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SCAN ME

December 2024

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No. 260

'Tis the Season to Plant Sand Dunes



Tom Castronovo/Photo

American beachgrass, *Ammophila breviligulata*, is being extensively used in Lavallette, Ocean County, NJ, to stabilize and help enlarge the east side of the sand dunes.

By Tom Castronovo
Executive Editor/Publisher
Gardener News

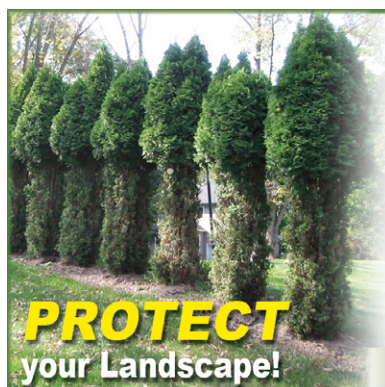
Lavallette is my favorite beach to visit. I love it in the spring, summer, fall, and in the winter.

Lavallette is a borough in Ocean County, NJ, situated on what some refer

to as The Barrier Island or Barnegat Peninsula. The entire borough is less than one full square mile.

Growing up in Lavallette, visiting the beach and swimming in the ocean

was a treat. When I was a kid, there were no sand dunes. During a very high tide, the ocean would run down the road, collecting at the intersection at the bottom. I can (Cont. on Page 14)



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Around The Garden

By Tom Castronovo
Gardener News

New Update to the NJ Fire Code: Mulch/Combustible Landscape Materials Effective: April 15, 2025

Mulch poses a very real fire hazard when it is not properly managed.

As a volunteer firefighter, I believe there are three potential causes of mulch fires. The most widely accepted cause is the improper disposal of smoking materials. The next is spontaneous combustion under the right atmospheric conditions. The last is improper clearance of electrical devices (i.e., decorative lights).



Tom Castronovo/Photo

Improperly discarded cigarette butts in a Hunterdon County, NJ, shopping center mulch bed.

On April 15, 2024, the State of New Jersey Division of Fire Safety adopted the 2018 International Fire Code, New Jersey Edition. This provision becomes operative 12 months after the effective date of these rules, which is April 15, 2025.

This change will affect the use of combustible landscape materials or “mulch” in all applications with the exception of owner-occupied, one- and two-family or attached single family dwellings used exclusively for dwelling purposes. Townhouses are considered attached single-family homes.

N.J.A.C. 5:70-3, 305.6 Landscape materials.

The use of combustible landscape materials, such as wood-based mulch products, is prohibited in any of the following conditions:

1. Within 18 inches of any building or structure;
2. Within 18 inches of a deck, porch, balcony, or any other portion of the building constructed of combustible material; or
3. Within 18 inches of any designated smoking area defined in Section 310.2.

Exceptions:

1. Live plant material such as shrubs, flowers,

and trees provided that they are not beneath a combustible overhang with less than 6 feet of clearance.

2. Non-combustible building or structure exteriors that have no combustible components or trim with less than 3 feet clearance from grade.
3. Fire-resistant mulch.

N.J.A.C. 5:70-3, 305.7 Existing materials.

All occupancies subject to this code shall remove all combustible landscape materials that are located within 18 inches of the foundation of any building or structure or in the area of any designated smoking area. This product may be replaced with noncombustible materials such as stone or sand.

Please take this into consideration. Yes, landscape fabric can burn or melt under high heat or flame.

I understand apartment-multi dwellings and condominiums are not exempt. Commercial and industrial buildings are also not exempt.

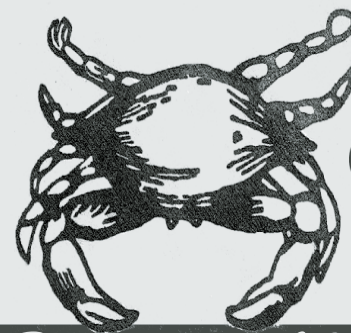
The mission of the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety shall be to serve as the central focus for the State’s fire service community and the general public in all matters relating to fire safety through the development and enforcement of the New Jersey Uniform Fire Code (NJUFC), public education programs and firefighter training programs. Within the Division of Fire Safety, the Bureau of Fire Code Enforcement is responsible for enforcing the NJUFC.

Local fire officials also have the responsibility and authority to enter, investigate and perform routine fire inspections of all buildings, structures, and properties, with the exception of owner-occupied detached one- and two-family dwellings used exclusively for dwelling purposes as required by the NJUFC. All commercial properties, businesses and apartment-multi dwellings must be inspected yearly.

Over the years, I learned the purpose of the NJUFC is to establish the minimum requirements consistent with nationally recognized good practice for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire, explosion or dangerous conditions in new and existing buildings, structures, and premises, and to provide safety to firefighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

You can learn more about the NJUFC at <https://www.nj.gov/dca/dfs/index.shtml>

Editor’s Note: Tom Castronovo is executive editor and publisher of Gardener News. Tom’s lifelong interest in gardening and passion for agriculture, environmental stewardship, gardening and landscaping, led to the founding of the Gardener News, which germinated in April 2003 and continues to bloom today. He is also dedicated to providing inspiration, and education to the agricultural, gardening, landscaping and nursery communities through this newspaper and GardenerNews.com.



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In New Jersey, most consumers begin to think of Jersey farms in spring when asparagus and greens begin to appear in our fields and at our retailers.

Maybe they plant some flowers, trees, shrubs, or vegetable plants from their favorite garden center. Then they enjoy the Jersey Fresh harvest through the summer with corn, tomatoes, peaches, peppers, blueberries, and more.

Then fall arrives and people enjoy hard squashes, broccoli, cauliflower, cranberries, and apples. Families and friends enjoy gathering for apple and pumpkin picking and hayrides and corn mazes.

After the gatherings of Thanksgiving, and sourcing as much of their holiday dinner from New Jersey farmers as possible, most people stop thinking about our farmers and other agricultural operations. They just assume that farmers get several months “off” until the crops magically begin to appear again in late March or April.

Livestock farmers and ranchers and our fishing and aquaculture industries work day-in and day-out, all year round. Cows must be milked several times a day without fail. Animals must receive care and be tended to so that farmers



NJ Dept. of Agriculture

By Joe Atchison III
Assistant Secretary of Agriculture

The “Off-Season” is Anything but “Off” for our Farmers

ensure continued good livestock health.

While the winter takes hold of the fields that our fruit and vegetable farmers work, the farmers are busy with myriad other projects that need to be addressed throughout the “offseason.” Most farms have equipment that is worth tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. Winter is the time to make repairs or adjustments to tractors, tillers, spreaders, combines and packing house equipment lines used for sorting and packing. Many have machine shops on site where they fabricate replacement pieces or fashion a different attachment to perform a new task.

Farmers also use the winter to review the season that has just passed and to make adjustments

to the next planting season that will soon appear on the horizon. Meeting with seed distributors and exploring new varieties and making the plans to rotate the fields are among the important things farmers either change or enhance.

If the farm has a retail farm market or farm stand, it may be closed for the winter, but repairs and updates will be made so that it is ready for the next year.

Winter is also a busy time for conventions, conferences, and trade shows. Farmers are required to earn “pesticide credits” during educational sessions to continue to be licensed applicators.

The New Jersey State Agricultural Convention and the Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey have a co-located event

each February where farmers can visit with vendors and suppliers on the trade show floor, earn credits at the educational sessions, and can witness 100 delegates from all of New Jersey’s agricultural organizations discuss and pass resolutions that shape the direction of the Department of Agriculture for the coming year.

If they get a chance, there may be a hunting trip or a family vacation squeezed in there, but they certainly have earned a break in their relentless schedule.

The most successful farmers are those who are versatile and multitalented. It just goes with experience, farmers love what they do when it comes down to the growing and production part, or even the marketing side of things.

But many farmers I’ve known also really take pride in their ability to maintain and modify equipment.

It really takes so many steps to get agricultural and horticultural crops that nourish and sustain us to your table or your door.

I think about this daily because to stay ahead, it is necessary to keep looking forward. Farming is a symphony of synchronous practices that takes not only dogged fortitude but also incredible and extraordinary talent.

All of this happens out of view of the day-to-day farm-products consumer, but it is necessary to help with a successful harvest each year. So, when you gather with your family this holiday season, remember our farmers who work hard all year long to ensure we have Jersey Fresh fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products during the warmer months.

Editor’s Note: Joe Atchison III is the New Jersey Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. Atchison is also the Director of the Division of Marketing and Development for the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. He can be reached at (609) 292-3976.

