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## Outdoor Industry Activities, Consumer Profiles, Gardeners' Attitudes, Household Participation, Insights, Trends, and Retail Sales



Tom Castronovo/Photos

*Lupinus*, commonly known as lupine, a perennial plant with peach, pea-like flowers that attract pollinators; premium hyacinths, *Hyacinthus orientalis*, breaking dormancy; a super healthy white woolly *Mammillaria albilanata* cactus; and coleus, scientifically known as *Plectranthus scutellarioides*, with striking foliage starting to emerge.

**By Tom Castronovo**  
Executive Editor/Publisher  
*Gardener News*

First up are the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) top 10 gardening trends for 2025.

PHS has been an established gardening resource for almost 200 years.

Renowned as the producer of the iconic PHS Philadelphia Flower Show and a leader in horticultural innovation, PHS highlights emerging trends that span floral, landscape, and ornamental design,

as well as houseplants and vegetable gardening. Gardeners nationwide can look to PHS for inspiration and expert guidance in the year ahead and see many of these (Cont. on Page 8)



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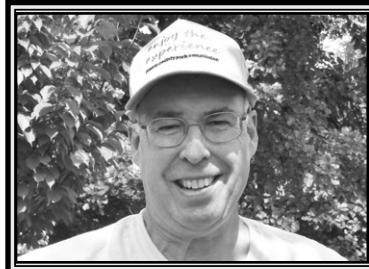


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Although the garden is still emersed in winter's grasp, February brings signs that spring is not far behind. There are numerous plants starting to awaken as the days lengthen, including one plant most gardeners cannot live without – the Pussy Willow! Found within the genus *Salix*, those silky flowers provide a tactile experience everyone needs in winter!

*Salix* is a member of the Salicaceae or Willow Family and consists of over 350 species along with numerous naturally occurring hybrids. The genus covers a broad geographic range, with species native to North and South America, Mexico, the West Indies, Europe, Africa, and Malaysia. The genus was officially described by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) in 1753 and is from the Latin *Salix* for Willow Tree. The Latin name may have originated from the Celtic words *Sal*, meaning near and *Lis* for water, describing how Willows appreciate wet sites!

Pussy Willow is probably the most familiar Willow for gardeners and not surprisingly, there are several species and hybrids bearing the name! Willows are dioecious, with certain plants having only male flowers while others only female. The silky floral structures



## Morris County Park Commission

By Bruce Crawford  
Horticultural Manager

### Willows for Winter

we so adore are called catkins and the name is derived from the old Dutch Katteken for kitten! Catkins consist of a central stem around which the male or female flowers are tightly packed, lacking the typical whirls of petals and sepals. Each individual flower is subtended and protected by a leafy floral bract, from which the much beloved hairs, botanically called trichomes, project. These hairs serve to protect the developing flowers beneath from winter's chill. As temperatures warm in February, the catkins enlarge to 1-2½" long and develop the silky trichomes. As the flowers mature further, the showier male flowers reveal red to yellow anthers, with most species pollinated via early awakening pollinators, although some are wind pollinated.

The selections with the largest

catkins are native to Europe and Asia, although *Salix discolor* with 1-2" long catkins is found throughout northern regions of North America. Commonly known as Glaucous Willow owing to the waxy undersides of the 3-5" long leaves, it becomes a large shrub reaching 15-20' tall by 12' wide. Described in 1803 by the American Botanist Gotthilf Heinrich Ernest Muhlenberg (1753-1815), the species epithet means 'of two colors' since the female catkins have a green tone and the males yellow. It is also a host plant for several moth and butterfly species.

Perhaps bearing the largest catkins, the Japanese Pussy Willow or *Salix chaenomeloides* displays silvery white male catkins up to 3" long on plants reaching heights of over 30'! The species was named in 1938 by the Japanese botanist

Arika Kimura (1900-1996) with the species name describing the similarity of the foliage to *Chaenomales* (Flowering Quince). More recently, it is thought this is a naturally occurring hybrid between *Salix gracilistyla*, commonly named the Rosegold Willow and *Salix caprea*, the Goat Willow.

