence' 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. ‘Conservor’ is an outstanding choice, with a high, round shape suitable for long storage. 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, Lemon Verbena (the leaves are wonderful in water or iced tea) and Lemon Basil, which is resistant to downy mildew. Thai Basil will be available again (try it with fish as well as using the leaves in oriental dishes.) Other basil varieties will include Lime Basil, ‘Genovese Red Freddy’, and ‘Sweet Genovese’ (which makes superb pesto). Oregano ‘Hot and Spicy’ 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 in a separate pot as it 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 and successive plantings.

Acer Gardens now offers many seed varieties of popular gourmet vegetables and annuals (some of which have almost vanished.) It’s best to pick these up early to make sure your choice is still available.

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

### **Growing Patio Vegetables and Herbs**

Even if you don’t have a “real” vegetable garden, you can certainly grow herbs and many vegetables. The nursery has a large selection of herbs and vegetables which will all do well planted together in containers! Dwarf vegetables are always a good choice as are vegetables that take up little space (lettuce, radishes and scallions) or crops that bear over a long time (tomatoes and peppers). “Bush” and “Compact” sizes will do well grown in containers or tucked into the front of flower beds. Try planting a Summer Salad container with a tomato, a cucumber, parsley and chives. Lettuce and containers are born companions. Plant seeds every 3-4 weeks for successive harvests. Some new cucumbers and squash plants are designed to be grown vertically and take up very little room.

Choosing vegetables with the same water and sun requirements will be a plus. Almost all vegetables do best when grown in full sunlight, at least 6 hours per day. Leaf vegetables (lettuce, greens, spinach and parsley) will tolerate a little shade, especially as the season lengthens.

Pick a container larger than you think you will need. Be sure the container has good drainage (holes in the bottom) because containers need more watering than vegetable beds as they dry out quickly from sun and wind. Some plants may require daily watering. Don’t let the soil dry out between waterings as this could cause the plants to drop their flowers and fruits. Potting mixes (peat-based) are a good soil choice; use a slow release or organic fertilizer at planting time.

### **Squashes**

There are two types of squash plants: summer and winter. Summer varieties, large and bushy, come in many shapes and include zucchini. Winter varieties are vine plants and range from Acorn and Butternut to Hubbard. All prefer heat and full sun and like to grow in hills. Mulching is always appreciated as is the

addition of well-composted material. The winter varieties will spread unless controlled! When cutting off squash, include 2" of stem to prevent storage rot. Remove over-ripe squash from the plant. Many gardeners plant a second crop as the first starts to produce; some squeeze in a 3<sup>rd</sup> crop which will produce into early fall. Squash plants appreciate soaker hose watering as wet leaves can lead to fungus problems.

There are new cultivars of summer squash (zucchini-type) which are self-pollinating, disease-resistant and very prolific.

### **Cuarzo**

A distinctive variety with an extended harvest time and heavy yield. The upright plant allows for ease of harvest and an attractive appearance. Matures in 40-45 days.

### **Dunja**

This bush variety is a vigorous plant and needs little care once established. Give it lots of space and evenly moist soil. Benefits from a steady supply of nutrients. Matures in 41-50 days.

### **Emerald City**

Long and slender, these zucchini are easy to grow, love hot weather and warm soil. Compact plants give high yields. Pick when the plants are 6-8" long. Matures in 45-65 days.

### **Green Machine**

Healthy plants with high disease resistance keep this zucchini producing straight 7-8" squash for a full season. Space widely for easy harvesting. Matures in 45 days.

## **Proven Tomato Winners**

Tomatoes require full sun all day and really good air circulation around each individual plant. Amend soil with compost prior to planting. Water the soil, not the leaves, and water deeply every 5 days, depending on the weather. For maximum returns, prune off non-fruiting branches as the plant grows. Protect from frost. Store picked tomatoes at room temperature indoors. When harvesting, cut stems close to the fruits. Most cherry and grape varieties will perform well here throughout the season.

These varieties are all very disease resistant and bring continued success:

### **Chef's Choice Orange Hybrid**

A beefsteak for slicing and saucing, this tomato yields over 2 dozen fruits during the season. Disease-resistant plants resist cracking. Matures in 75 days.

### **Heirloom Marriage Genuwine Tomato**

This heirloom is a cross between Brandywine and Costoluto Genovese. Delectable flavor from globe-shaped fruits. Excellent for slicing. Needs to be trellised. Matures in 70-75 days.

## **Mountain Merit**

First full-size tomato offering resistance to both early and late blight. Deep red flavorful fruit is great for slicing, sandwiches and later canning. Harvests last 4-5 weeks. Matures in 75 days.

## **Stellar**

Beautiful red, round tomatoes are perfect for all uses. Compact, mounding plants make this slicer ideal for small gardens and large containers. Excellent resistance to Late Blight. Matures in 70-75 days.

## **Super Fantastic**

Beefsteak tomatoes are solid and meaty. Vines produce high yields. This vigorous plant should be caged or staked. Produces until frost. Matures in 70-75 days.

## **General Reminders**

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.)

**Tuesday** at Acer Gardens are 60+ Discount Days ... 10% off all purchases.

**Wednesday** offers a 10% Nursery Discount to all customers.

Acer Gardens  
Linda Z. Lynch  
Editor

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