As we welcome the Christmas season, it’s a meaningful time to look back on the year and celebrate the accomplishments we’ve achieved together. At the New Jersey Farm Service Agency, 2024 has been a record-setting year filled with growth, resilience, and a deep commitment to our agricultural community. It’s a season for gratitude, and as I reflect, I am incredibly proud of NJ FSA’s work and the dedicated team that brings it to life.

One of our most notable achievements this year was reaching record sign-up numbers for various programs—a testament to the trust and engagement of our farmers. We’ve fought hard to secure emergency assistance and funding to meet their needs, including a successful push to bring much-needed relief for ash tree removal. Initially, we faced a setback when our request for assistance was denied by Washington, but with persistence and the dedication of my team, we advocated for New Jersey’s farmers and ultimately secured the support farmers deserved. That victory stands as a reminder of the strength of collaboration and the importance of never giving up.

This success, and so much more, wouldn’t have been possible without my remarkable team. Every member of NJ FSA works tirelessly each day



USDA Farm Service Agency

By Bob Andrzejczak
State Executive Director

Celebrating Christmas and Reflecting on a Year of Dedication and Growth

to make sure our farmers have the resources, funding, and programs they need to not just survive, but thrive. Their commitment to New Jersey’s agricultural community runs deep, and they truly care about the work they do. I’m grateful every day for their efforts—they are a true blessing to this agency and to our farmers.

Looking back, some of the most rewarding moments this past year have been seeing our team grow into their roles, take on challenges, and come up with creative ways to better serve our farmers. It’s been a privilege for me to work alongside them, learning together as we meet new farmers, find innovative solutions, and sometimes even bend the rules when the system falls short. The heartfelt thank-you calls from farmers are a powerful reminder of the difference we make, and

they truly make being the NJ State Executive Director the best job there is.

As Christmas brings a close to this year, I am filled with pride for what we have accomplished and eager to see where the new year will take us. We’ve made incredible strides this year, and I look forward to 2025 with the same dedication and enthusiasm, ready to continue our mission to support and uplift New Jersey’s farmers.

New Jersey Farm Service Agency’s Educational Sessions at the Ag Convention

The NJ FSA is proud to host a series of educational sessions at this year’s New Jersey Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and State Agricultural Convention, held from February 4th - 6th, 2025, at Harrah’s in Atlantic City. Join us on February 4th in the Wildwood Room

for sessions that cover essential FSA programs, services, and resources designed to support New Jersey’s farmers.

2:15 p.m. – “How Can USDA FSA Help You? All Things NAP”

An in-depth look at the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and how it serves as a vital risk management tool for farmers, helping to protect crops and mitigate losses.

2:45 p.m. – “FSA Farm Loan Programs and the New Enhancing FLP Rule”

This session covers recent updates to the Farm Loan Program, introducing new rules designed to provide greater flexibility and accessibility, making loans more farmer-friendly.

3:15 p.m. – “Why County Committee Elections and Acreage Reporting Are Important”

Learn about the importance of County Committees (COCs) and acreage reporting, and how these processes ensure local representation and ensure coverage within FSA programs.

3:45 p.m. – “How Can USDA FSA Help You? Marketing Assistance Loans and Farm Storage Facility Loans Overview”

An overview of loan options, including Marketing Assistance Loans and Farm Storage Facility Loans, which support operational cash flow and investment in storage infrastructure for long-term growth.

Each session will conclude with a brief Q&A, providing attendees an opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity on these valuable programs. We look forward to seeing you there and sharing resources that can help make 2025 a successful year for New Jersey agriculture.

Editor’s Note: Bob Andrzejczak is the State Executive Director of the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in New Jersey. He can also be reached at 609-587-0104 during regular business hours. For more information, please visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/New-Jersey/sed-biography/index>



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From the Director's Desk
Rutgers Outreach
Provided by Brian Schilling
Director

Winter Wonders for Your Home Gardens

Winter landscapes don't need to be bare and boring. New Jersey has a wonderful array of plants that thrive in that season and provide color, even flowers, in winter. Here are six winter superstars that will add interest to your winter yard.

Camelia are dense, dark green evergreens perfect for hedges and screening. Members of the tea family, they produce beautiful white, pink or red flowers, bringing cheery color to winter landscapes. These shrubs need space and can become quite large, so a corner of the yard with a little summer shade is the perfect location. With over 220 species, there is a camelia for everyone.

Another winter superstar shrub is the Red Twig Dogwood, *Cornus sericea*. After dropping leaves that provide bright yellow fall color, the stems of this plant remain red throughout winter. The tall, straight, brightly colored stems create striking displays when planted in groups. These native plants also provide important food for local pollinators when they bloom in the spring.

Inkberry holly, *Ilex glabra*, is another native shrub that provides winter interest through persistent, purple berries, an important winter food source for birds. The berries are not edible for humans. This evergreen shrub can form root suckers, creating dense thickets and is therefore perfect for areas that need stabilization, such as slopes.

Not much bigger than a typical shrub, a Dwarf Colorado Spruce (*Picea pungens*) is a wonderful, compact tree that brightens up winter landscapes with beautiful blue foliage. These slow-growing trees are virtually maintenance-free. They provide color, shape, and

texture throughout the year and can therefore be a centerpiece for flower beds in almost all landscapes.

There are even smaller accent plants that add spice to a winter design. Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), also a New Jersey native plant, is an evergreen fern that gives an unexpectedly lush touch of green throughout the winter season. These dense, leathery ferns, grow approximately 2' tall, are happy in shady locations, and can even tolerate damp soils as they are native to woodland areas with moist riverbanks.

One of my favorite winter superstars are Hellebores, a genus of clumping, dark green evergreen perennials, which bloom extensively throughout winter. Their flowers range from green to creamy and white to burgundy. They are very hardy and can tolerate locations from shade to sun, serving as outstanding accent plants throughout the year.

Over this winter season, take note of plants that you see bringing interest to winter landscapes so that, come spring and summer, you will remember to add a few of these during planting season and enjoy the benefits for many winters to come.

There are indoor plants that also shine at this time of year. Many of us have a love-hate relationship with one, namely the Christmas Cactus.

Christmas cacti are perhaps one of the most loved and hated indoor plants! Some people have great success, with their plants forming large clumps that regularly bloom and are the envy of friends and family alike. Others try these plants only to have them wilt or rot while never producing a single

bloom.

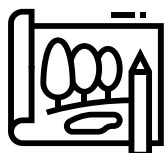
Knowing a little about the origins of Christmas Cacti (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) may shed light on their care and foster success. These plants are both tropical and arid at the same time, creating a caretaking dilemma for indoor gardeners. Native to the tropical rainforests of Brazil, Christmas Cacti like cool and humid air, something very 'uncactus-like' as we normally expect cacti to prefer hot, dry air! Because of this, Christmas Cacti can thrive in sunny windows, particularly in kitchens or bathrooms where they might get additional humidity.

In their native environment, however, the roots of these plants are very arid-like. Christmas Cacti are epiphytic, meaning they grow clinging to the tops of trees with grasping roots attached to the trees' bark rather than in moist, tropical soil. Because of this, they do not like to be planted in soil where their roots do not get enough air and remain damp. A cactus mix with a little added bark or other drainage enhancement is preferred. Water only when completely dry.

Try to place your plant where it will live throughout the year as, once Christmas Cacti are established, they do not like to be moved. If your plant has dropped branches, it has likely been moved or overwatered. Once the winter season brings shorter day lengths, these plants will begin blooming and can continue to do so through spring.

Even though it is December, there are still a variety of plants to enjoy! Reach out to the Rutgers Cooperative Extension office in your county for more information and help supporting your winter gardening – indoors or out!

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Editor's Note: This article is written by Ruth Carll, State Leader, Consumer Horticulture and Master Gardener programs, Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY NEWS

Extension Specialist Cesar Rodriguez-Saona Awarded USDA Grant for Integrated Pest Management of Blueberry

Cesar Rodriguez-Saona, extension specialist in entomology, Department of Entomology, is the principal investigator of a two-year, \$199,783 grant from the USDA Crop Protection and Pest Management program for the project, "Improving Management of a Key Insect Pest of Blueberries Through Optimization of Pollination Services," from September 1, 2024, to August 31, 2026.

This grant is part of a \$20 million investment by the Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) program to address high priority issues related to pests, including insects, nematodes, pathogens, and weeds, and their management using IPM approaches at the state, regional and national levels. The program supports projects that will increase food security and respond effectively to other major societal challenges with comprehensive IPM approaches that are economically viable, ecologically prudent, and safe for human health.