*Salix gracilistyla* is considered by some to be the most attractive species. Named in 1867 by the Dutch botanist Friedrich Anton Wilhelm Miquel (1811-1871), the species epithet references the long and slender style of female flowers. Native to China, Korea, and Japan, the Rosegold Willow develops into an arching shrub of a mere 10-12' in height and width. The common name stems from the anthers' initial rosy-red appearance before turning to orange and finally gold. 'Mt Aso' is a rarely seen male

selection named in honor of the largest volcano in Japan due to the attractive, molten red appearance of the catkins!

Following bloom, all these Willows benefit from a harsh pruning to 8-12" tall. This encourages long slender shoot formation that creates a more attractive form and allows the catkins to be displayed at their very best. All the selections are hardy in zones 4-8 and are very adaptable, growing with vigor in moist or average soils. The one criterion for attractive growth is full sun!

Willows often outgrow their space in the garden without a hard pruning, destroying their visual appeal in the process. Yet, with a little annual pruning and a location where the silky catkins can be appreciated, every gardener will agree that Willows are for Winter!

**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](mailto:BCrawford@morrisparks.net)

Now that we have entered the dead of winter, it is a good time for both commercial growers as well as home gardeners to take stock of their seed inventory for the fast-approaching 2025 growing season.

In our case, we order the bulk of our seeds and plants in the fall. But because the bulk of the conferences and trade shows are held during the winter months, we often come across new releases and varieties that look promising at this time of the year. Usually, when new varieties are first released, they are only available in limited numbers. But if a new selection looks promising, we might try a few hundred seeds to see how that variety does for us.

There are many traits and attributes to look at when it comes to selecting new varieties. By far the most important is whether or not a certain variety will grow and perform well in our specific climate. Many varieties do well in certain areas but then grow poorly in others. Take the San Marzano plum tomato for example. It might have great yields and outstanding flavor when it is grown in Italy, but when it is grown here in



## The Town Farmer

By Peter Melick  
Agricultural Producer

### Seed and Variety Selection

New Jersey it does not do nearly as well. I can think of a couple of tomato varieties that grow well for us here in central New Jersey in our heavier soils, but when they are grown in southern New Jersey in sandier soil and with higher average temperatures, they are like a different tomato altogether. And that same advice goes for growers everywhere.

Something else to consider is how much demand there will be for new cultivars. If a variety has sold well in the last few years and there is a new and improved version that is now on the market, by all means, try it. But if you had trouble selling turnips last year, and there is a brand-new high yielding turnip cultivar being offered, don't think for a second that this new

and improved variety will solve all your problems for you. It won't. Next season, you will be scratching your head wondering why no one wants to buy these new and improved great looking turnips. Maybe your customers just don't like turnips, no matter how great looking they are!

Another little item to remember is that every variety looks great in the seed catalog. Do not let fancy descriptions and photo-shopped pictures deceive you. If the seed company didn't have a nice-looking picture, they just wouldn't include it. And be careful when reading the descriptions that the seed companies often provide. When they use over-the-top descriptions like "outstanding size," "knock your socks off

flavor," and "tops in class for yields," it's hard to not get excited. And then you will see older varieties with descriptions like "solid performer" and "old standard" which I always thought were kind of funny. After all, if you were looking for a new wife or girlfriend, would you pick someone who was a "solid performer" or someone who would "knock your socks off"? That's what I thought. But all kidding aside, just take these descriptions with a grain of salt, that's all.

If you can develop a good relationship with your seed companies and their representatives, they can be an excellent resource that can help steer you to the higher performing varieties, and keep

you from making too many mistakes. I have found that for the most part, they have a great deal of knowledge and expertise in their field, and they want a good productive relationship as much as you do. If they try and feed you too much BS, they won't be in business for long and they need the trust of their growers as much as anything. And these representatives work with newer varieties all year long so their experience should count for something. Now let's get ready for planting, think Spring!

**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.

Every month brings a new challenge and a new opportunity to my desk. It comes in the form of the question, “What should be the topic for this month’s *Gardener News* column?”

A major part of my duties at the NJDA includes watching to see what’s happening in the industry, around the state, in past history, and what notable events are taking place during the month that a given column will be published.

While I was pondering this question recently, I thought about the New Jersey State Agricultural Convention happening in Atlantic City February 5-6 at Harrah’s Resort. It’s open to the public and you are welcome to listen to the sessions in-person on those days. But I touched on that topic in my column last month.