Rodriguez-Saona and Rutgers post-doc Beth Ferguson, who is co-principal investigator on the grant-funded project, are investigating an

integrated pest and pollinator management strategy for plum curculio, a persistent pest of blueberries in the mid-Atlantic. This pest damages the blueberry fruit through a scar left by feeding damage and from laying eggs, resulting in premature fruit drop from larvae.

Management can be conducted post-bloom, but pesticides cannot be applied while honeybees are present, explained Rodriguez-Saona.

"Because plum curculio adults arrive in blueberries around peak bloom, growers cannot adequately respond to increasing populations. Honeybee hives are currently kept in blueberries until the end of bloom, but whether this contributes significantly to yields is not known. The benefits of removing hives early to increase yields and better manage plum curculio may outweigh any effects on late-season fruit production."

The overall goal of the funded project is to use plum curculio management as a model for effective creation and implementation of integrated pest and pollinator management strategies in pollinator-dependent crops.

Rutgers Seeks Volunteers to Become Master Gardeners

Rutgers Cooperative Extension is seeking volunteers to train as Master Gardeners, who will help the school deliver horticulture programs and information to the public. Enrollees can expect to complete training and start service by the second week of January.

Anyone interested in gardening and volunteer service can become a Rutgers Master Gardener by enrolling in a free information session in the following counties: Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Passaic, Sussex and Union.

The session will inform participants of the program's purpose and structure, and the amount of training and commitment required. Participation in one information session is required before enrolling in the 2025 Rutgers Master Gardener Training Program. No previous education or training in horticulture is required.

For more information, contact Ruth Carll, Consumer Horticulture and Master Gardener Programs at Rutgers Cooperative Extension, at 848-932-4211.

Home Gardeners School is Back

The Rutgers Home Gardeners School provides expert instruction in a variety of classic and innovative gardening and landscaping subjects for beginner and advanced gardeners!

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Date: March 15, 2025

Time: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm (Check in will begin at 8:00 am in front of Hickman Hall.)

Location: Hickman Hall (89 George St.) and Loree Building (72 Lipman Dr.), New Brunswick, NJ (Directions & Map). Workshop sessions are held in two buildings, requiring a short walk across a foot bridge.

Format: Live, Instructor-led

Learn more at <https://cpe.rutgers.edu/home-gardeners-school>

If you have any questions about Home Gardeners School, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Program Coordinator: Olga Welsh

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North Jersey Ornamental Horticultural Symposium

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Landscape Day - January 9, 2025

NJDEP Category CORE: 2 units, Category 3A: 10 units,
Category 6B: 2 units, Category 8C: 10 units, Category 10: 4 units,
Category PP2: 8 units, Category 13: 4 units

Snow date - January 10, 2025

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Inflation has been in the news quite a bit lately. Polling during the recent Presidential and Congressional campaigns showed that inflation was by far the top issue for the majority of American voters. And why wouldn't it be?

Just about everyone in the country is affected by it in some fashion or another. When the prices of goods and services rise faster than the incomes of the consumers who are purchasing those goods and services, then those consumers feel it in their wallets.

There are numerous causes of inflation and many of them are debatable. But some potential causes of our most recent spike in inflation can be attributed to factors such as the war in Ukraine, the Federal Government's Covid spending, weather issues causing scarcities, and dramatic increases in the minimum wage. And inflation would not be so bad if it affected everyone equally. Higher prices would be offset by increases in wages, earnings, and income. No harm, no foul. But when certain segments of society are disproportionately impacted by inflation, then there can be problems.

Inflation can impact many



The Town Farmer

By Peter Melick
Agricultural Producer

Agricultural Inflation

facets of agriculture. A rise in oil or fuel prices would be felt across numerous segments of agriculture. Growers who rely on fuel to plant, grow, harvest, and transport their crops would definitely feel the pinch of higher fuel prices. But farmers who grow commodities such as corn, soybeans, wheat and hay would be impacted more so than other areas of agriculture just because they are so much more reliant on energy inputs.

If the minimum wage increases dramatically, a farmer who is growing 2000 acres of soybeans by himself with a little help from his wife will not be too severely impacted (unless of course, he is paying his wife minimum wage.) Relax, I'm kidding! But a grower who is paying one hundred seasonal employees

to hand pick string beans will surely be affected. Even if that grower was paying his employees wages that were significantly higher than the minimum wage, every time the minimum wage is increased, there is pressure to increase everyone else's wages as well. Here in New Jersey, the minimum wage in 2019 was \$10 per hour. In 2026, the minimum wage will be \$15/hour. If a fifty percent increase in seven years is not inflationary, then I don't know what is!

Farmers can be greatly affected by increases in agricultural prices as well. For example, if there is a severe drought that decreases corn and soybean yields across the country and causes the prices of those commodities to rise, then growers who are raising dairy

cows or chickens or pigs will be forced to pay a lot more for feed. Their profit margins will then be decreased accordingly.

If farmers had the ability to adjust their prices to reflect their costs of production, inflation would not be so detrimental to their financial well-being. But farmers are not price-makers, they are price-takers. The large majority of growers do not have the ability to hold out for a better price. With perishable crops such as fruits and vegetables, they have to be marketed, sold and consumed in an extremely timely manner. If there are normal growing and marketing conditions, then things will work out great. But if there is a glut in the market, it is very possible that the grower will be forced to

accept less for their product than it cost to grow.

The other way in which growers are price-takers is that they do not have any real pricing power when it comes to purchasing supplies and equipment. I am sure that everyone is familiar with how much construction materials such as steel, lumber and concrete went up during and after Covid. Just imagine that you were a dairy farmer that was building a new barn and had to bear all of those increased construction costs, and then got less for your milk than you did the year before. Here's to finishing 2024 on a good note!

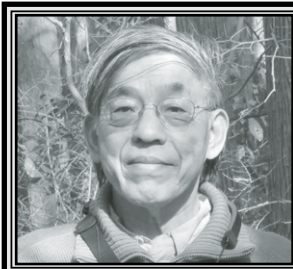
Editor's Note: Peter Melick is co-owner of Melick's Town Farm in Oldwick and a 10th-generation New Jersey farmer. Peter is a member of the Tewksbury Township Committee, Hunterdon County, NJ. He also served as a director for the New Jersey Farm Bureau and is a past president of the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture. Peter has also been featured on NJN, News 12 New Jersey and on the Fox Business Network.

Is your garden completely dormant and all a gray-tan color now? How about planting ferns which remain an invigorating green all year long? Marginal wood fern, *Dryopteris marginalis* is an excellent solution to the winter blues. This native NJ fern will brighten up your garden and you as well.

Marginal wood ferns continually remind us, when everything looks so bleak, that all will be well the next spring. It is especially refreshing to see its blue-green fronds peeking out from a fresh, pure white snow cover.

While most NJ ferns pull chlorophyll and other goodies out of leaves in fall, marginal wood ferns pump sugar into the leaves and keeps the chlorophyll in place. Sugar acts like an antifreeze and the wood fern can photosynthesize during favorable conditions all year long, especially when most trees lose their leaves.

Marginal wood ferns grow to about 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet tall. There is only a short stem, and the crown basically hugs the ground. Thus, the arching somewhat leathery leaves are



The Native Plant Society of New Jersey

By Hubert Ling
Horticulture Chair

Green-up Your Gray December Garden

about 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet long and 7-10 inches wide. Marginal wood fern is a twice cut fern meaning that each leaf (frond) is a compound leaf. However, these leaflets are also naturally deeply cut again (twice cut) into additional leaflets which give these ferns somewhat of a lacy look. This natural engineering marvel allows ferns to have large, light-catching shade leaves, but it also greatly reduces wind resistance and potential wind damage. The sterile and fertile fronds in this fern are basically similar in general shape.

The genus name *Dryopteris* is from the Greek dryas meaning oak and pteris which means fern. This refers to the common occurrence of these ferns in oak woods. The species name

marginalis refers to the fact that the small round sporangia (sori) are located on the edges (margins) of the leaflets. The plant was considered valuable enough to be included in Thomas Jefferson's collection at Monticello and it was introduced into Britain in 1772.

These long-lived ferns are easy to purchase on-line or at your local native plant nurseries. The fern grows well in partial shade, on moist, well drained, rich, neutral to slightly acid soil. It also grows in well drained acidic clay and on rocky or sandy, relatively dry, shady hillsides where it is useful to help stabilize slopes. The plant is moderately resistant to rabbits, groundhogs, and deer and can survive short droughts. It is a slow to medium grower and

although it grows well where you put it, it generally does not spread. I actually wish it would send off a few offshoots like its close relative Goldie's fern.

Marginal wood ferns are native from Canada to Georgia and west to Oklahoma. In NJ it is found in just about every county but is less common in the Pine Barrens. The plant can hybridize with ten other species so exact identification in the wild may be complicated. However, the hybrids may have malformed spores or the sori may not be perfectly aligned on the leaf margins.

Without runners, propagation of marginal wood fern depends mainly on spores. However, propagation through spores is a lengthy process, involving sterile potting material to

prevent contamination from mosses, special conditions, and lots of patience. Expect that the process will take years. The good thing about the process is that ferns produce hundreds of thousands of spores, so if you are successful you can share with the rest of the state. Check the internet on how to grow ferns from spores for details. You can also possibly propagate the fern through crown cuttings. However, these may get crown rot if not handled correctly. Your best bet for the average gardener is to buy the plants; they are listed online for \$5-\$18.

Marginal wood ferns are generally not subject to insect or disease problems. They do well on rocky slopes and river banks and in partial or deep shade. They are easy to care for and provide year-round interest. Consider them especially if your yard needs a bit of green right about now.

Editor's Note: Hubert Ling is Past President of The Native Plant Society of NJ and Horticulture Chair. He can be reached at milhubling@verizon.net.

NASDA NEWS

North American agriculture officials gathered to strengthen international trade and food security across the globe.

Members of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) and their provincial counterparts from Canada issued a joint communiqué underscoring the role of states and provinces in protecting food security and improving the competitiveness of North American trade during the 33rd annual Tri-National Agricultural Accord. NASDA President, Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward hosted the conference for the United States.

“By collaborating as a North American trade alliance, we increase food security for our entire continent and uplift rural communities. We will take action from our discussions this week to better foster trade and engineer solutions to challenges farmers and ranchers face in each of our countries.” Ward said.

Delegates recognized the benefits of USMCA to enhance North American trade in agricultural products and emphasized the importance of the agreement’s 2026 review to further promote free trade across North America. Delegates highlighted the importance of agricultural outreach programs and encourage jurisdictions to seek opportunities for cross-border collaboration to leverage resources to better reach rural, indigenous and minority communities. Delegates called on their respective federal partners to organize periodic table-top exercises with active involvement of state and provincial agricultural leaders to ensure continuity, communication, and consistency in our response to foreign animal diseases.

In addition to the joint communiqué, a statement from tri-lateral meetings and statement from the U.S.-Canada bilateral meeting were published at the accord. The Tri-National Agricultural Accord is the primary opportunity for senior state and provincial agricultural officials of the United States, Canada and Mexico to work together on agricultural trade and development issues. The accord represents a longstanding commitment to collaboration on trade between the three countries, and the current meeting arrangement dates back to 1992. Mexico will host the 34th Tri-National Agricultural Accord in 2025.

NASDA represents the united voice of departments of agriculture in all 50 states and the repertoires of American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The commissioner, secretary, or director of each department is the designated representative to NASDA. Twelve of our members are statewide-elected officials, one achieved their position through career promotions in public service, all others are appointed by their governors.

NASDA members work to ensure all types of agriculture thrive and are co-regulators with the federal government on a host of responsibilities including environmental protection, food safety and more.



In the Chef's Corner

By Andy Lagana
Chef

Veal Osso Buco

Greetings *Gardener News* readers. We are getting into the colder months of the year, and I’m ready to bring my winter staples back into the mix. One of my favorite dishes is Veal Osso Buco, a classic Italian dish of braised veal shanks in broth, vegetables, and wine.

For this dish, bring together 4 ounces pancetta (diced into 1/4 inch cubes), 2 1/2 to 3 pounds veal shanks (4 to 6 pieces 2 to 3 inches thick), 1/2 cup diced carrot (1/4-inch dice), 1/2 cup diced celery (1/4 inch dice), 1 medium onion (1/4 inch dice), 2 tablespoons chopped garlic (about 4 cloves), 3 to 4 sprigs fresh thyme (or 1 teaspoon dried), 1 cup dry white wine, 1 to 2 cups chicken or veal stock, flour for dusting the meat prior to browning, salt and pepper.

Additionally, you’ll need ingredients for the gremolata, an Italian condiment mix that’s used to add flavor to dishes. This accompaniment is predominantly used in the Milan area of northern Italy. Prepare by setting aside 2 tablespoons Italian parsley, 1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest and 2 cloves garlic (crushed and minced).

Preheat your oven to 325°F. Heat a Dutch oven on the stove top over medium heat for about 5 minutes. Add pancetta to the pan and cook it along with occasional stirring. When the pancetta is crispy and most of the fat has rendered (after about 5 minutes of cooking), remove the pancetta to a

plate covered with paper towel and set aside. If necessary, drain off all but 2 tablespoons of the fat from the pan.

Dredge the shanks in flour, then brown in a pan. Place the flour in a shallow bowl or deep plate. Season the veal shanks well with salt and pepper. Dredge the shanks with some flour, shake off any excess and add the meat to the hot fat in the pan. Increase the heat to medium high and cook the shanks on each side until well browned (about 5 minutes per side). Remove the shanks to a plate and set aside.

Add the onions, carrots, and celery to the Dutch oven. Cook the onion mixture, stirring frequently, until the onions are translucent (about 5 minutes) and toss in the garlic and thyme. Continue cooking until the vegetables just begin to brown (about 10 minutes). Add the shanks and the pancetta back to the pan. Pour in the wine and then add enough stock to come a little more than halfway up the sides of the shanks. Then, bring to a simmer. Cover the pan and put it in the oven to cook until the meat is tender, about 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Combine the gremolata ingredients, and place in a separate small serving dish.

As a side, I like to serve a creamy polenta with parmesan cheese. Like the gremolata, polenta is a dish that is eaten throughout Italy, but it is most popular in the northern regions of Veneto, Lombardy, and Piedmont. In fact, polenta is so popular in

the north that the people there are sometimes called polentoni, which means “polenta-eaters.” To prepare, you will need 4 cups of water, 1 cup of milk, salt, and pepper, 1 cup of corn meal, 3 tablespoons of butter, 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese and 1 tablespoon of fresh parsley.

Bring the water and milk to a boil in a heavy-duty sauce pan or small Dutch oven. Stir in the salt. Gradually sprinkle the polenta into the pan while whisking it at the same time. Turn the heat to a very low simmer, cover and continue to cook the polenta for 25 – 35 minutes and up to 45 minutes. Be patient and keep cooking it until the consistency is thick and fluffy and begins to pull away from the sides of the pan. Stir frequently so it doesn’t stick to the bottom of the pan. When it’s done, remove from the heat and stir in the butter, cheese, and additional salt to taste if needed. Serve warm, sprinkled with rosemary and additional cheese if desired.

For this dish, both red and white wines pair well; however, I will always choose the red – particularly during this time of year. Rich, earthy reds like Barolo, Barbaresco, Super Tuscan, Lagrein, Malbec, Côte Rôtie, and Châteauneuf du Pape complement the braised meat. Lighter reds like Pinot Noir, Chianti Classico, Barbera, and Dolcetto balance the rich sauce with their high acidity. Gather your family or friends at the table and enjoy!

Editor’s Note: Andy Lagana is a Chef at Crystal Springs Resort in Hamburg, Sussex County, N.J. For more information on its culinary program, visit www.CSResort.com.



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December 3, 2024 - NJLCA Holiday Gala and Landscape Achievement Awards Dinner
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'Tis the Season to Plant Sand Dunes

(Continued from page 1)



Tom Castronovo/Photo

Newly planted American beachgrass in the sand dunes east side at the top of Washington Avenue in Lavallette, Ocean County, NJ.



Tom Castronovo/Photo

A section of sand dune that held up after Tropical Storm Sandy in 2012, between Kerr and White Avenues in Lavallette, Ocean County, NJ, due to the massive American beachgrass root system.

remember using canvas rafts as the ocean water collected on the road. I thought that was really cool. On a good day, the bay would rise, adding to the size of the nature-made road pool. Also, without a dune, you could stand in the middle of the beach block road and see the entire beach and the ocean. The breezes were incredible.

After Hurricane Gloria in 1985, Lavallette officials developed a dune system between the promenade and the beach. That was the end of rafting in the road. I was bummed.