I could talk about what you as gardeners are doing in the off-season, with planning for the coming season, and encourage you to seek out *Jersey Grown* and *Jersey Native Plants* when shopping at your favorite garden center or nursery. But I’m betting that most of you have already had those thoughts as we have started this new year.



## NJ Dept. of Agriculture

By Joe Atchison III  
Assistant Secretary of Agriculture

# Who Doesn’t Love Agriculture?

Finally, it hit me right in the heart, the topic for this month’s article is Love and Agriculture. Finding the perfect Valentine’s Day gift for your loved one means different things to different people of all walks of life. It could be a beautiful arrangement of flowers. It could be a box of chocolates, or it could be a special dinner at your favorite local restaurant or hand made in your kitchen.

Notice the commonality? No matter what it means to you, almost every great gift for Valentine’s Day gets its start in agriculture. Well, except for jewelry, but even the major elements that go into making beautiful gold, silver, even emerald or ruby jewelry come from the ground, just like many of our agricultural gems.

If you want to give flowers, sure, you can consider roses, but there are so many other options that are beautiful as well. Consider all the colors and textures across the floral universe and find an arrangement that showcases a number of them.

Chocolate comes from cocoa or cacao beans, depending upon how dark you like your treats, and those tropical delights are definitely not grown in New Jersey. But there are many fine local chocolatiers throughout the state that incorporate various different ingredients produced here into their candies, including some local honey and other agricultural products. Think about supporting these local artisans and asking them to include even more local flavors into their products.

Finally, a special meal is absolutely a great way to someone’s heart. I love to cook at home, especially on holidays. We eat out several times throughout the year, but there’s something special about a home-cooked meal from your kitchen. While there are just a few fresh produce items grown in the Garden State that are available to the public in early February, you can still check out agricultural products like local eggs, meats, cheeses and other livestock-derived products that can be found.

Of course, what’s Valentine’s Day without a little wine to celebrate? New Jersey has several wineries (close to 60 of them), breweries, distilleries, cideries and meaderies, if you’d like to have a local drink with your dinner. Several of these

producers even use Jersey produce and grains in their products, and these include blueberry brandy, peach vodka, strawberry wine and habanero ale.

There are also a few winter markets around the state that offer great fixings for a cold-weather salad or appetizer. There can always be a treat from proteins like *Jersey Raised* beef, pork, bison, chicken, goat or lamb, to *Jersey Seafood* hand-harvested clams and oysters and fresh-caught fish.

If you’ve frozen *Jersey Fresh* berries or fruit, you can whip up a special local dessert offering the flavors of spring and summer.

No matter what you give your loved one, whether family or friend, make sure to appreciate the contribution that agriculture made to your gift.

**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.**

## Find out where your firewood comes from to prevent the spread of invasive pests

The U.S. National Parks Service recommends getting firewood within 10 (and never more than 50) miles of its destination. Transporting it longer distances — from your home to a campsite or from a farm to your home, for instance — significantly increases the chances of introducing invasive pests into the local ecosystem. And those pests can inflict devastating damage on local forests.

## EPA Updates Guide to Help Translate Pesticide Safety Labels into Spanish

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is announcing updates to the Spanish Translation Guide for Pesticide Labeling (Spanish Translation Guide), a resource for the translation of the required human health and safety sections on pesticide labeling from English to Spanish. The Spanish translations ensure that workers have access to important information to protect themselves and others from pesticide exposure, protect the environment, and get appropriate help if exposed to a pesticide product.

EPA initially developed the Spanish Translation Guide in 2019 in response to feedback from stakeholders who believe that having bilingual pesticide labeling is critical to the wellbeing of pesticide handlers, applicators, and farmworkers, many of whom do not speak English as a first language. The Pesticide Registration Improvement Act of 2022 (PRIA 5), enacted on Dec. 29, 2022, amended the Federal, Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) to

require Spanish language translation for sections of the end use product labeling where translation examples are available in the Spanish Translation Guide. The Spanish Translation Guide is written in a universal form of Spanish to reach as many Spanish speakers as possible. It helps registrants maintain accurate, consistent translations on product labels and ease their burden when adding Spanish translations.