After the extensive and oversized dunes were made and grew in size over the years, the views of the beach and the ocean disappeared. The ocean

breezes also diminished and the summer humidity at the top of the road got worse. The folks at the bottom of the road experienced really nasty summer humidity. Most people on the north end weren't happy. The dunes were higher and wider.

After Tropical Storm Sandy in 2012 rolled through, I realized how important (Cont. on Page 22)

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The garden often serves as a peaceful escape from the hectic world around us, especially during the hustle of the Holidays. However, it is still fun for the garden to display some seasonally appropriate colors which, with a touch of luck, may extend well into winter.

Surprisingly, a plant I rarely see recognized for its colorful foliage is *Geum triflorum*, commonly called Prairie Smoke. With colors of red, green, maroon and even orange, the foliage provides marvelous Holiday cheer from December to spring!

Geum is a modest sized genus of around 50 species and is a member of the Rosaceae or Rose Family. Although modest in size, its global reach is vast with species found in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and even New Zealand! *Geum triflorum* is native from Ontario and Illinois west to British Columbia and New Mexico. The genus name was crafted and published in 1753 by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778). The root of the name possibly comes from the Greek *Geno*, meaning “to give off an agreeable fragrance” or *Geuo* meaning “to taste”, both a reference to the clove-like



Morris County Park Commission

By Bruce Crawford
Horticultural Manager

A Smoking Good Plant for the Holidays

fragrance of the roots of certain species. Prairie Smoke was described in 1814 by the German American botanist Frederick Traugott Pursh (1774-1820) who spent two years traveling from the Carolinas to New Hampshire. The species epithet of *triflorum* or three-flowered refers to how the flowers typically appear in arrangements of three.

The foliage of Prairie Smoke appears in dense whirls of closely arranged rosettes. Each 6-8” long leaf resembles a fern frond with a central stem and upwards of 19 leaflets appearing oppositely along the central stem with a terminal leaflet. The foliage can reach heights of 18”, although 10-12” is more the norm. From April through October the foliage is deep forest green with numerous short hairs appearing

along the margins and less on the surfaces. Come the crisp nights of November, the foliage gradually changes into its winter wardrobe of glowing colors.

In March, the highly pubescent red flower stems begin to expand, tipped with two leafy bracts. While still close to the ground, the bracts open to expose three flower buds emanating from the same point on the main stem. The pubescent buds are urn shaped and initially hang downward with the flower’s narrow end pointing to the ground. This orientation protects the flower from rains and late season snowfalls. The flower buds measure ¾-1” long and in diameter. The five pink bracts of the calyx remain tight around the bud, concealing all but the very tips of the light yellow to pink petals within. In addition, five

narrow pink bracts flair outward from the base of the bud.

The flowers are pollinated by Sweat Bees (*Lasioglossum* species) who squeeze into the narrow opening in search of nectar. They are also pollinated by Bumble Bees who hang upside down beneath the flower and beat their wings, dislodging pollen and allowing self-pollination – a process called ‘buzz pollination’!

Following pollination, the flowers really get smoking! The flowers proceed to fully open, exposing the petals while the pedicels straighten, drawing them into an upright position. The numerous styles or stems that connected the stigma to the ovary lengthen to 3” in length and dramatically project upwards. Adding to the drama, the styles are light pink in color and are

covered with hairs, giving them the appearance of smoke!

Prairie Smoke is found in locations varying from well-drained sandy soils to moisture retentive loamy soils and even along stream banks! The key is for the soils to be well-drained, slightly acidic and in full sun. Plants are hardy in zones 3-7.

December is certainly not a month known for attractive herbaceous plants. The flowers, followed by the smoke like drama of the styles would be a sufficient reason to grow the plant. However, when combined with the gorgeous winter foliage, it becomes a plant worthy of every sun-filled garden. Perhaps this is a plant that should appear on more Holiday wish lists, since without doubt, this is a smoking good plant for the Holidays!

Editor’s Note: Bruce Crawford is a lover of plants since birth, is the Manager of Horticulture for the Morris County Parks Commission, and a Past President of the Garden State Gardens Consortium. He can be reached at BCrawford@morrisparks.net

As the leaves fall, the days grow shorter, leading us to fast approaching winter. Progressing through an incredibly productive time this Fall in large part due to the mild weather and dry ground conditions; it will soon be time to switch gears as another very busy year comes to a close, or rather rolls into a different rhythm.

Fall and winter months offer opportune times to perform many tree services. Site visits and corresponding inspections can be very revealing due to the lack of foliage. These are excellent times to perform formative or structural pruning as the architecture of the plants is very apparent. Weak crotch formations in need of support cables and/or bracing are more visible during this period of dormancy. Dead trees and brush are easier for tree people to deal with now. Why wait until the weather warms and the landscape begins to green up again? Performing necessary tree work now gives your landscape a jumpstart on the growing season.

After the first frost, fall fertilizing of trees is most beneficial as root growth is stimulated at this time. Many



Tree Notes

By Bert Kuhn
NJ Licensed Tree Expert (LTE)
Licensed Tree Care Operator (LTCO)

Tree Care in Fall and Winter

of our shade trees are in direct competition with turf and benefit immensely from periodic fertilization. Always remember vigorously growing trees are less attractive to damaging insects, pathogens of disease, and other stressors.

Although the beginning of the growing season was near optimal, the late spring, summer and now fall have been extremely dry. What began as a strong growing season eventually became stressful to plants due to this dryness. Although I have not seen any immediate mortality associated as a result, there is no doubt the moisture swings trees and plants have endured recently will have impacts.

We need rain and lots of it to catch back up. Not all at once though, as the ground is currently

extremely hard and will take quite a bit of moisture to loosen up. If we get hard rain before that occurs, much of it will run off and not soak into the soil.

Questions were answered this growing season regarding Beech leaf disease, Spotted Lantern Fly, and the progression of Bacterial Leaf Scorch. Beech leaf disease is present and seemingly spreading rapidly; its impact upon our Beeches is yet to be seen. Spotted Lantern Fly numbers were way down, however they seemed more apparent very late in the season. Where will their numbers be next year?

Dry conditions led to BLS, or Bacterial Leaf Scorch, symptoms being displayed widely throughout the summer and into the fall with a substantial amount of trees infected. The best we can

hope for is ample moisture this winter to allow a good start to the 2025 growing season.

The fall has been a very busy one for the New Jersey Arborists of the International Society of Arboriculture, of which I am currently president. We recently hosted a team arborist competition at the beautiful Camp Tecumseh in Pittstown, New Jersey the first weekend of October. Originally designed as an event between New Jersey and the Pennsylvania chapter to enhance collaboration and interaction between the chapters, it was dubbed the “Duel on the Delaware,” the first one being held in November 2021 at Washington Crossing State Park. This year’s “Duel” expanded to include the New York State Arborists and the Ohio Arborists

along with NJAISA and Pennel ISA. Its success continues to propel this growth, which I feel is attributed to it being a lively, fast-paced, action-packed team event.

Our annual Work Day is coming up quickly in Haddonfield, Camden county at Penny Packer Park on December 7. This event showcases our chapter’s incredible spirit of volunteerism, camaraderie, and cooperation which recharges all who participate. It provides large sites, often public parks, with an enormous amount of tree work done for a fraction of the cost.

Our small but very active and impactful chapter constantly continues to fulfill our mission “to advance the profession of Arboriculture in New Jersey.” It continues to be a great honor to lead this organization!

Editor’s Note: Bert Kuhn is President of the New Jersey Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture and CO/Owner of Action Tree Service (# NJTC768009), based out of Watchung, NJ. He can be reached at 908-756-4100

As we wrap up an active and impactful year, the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA) proudly reflects on an exceptional 2024, packed with events that highlighted our commitment to professional development, industry advocacy, networking, and community building.

Here's a look back at some of the year's most successful initiatives, events, and milestones that brought our members together and fortified the outdoor living industry across New Jersey.

The year kicked off with our highly anticipated Landscape New Jersey Trade Show and Conference, drawing in over 2,000 attendees to learn from and engage with the industry's best. With hundreds of vendors, hands-on demonstrations, and in-depth presentations, the trade show provided an invaluable platform for members to explore innovative products, meet suppliers, and discover emerging trends in landscape design, sustainability, and green infrastructure. This event truly set the tone for a year full of energy, collaboration, and industry excellence.

This year's 24th Annual NJLCA Golf Challenge was a hit, with over 120 golfers teeing off on a perfect summer day. Held at one of New Jersey's premier golf courses, Crystal Springs Golf Resort, the outing offered members a chance to relax, network, and raise funds for NJLCA's scholarship initiatives. The day ended with an awards reception, where participants were able to connect further, celebrating the camaraderie that makes NJLCA a thriving community.

Supporting the next generation of landscape professionals is at the heart of NJLCA's mission. This year, we awarded scholarships to several deserving students pursuing careers in turfgrass, science,



The NJLCA Today

By Gail Woolcott
Executive Director

A Year in Review: 2024 Highlights from the NJLCA

horticulture, landscape architecture, and related fields. These scholarships are a testament to NJLCA's dedication to bringing in new talent and ensuring that the industry continues to thrive with well-trained, passionate individuals.

In 2024, NJLCA continued its advocacy for outdoor living professionals through legislative events and meetings. These gatherings brought us together with policymakers to discuss critical issues impacting the industry, from environmental regulations to labor laws, blower bans to worker visas, mulch rules to heat stress. Our voice was heard on numerous platforms, as we lobbied for fair policies that benefit both the outdoor living industry and the communities we serve.

Complementing the indoor trade show, NJLCA held its New Jersey Landscape Contractors Showcase Expo that allowed attendees to see equipment in action, participate in outdoor demonstrations, and explore a variety of landscaping products and tools. This hands-on experience was invaluable, enabling members to assess equipment and products up close and connect with vendors in a more interactive setting. The vendors were so supportive, and attendees had a great time!

NJLCA also held its regular monthly member meetings, in addition to a

few roundtable discussions throughout the year, offering members an open forum to discuss industry challenges, share insights, and brainstorm solutions. These discussions fostered a collaborative environment and provided members with practical knowledge and strategies for success. Topics ranged from sustainable practices to employee management, ensuring our members stay informed and adaptable in a rapidly changing industry.

Keeping up with regulatory requirements and safety practices is vital for our members. NJLCA's pesticide classes provided in-depth training on safe and effective pesticide use, helping members maintain their certifications and stay compliant with state regulations. The classes were highly attended, underscoring NJLCA's commitment to industry best practices and environmental stewardship.

As 2024 ends, it has been a wonderful year of growth, learning, and community building. We are grateful for our dedicated members, sponsors, and of course our Board who made this year's events and achievements possible. Looking ahead to 2025, we are excited to continue our mission of supporting outdoor living professionals across New Jersey with more events, educational opportunities, and resources to help them thrive.

Coming next, this year's Landscape Achievement Awards will celebrate the outstanding achievements of NJLCA members who have demonstrated excellence in landscaping, innovation, and service. The awards recognize the hard work, creativity, and expertise that our members bring to the industry.

On a sad note, Roger Dammer, the founder of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (formerly the Bergen County Landscape Contractors Association), passed away on November 12, 2024.

Roger's journey began in 1960, a time when the landscape industry was still finding its footing, and he faced the daunting task of mowing lawns and tackling yard work with limited knowledge about the complexities of insects and plant diseases. In his quest for knowledge, Roger reached out to fellow landscapers, including Skip Powers, and shared his vision of forming a Bergen County Landscape Association. With Skip's enthusiasm and support, Roger took a bold step forward, contacting Bill Oberholtzer to bring this idea to life. Their meeting at the Extension Service office in Hackensack marked the inception of a community that would transform the landscape industry. On June 6, 1966, 21 passionate individuals gathered, leading to the birth of the Bergen County

Landscape Contractors Association, a testament to Roger's leadership as he was elected president. His commitment to fostering collaboration and education among landscape professionals laid a strong foundation that continues to inspire us today.

In 1996, the BCLCA transformed into the NJLCA, marking a pivotal moment in our history that we owe largely to Roger's remarkable vision and tireless dedication. For years, he was not just a member but a vibrant force within the association, gracing our events with his presence and wisdom right up until his recent illness. Even as he faced challenges, Roger's spirit shone brightly—who else could turn a brief visit into a lively storytelling session, complete with tales from Board Meetings of the 1960s, '70s and '80s?

He will be missed terribly, yet we are so happy to have had Roger for so long!

Become a member to stay informed of the latest issues affecting our industry. Join today!

Editor's Note: Gail Woolcott is the Executive Director for the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. Gail received the New York State Turf & Landscape Association 2022 "Person of the Year" award on December 1, 2022. Gail also received a proclamation from the Westchester County, New York Board of Legislators proclaiming December 1, 2022 as "Gail Woolcott Day" in Westchester County. Gail has also been presented with a community service award from the Borough of Fairview, New Jersey for her assistance in leading the 9-11 Memorial Park project and the Legislative Champion of the Year award from the Federation of Employers and Workers of America. She can be reached at 201-703-3600 or by emailing gwoolcott@njlca.org.

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In recent years, a movement called “leave the leaves” has risen to prominence.

Traditionally, gardeners and homeowners have worked diligently in the fall to remove all the leaves from their garden and lawns. Often these leaves are raked to the curbside where municipalities remove them. In other cases, leaves are bagged for removal and in some cases, homeowners burn leaves in piles to remove them.

However, simply leaving the leaves is a much more ecological approach to gardening. Trash bags are not used and therefore the leaves don't end up in landfills. While leaves that are removed by the municipalities often are turned into leaf compost, this process still requires considerable fossil fuels to remove the leaves from the curbside and shred them to get the leaf compost. Burning leaves contributes to greenhouse gases, and ultimately global warming and climate change. Reducing leaf removal in the garden will also result in less use of gas-powered lawnmowers and leaf blowers.

Leaving the leaves in garden beds will add organic matter to the soil. The organic matter reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers, and



Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

By Andrew Bunting
Vice President of Horticulture

Leave the Leaves

feeds the micro-organisms in soil. From autumn into the spring, these leaves will break down, adding important organic matter to soil which overtime builds the health of the soil.

Leaves in the garden beds can also serve as a natural mulch. As the leaves decompose, the layer of leaves will help to conserve moisture and suppress the germination of weed seedlings in the spring. This can be especially helpful in the vegetable garden, where leaves can be added between rows of veggies to provide natural mulch and organic matter. Leaving the leaves can also help to mitigate against erosion.

As the leaves begin to drop in the fall you can begin raking them and adding them between perennials, shrubs, and trees. If possible, leave the leaves whole and allow leaf-eating insects and millipedes to naturally break down the leaves in the garden. Some leaves might be too large,

such as certain species of oak leaves, sycamore, London planetree, and catalpa. Raking them into the lawn and cutting them into smaller pieces with a lawnmower can make some of the larger leaves easier to accommodate into garden beds.

If you have significant tree cover, there simply might be too many leaves to effectively use as a natural mulch in your garden beds. If this is the case, take any excess leaves and add them to the compost pile. These leaves will quickly turn into leaf compost which can be added back to the garden or used in containers and planters throughout the garden.

Leaving leaves in the garden is critical for creating habitat for lizards, birds, turtles, frogs, and snails. Nearly 70 percent of all native bees nest in the ground, so leaving the leaves undisturbed will create the best habitat for bees and other overwintering

pollinators. In recent years, there has been a decline in fireflies. The larvae of fireflies are carnivorous and need decomposing leaves to attract snails, slugs, and earthworms for them to feed on. Like many other insects, fireflies also overwinter in fallen leaves, so leaving them in your yard can help protect the firefly population.

A “fall cleanup” is as much a part of our autumnal activities as Halloween and watching football games. Generations of gardeners have raked and removed leaves from their gardens. “Leaving the leaves” is a new approach to the garden. This might be an aesthetic approach that needs to be promoted to be fully understood by your neighbors or HOA.

Leaving the leaves is a simple and effective way to create an abundance of habitat for a myriad of animals, birds, and insects, and it is a great way to add organic matter to the garden.

In nature, leaves fall to the ground and immediately begin decomposing. In the spring, the woodland perennials emerge through this leaf litter and the leaves continue the decomposition process while still providing mulch and weed suppression heading into the summer. As gardeners, we have the opportunity to emulate nature while creating excellent habitats in our home gardens.

Editor's Note: Andrew Bunting is Vice President of Horticulture for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. He is one of the most recognized horticulturists in the Philadelphia, Pa., region and a highly regarded colleague in the world of professional horticulture. Bunting has amassed a plethora of awards, including the American Public Gardens Association Professional Citation, Chanticleer Scholarship in Professional Development, Delaware Center for Horticulture's Marion Marsh Award, and the Certificate of Merit from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. In addition, Bunting has lectured extensively throughout North America and Europe, and participated in plant expeditions throughout Asia and Africa. Learn more at <https://phsonline.org/team/andrew-bunting>

Certified Gardener Program Announces New Classes for 2025

Join us as we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of this program in Gloucester County.