Drawing on stakeholder feedback, the 2024 version of the Spanish Translation Guide includes additional info on:

- Restricted use pesticides;
- Misuse statements;
- First aid and precautionary statement label language;
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) label statements;
- New sections on engineering controls, environmental hazards, and physical or chemical hazards; and
- Storage and pesticide container disposal instructions.

EPA generally allows pesticide registrants to translate their product labels into any language as long as there is an EPA-accepted English version of the label, and the translation is true and accurate. Registrants will need to translate all sections of the label contained in the Spanish Translation Guide beginning in 2025, as specified in PRIA 5. The guide includes several new sections required to be translated, such as environmental hazard statements. Registrants who have already translated the new sections into Spanish and verified that the translations are ‘true and accurate’ do not have to revise those sections of the label.

The revised Spanish Translation Guide is available for download from EPA’s website and in docket EPA-HQ-OPP-2024-0521 at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov). For more information on the PRIA 5 requirements and deadline to implement bilingual labeling visit EPA’s bilingual labeling page at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-labels/bilingual-labeling>.



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## 44th Home Gardeners School

March 15, 2025 | 9:00 am – 4:00 pm | New Brunswick, NJ.

Early Bird Fee—\$135\*

**We are excited to announce that our 44th Home Gardener School (HGS) has returned!**

This event includes many horticulture topics for every experience level – beginners to seasoned Master Gardeners. There's something for everyone!

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# Coming Soon...The Rutgers Home Gardeners School

You wanted the best, you got the best. The Rutgers Home Gardeners School is back!

Celebrating a glorious return to in-person festivities for the first time in six years, Rutgers Home Gardeners School will be held on March 15, 2025, and showcase a rich tapestry of horticultural topics brought to you by an array of expert instructors comprising more Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) faculty than ever before.

The Rutgers Home Gardeners School boasts 40 individual workshop sessions organized by theme, allowing attendees to select those that are most relevant to their gardening interests and create their own personalized schedule for a fun day of learning. Workshop themes include Best Practices, Design, Food Production, Sustainability, Wildlife, and more. All workshops are clearly labeled with experience levels of beginner, advanced, or appropriate for all learners, better enabling participants to make more informed choices and to get the most out of their day.

RCE faculty are complemented by expert speakers from commercial horticulture and landscape design firms to provide attendees with the opportunity to learn from highly respected professionals with a wealth of experience. These instructors will cover a whole host of practical topics designed to prepare participants and their gardens for the spring and beyond, including landscape design, common problems and solutions, flowers, lawn care, greenhouses, vegetables, pesticides and IPM, best management practices—the list goes on! Register today to enjoy popular topics such as “Grow Your Own Garlic,” “Making the Most of Your Raised Bed Gardens,” and “Building a Pollinator’s Paradise,” which will explore garden features that support biodiversity, pollination of edible crops, and encourage biological control of

vegetable pests while beautifying your landscape.

Another highlight of this year's event is an introduction to the Rutgers RU Ready to Farm program with Agricultural and Resource Management Agent William Hlubik. This statewide training program is designed for anyone interested in starting their own small farm and was recently featured nationally on “Eye on America” on CBS Evening News. Whether you're a Master Gardener or planting your first seed, we have cultivated a diverse crop of workshops for you.

“The field of home horticulture explores both the practices of gardening and landscaping as well as impacts on the local environments and healthy lifestyles,” said Ruth Carll, faculty coordinator for Rutgers Home Gardeners School and State Leader, Consumer Horticulture and Master Gardener Programs at RCE. “I think the large number and diversity of topics represented at this event illustrate the complexity of this field. There is something for everyone!”

Four of our workshops this year are taught by the accomplished staff of Rutgers Gardens. Come learn from the best as Director Lauren Errickson teaches “Getting Started with Edible Landscaping,” covering such crucial factors as site selection, plant choices, installation, and harvesting, as well as the traditional uses of edible landscape plants and their associated folklore. She will also discuss the history of the Gardens themselves in her talk “Rutgers Gardens: Past, Present, and Future.” Assistant Director Maxine Marvosa will walk you through choosing the right tree for your garden from the nursery and employing expert techniques for planting and pruning your new selection in her workshop, “Setting Your Trees Up for Success.” Assistant Director Alex Sawatzky

will share best practices for “Growing an Organic Vegetable Garden from Seed to Harvest,” including key considerations such as timing, supplies, and infrastructure needs.