A new season of Certified Gardener classes will be starting January 8, 2025, at the Gloucester County Shady Lane Complex, 254 County House Road, Clarksboro, NJ 08020. The Certified Gardeners are community volunteers trained in environmentally friendly gardening.

This year-round program includes lectures and hands-on learning. The class meets each Wednesday from 9am to 12pm from January through May. The hands-on portion of the

course occurs through a variety of community outreach projects including the Butterfly House and Historic Gardens at the Red Bank Battlefield Park, demonstration and donation gardens throughout the county, and through educational events and classes.

The class is open to all residents of New Jersey. Topics covered in the program include gardening naturally, plant diseases, propagation, native plants, pruning, lawn care and more. The program also requires participants to volunteer service hours toward Certified Gardener projects, activities and

events throughout the year.

If you have an interest in gardening and volunteering this program is for you! Both experienced and beginning gardeners can gain valuable education and experience through this unique program.

There is a \$150.00 fee, which covers educational materials and speaker fees. The program is free to veterans. Those interested in joining can call the GC Office of Land Preservation at 856-224-8045 or email mcummings@co.gloucester.nj.us for more information.

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Germinated in 2003

It's the end of another year of lawn care. Wow, it has been a wild ride. First, it was a rainy spring stopping many attempts to apply grass seed and fertilizer. This was followed by a hot, dry summer, but the drought continued through the fall season.

I've preached many times that usually the fall brings cooler temperatures and normal rainfall, not this year. September and October have been extremely dry with 10 to 20 days+ of no rainfall at all! In my 40+ years growing lawns, I do not recall a fall season as dry as this one.

Many fall seeding repairs were stunted and did not germinate, maybe your fall seeding will have germinated by the time you read this article, I hope so! I'm sure that we will have had some rain and germination of seed and greening of fertilizer applications.

There are many unknown facts about the benefits of lawns. A 5,000 square foot lawn produces enough oxygen for 15-30 people per day. A 5,000 square foot lawn



Turf 's Up

By Todd Pretz
 Professional Turf Consultant

**Think it's just a lawn?
 Think again!**

can harvest more than 2,000 gallons of rainwater that could otherwise be lost to runoff. There are approximately 200,000 blades of grass in one square meter of turf. Can you believe that 20% of the world's vegetation is made up of grasses? Wow, that's a lot. Oregon is the grass seed capital of the world, growing approximately 75% of the world supply with over 1,500 grass seed farmers. If you add in Washington, Idaho and Minnesota's supply, it's probably 80% of the world's supply.

Parks and yards provide a safe place for people and pets to play. Research says

children's stress levels fall within minutes of seeing green spaces. Children spending more time outdoors perform better on cognitive testing and experience better memory, while adults also find a happy increase in mental health when moving into green areas. Workers perform better when under the calming influence of nature. Nature can provide better moods and improve relationships with neighbors and community. Runners enjoy an uplift when working out in green spaces. Rehabilitation facilities use green grass walks and bench areas to sit to help patients

recover faster. Windows providing views to green areas and nature help to heal the soul.

Lawns dissipate the heat effects of asphalt, concrete and other hardscapes. Green grass can be 30 degrees cooler than asphalt and 20 degrees cooler than bare soil. While lawns provide oxygen, they also sequester carbon dioxide, that's good. What else? Lawns control soil erosion with their vigorous root systems. This prevents soil from washing onto sidewalks, driveways and into waterways, making a better environment. Fertilizers, water, and dust are all absorbed by the grass and

do not end up in the ocean. There are a lot of good things about lawns these days.

Remember to choose the correct grass seed for the area you are seeding. A sound watering schedule provides the best root development for healthy turf. This of course may take a back seat when we see our watering bills skyrocket, or we experience a severe drought like we did this year. Let your lawn go brown-dormant next year if drought rears its ugly head again. It should "green-up" again when the rain returns.

Well, your lawn is more than just a lawn. It's time for you to take a winter break from your lawn, you've worked hard at it and Mother Nature didn't help much. Enjoy the holidays and some football and we'll see you next spring!

Editor's Note: Todd Pretz is Vice President of Jonathan Green, a leading supplier of lawn and garden products in the northeast. For more information, please visit: www.jonathangreen.com

NORTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF STATE

The Northeastern Association of State Departments of Agriculture convenes the following 10 states: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CT DoAg Announces Farm Transition Grant to Support Diversification and Expansion of Agricultural Businesses

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture (CT DoAg) announces the release of Farm Transition Grant program guidance for fiscal year 2025. Connecticut farmers and agricultural cooperatives are eligible to apply with a focus on projects seeking to diversify existing operations or transitioning to value-added agricultural production and sales. All applications are due no later than 4:00 p.m. EST on Friday, January 10, 2025.

The grant categories are summarized below.

New Farmer Micro Grants: Up to \$5,000 awarded to support new and beginning individuals or partnerships with one full year to three years of production history, seeking long-term careers in the Connecticut agriculture industry. Eligible expenses include production or processing equipment directly related to agriculture, small buildings, irrigation, pasture fencing, equipment purchasing related to increasing production, and marketing expenses including establishing a website.

- **Infrastructure Investment Grant:** Up to \$25,000 awarded to support farmers in production for a minimum of three years with a need for infrastructure to expand, diversify, and/or transition the farm's production and operation.
- **Research and Development Grant:** Up to \$25,000 awarded for farms with a minimum of three years of production history to conduct research to evaluate the viability of developing a new product line, service, or market.
- **Innovation and Diversification Grant:** Up to \$49,999 awarded for the implementation of a new product or service for market or business expansion after a research and development phase has been explored.

"As Connecticut farms evolve to meet modern demands, we continue to refine our farm transition grant program to provide the crucial support they need to diversify operations, embrace sustainability, and cultivate a resilient agricultural future," said Agriculture Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt. "Leveraging state dollars with private funds enables us to make meaningful investments in small businesses to accelerate their growth."

Farm Transition Grant is authorized by and funded through C.G.S. Section 22-26k to strengthen the economic viability of Connecticut's agricultural businesses in times of growth and change. Grant guidelines and forms can be found at www.CTGrown.gov/grants with additional details on match requirements and eligible expenses. This is a competitive grant process with applications scored by a review panel. Grant awards will be announced in February 2025.

Questions regarding the Farm Transition Grant can be directed to Alison Grabarz at Alison.Grabarz@ct.gov.

Tap Into the Possibilities: New PA Maple Map Connects Consumers with Maple Products and Businesses

Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding announced a new PA Maple Map to connect consumers with Pennsylvania-produced maple products and businesses that serve or sell them. A partnership of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Hardwoods Development Council and PA Preferred® program, in cooperation with the PA Maple Syrup Producers Council, the map is part of a marketing initiative promoting Pennsylvania maple syrup with nearly \$500,000 in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"The beauty and tastes of fall in Pennsylvania are second to none," said Secretary Redding. "We hope you'll use the new PA Maple Map as a tool to sweeten your fall travel and flavor your everyday life. The small-business ingenuity and vision of Pennsylvania farms is why we are a national leader, and why the Shapiro Administration is investing in keeping Pennsylvania agriculture at the top."

With nearly 300 farms producing maple syrup for sale, and 790,000 trees tapped, Pennsylvania ranks sixth nationally in production. In 2023, PA farms produced 205,000 gallons of maple syrup worth more than \$7.5 million, and 46 farms across the state had maple syrup sales of over \$50,000.

Maple syrup is a natural sweetener packed with antioxidants, minerals and vitamins. Far beyond punching up your pancakes, it offers endless recipe possibilities from topping roasted fall root vegetables to sweetening your soup on a crisp, fall day. It is among the many valuable, sustainable products harvested from Pennsylvania's 16.62 million acres of forestland.

PA Preferred® is Pennsylvania's brand for locally produced agriculture. Look for the PA Preferred yellow and blue check, on the PA Maple map and wherever you shop. Find a full range of PA Preferred members and quality local products at papreferred.com.



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DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE NEWS

NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

During Animal Shelter Appreciation Week, State Agriculture Department Announces Over \$10.4 Million Available to Support Animal Shelter Improvements

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball, announced over \$10.4 million is available to support animal shelters, rescues, and humane societies in making critical infrastructure upgrades at their facilities during National Animal Shelter Appreciation Week. This is the seventh round of funding dedicated to New York State's Companion Animal Capital Fund, the first state-funded program in the nation to support animal shelter improvement projects. Funded projects will enhance animal care at shelters and ultimately help to ensure increased adoptions for New York's dogs and cats.

Commissioner Ball said, "We've seen firsthand that funding provided to shelters and rescues through New York's Companion Animal Capital Fund initiative is making a true difference, helping these organizations make critical upgrades that mean better care for New York's animals as they await their forever homes. New York State is proud to offer this latest round, which will build on our incredible program successes so far, and we encourage all eligible entities to learn more and consider applying."

Since the launch of the Companion Animal Capital Fund program in 2017, the state has dedicated over \$38 million to the program, including the \$10.4 million announced today. In total, 98 projects have been awarded across New York so far.

Administered by the Department of Agriculture and Markets, the program provides grants to eligible municipal and incorporated not-for-profit pounds, shelters, humane societies, and rescue facilities to offset the costs associated with capital projects, such as renovating dog kennels, improving medical facilities, or building more efficient shelters to reduce overall operational costs. Funds must be used to support capital projects, including construction, renovation, rehabilitation, installation, acquisition, or expansion of buildings, equipment, or facilities necessary for the secure containment, health, and adequate care of sheltered dogs and cats.

A total of \$10.45 million is available through Round 7 of the program. Of that, \$4 million will be reserved for projects in underserved municipalities or regions for non-municipal shelters. Applicants need to provide a minimum of 10% of the total project costs. More information about eligibility and how to apply can be found at agriculture.ny.gov/rfp-0342-companion-animal-capital-projects-fund. Applications are due by 4:00 pm on December 20, 2024.

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Yearlings of New Jersey Sires Lead Sales at Prestigious Auction

A yearling by New Jersey sire Walner set a record for an individual sale recently at the Lexington Selected Yearling Sale in Kentucky. The record-setter was Rani Hanover, the first foal out of 2020 Hambletonian winner Ramona Hill, that went for \$925,000.

Yearlings from Walner led individual gross sales at \$8.9 million with 51 of his offspring sold. Two other New Jersey Sires were among the gross sales leaders with Muscle Hill's 35 offspring going for a combined \$4.3 million and Tactical Landing's 37 offspring going for \$3.25 million. Walner, Muscle Hill, and Tactical Landing each stand at Southwind Farms in Pennington in Mercer County whose offspring were three of the top seven selling sires at the sale.

"The prices New Jersey-bred yearlings generated demonstrate the respect the racing industry has for the work of New Jersey breeders," NJDA Secretary Ed Wengryn said. "These prices are a direct benefit of the Governor and Legislature committing to long-term investment in horse breeding and racing in New Jersey."

Walner led Day 1 of the sale with 27 yearlings going for nearly \$6.3 million, while Muscle Hill was third with 11 yearlings at nearly \$2.2 million. Walner was second on Day 2 of the five-day event with 15 offspring going for just over \$2 million, Tactical Landing was third with 12 sold for \$1.61 million and Muscle Hill was fourth with 12 sold at 1.6 million.

Overall, Walner's offspring sold for the highest average at \$175,216, while Muscle Hill's average was third at \$124,257, and Tactical Landing's average was seventh at \$87,784.

The totals for the week were 911 yearlings sold for \$65,712,700, an average of \$72,132 per horse.

Concord Stud Farm, based in Cream Ridge in Monmouth County, was fourth among consignors in average with \$111,542 for 24 yearlings. Concord Stud Farm is operated by David and Robin Meirs and their family and is comprised of 249 acres.

Walner is a former world champion and winner of 9 of 10 lifetime starts, including the 2016 Breeders Crown and 2017 Stanley Dancer Memorial, both at the Meadowlands. A son of Chapter Seven from the Canadian champion mare Random Destiny, Walner has sired six million dollar winning trotters, including the 2024 undefeated mare Jiggy Jog S while being the leading money winning sire in 2023, and second ranked in 2024.

Muscle Hill is a past world champion and winner of 20 of 21 lifetime starts, including his last 20 in a row. He was the 2009 Horse of the Year, Breeders Crown winner at ages 2 and 3, and a Hambletonian champion who has sired three Hambletonian winners (Trixtion, Triple Crown winner Marion Marauder and Ramona Hill) and the winners of over \$100 million, including being the sire of 11 million dollar winning trotters.

Tactical Landing was the Breeders Crown Champion at age 3 and is a full brother to world champion and Breeders Crown winner Mission Brief. Sired by Muscle Hill from Breeders Crown winning mare Southwind Serena, Tactical Landing has sired two Hambletonian winners from his first two crops of foals, Tactical Approach and Karl, the first stallion to do so.

Southwind Farms' General Manager is Laura Young and her husband, Chris Pazdan, is the Farm Manager. Along with the 235 acres at the horse facility, they also farm about 800 acres in hay and grain in Hopewell Township. A second Southwind Farms equine facility is in Gilbertsville, N.Y.

For more information about the Standardbred Breeders Association of New Jersey go to <http://www.sboanj.com/>

'Tis the Season to Plant Sand Dunes

(Continued from page 14)

the sand dunes were. The roots of the grass planted on the dunes produced a netting-like mass that held the sand together. The dunes were all about protection.

After visiting Lavallette in early November, I learned about the American beachgrass season from Anita Zalom, president of the Lavallette Council.

Ammophila breviligulata, known as American beachgrass, is used extensively in dune stabilization and creation.

American beachgrass is a native, fast growing perennial grass that is well adapted to growing in the salty, sandy conditions of sand dunes. Both the above and below ground parts of the plant help to stabilize and build dunes.

This beach grass can quickly grow an extensive network of underground roots and rhizomes that stabilize the dune by binding the sediments. The culms growing above ground catch sand as it blows across the landscape and builds the dune as the sand grains are deposited at the base of the plant over time. As wind and wave action bury the grass plants in large amounts

of sand, they thrive on being covered and respond by sending out new shoots and rhizomes to continue the dune-building process.

American beachgrass can be planted from October 15th to March 31st on the Garden State coastline, as long as the sand is not frozen.

Pedestrian traffic that bends or breaks the culms will seriously damage or kill the plants. This is why there are KEEP OFF THE DUNE signs.

Planting stands of beachgrass where openings or voids have developed is an annual maintenance procedure in Lavallette.

Beachgrass culms must be planted at least eight inches deep. This prevents plants from drying out, as well as being blown out by strong winds.

I learned that the rows should be staggered. This allows the plants to trap blowing sand and build the dune. I also learned that the sand should be firmly compacted around the plants.

A kind gentleman at the Lavallette Public Works building told me the easiest way to plant the grass is by using a notched PVC pipe that is around one inch in diameter to create

the planting hole.

Prior knowledge tells me the optimal time to fertilize fall planted grass plants is within 30 days after planting, using a general 10-10-10 fertilizer, and to time the application of fertilizer with rain in the forecast, so that the fertilizer is thoroughly watered into the sand. I prefer using an organic fertilizer. You can also apply it when the stand appears to be weakening. Make sure to read the label carefully.

Lavallette received 12,700 grass plants as part of an annual distribution effort by the Ocean County Government.

Dune plantings are completed by homeowners and volunteers. The public works department also lends a helping hand.

I also learned that horticultural and state experts have found that while American beachgrass thrives on the east side of the dune (facing the ocean) the plants have not had the same level of success on the west side of the dune. Different plant species are being explored for the west side.

The dunes in Lavallette are also a haven for wildlife. Over the years

I've seen birds finding refuge in them, and small mammals using them for shelter and burrowing. Lavallette's healthy dune ecosystem also supports a diverse range of pollinators. I've seen plenty of Montauk daisies blooming in early fall.

Thank you, Anita, for the multiple, educational, and great conversations over the years. I hope a lot of residents stop by the department of public works on Washington Avenue to pick up a bundle of grass, and plant it soon.

Editor's Note: Tom Castronovo is executive editor and publisher of Gardener News. Tom's lifelong interest in gardening and passion for agriculture, environmental stewardship, gardening, and landscaping, led to the founding of the Gardener News, which germinated in April 2003 and continues to bloom today. He is also dedicated to providing inspiration and education to the agricultural, gardening, landscaping, nursery, and outdoor living communities through this newspaper and GardenerNews.com.

Happy Holidays and Merry Christmas to All!

Full Moon

● **December 15, 2024** ○

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