Rutgers Home Gardeners School is brought to you by the NJAES Office of Continuing Professional Education (OCPE), a nationwide leader in providing quality outreach and public educational programs (historically called “short courses”). Established in 1906, OCPE has grown from serving 22 farmers in New Jersey to more than 20,000 students annually, reaching all 50 states and multiple countries around the world. OCPE promotes understanding and knowledge building throughout New Jersey and across state lines through our continuing education courses, and by supporting growth in public sector and professional communities by offering a diverse slate of educational and work-readiness topics.

We are also welcoming sponsors this year. If you or your business would like to sponsor a portion of this year's event, please visit our website [go.rutgers.edu/ru-hgs](http://go.rutgers.edu/ru-hgs) to view available sponsorship levels and watch your business bloom!

“I'm thrilled to welcome the community back to Rutgers Home Gardeners School,” said OCPE Program Coordinator Olga Welsh. “We know gardeners and horticulturists around the state have been eagerly anticipating a return to an in-person event and we are excited to once again spend the day sharing the expertise of Rutgers Cooperative Extension with our new and returning friends.”

For a full schedule and detailed descriptions of all 40 workshops, please visit our website [go.rutgers.edu/ru-hgs](http://go.rutgers.edu/ru-hgs). Any additional questions can be directed to Olga Welsh via email at [olga.welsh@rutgers.edu](mailto:olga.welsh@rutgers.edu) or by phone at (848) 932-7315.

**Editor's Note:** This article was written by Brian Warzak, Instructional Technology Specialist, Rutgers OCPE

# LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY NEWS

## Mettler's Woods Brought Under Additional Protection of National Organization

Mettler's Woods, one of the state's last remaining virgin forests that sits in a 65-acre patch of land owned and managed by Rutgers University-New Brunswick, has been chosen for preservation by a national organization.

The Old-Growth Forest Network inducted Mettler's Woods in Franklin in Somerset County, N.J., on Monday, Nov. 18, during a ceremony held on site under a canopy of trees, some of which have stood since the Revolutionary

War. The network – which is dedicated to connecting people with nature by creating a national web of protected, mature, publicly accessible native forests – recognized the university's preservation efforts.

Mettler's Woods is one of three patches of virgin woods remaining in New Jersey, and one of the last uncut, unburned oak-hickory forests in the country, Aronson said. It is a National Natural Landmark and is managed by the

university's Department of Ecology, Evolution and Natural Resources.

The area supports hundreds of species of plants and birds, and thousands of species of beneficial insects and soil microbes. Wildflowers carpet the forest floor in the spring, protected by a canopy of 300-year-old red, white and black oaks, along with hickory, American beech and maple trees.

## In Mark Robson's Science Class, Hands-on Learning Brings Students into the Heart of Nature

It was Cranberry Night for the students of Mark Robson's evening science course, "Plants and People," and the instructor wasn't entirely happy with himself.

On this cool fall evening, the professor and administrator at Rutgers University-New Brunswick had toted in whole cranberries and a host of other cran-related goodies for his 70-plus students to sample. Robson was disappointed because plain cranberries were sold out, leaving only those of the frozen variety.

"They don't bounce!" he said glumly.

But Robson's frown was fleeting, quickly replaced with his signature grin.

As his students know, Robson's classes are seriously fun. He uses plant props while lecturing, brandishing branches of swamp white oak and Douglas Fir, peppers his lessons with dad jokes and funny photos, and ends his instructions with plant tastings of cranberries, juice, chocolate or nutty treats.

The lessons from Robson, a Distinguished Professor of Plant Biology at the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, stay with his students, even when they aren't science majors.

"As a student whose specialty is writing, rather than calculations and experiments, I am finding that science is much less intimidating to me now," said Kate Beemer, a senior majoring in journalism and media studies. "Dr. Robson's lectures are approachable and engaging, and he breaks down the facts in a way that makes sense even to someone in my field of study."

The "Plants and People" class that Robson teaches is designed for nonscience majors such as Beemer. His goal is to get students to understand how interwoven humans and plants are – through food, oxygenated air and the Earth's ecosystem.

But what inevitably happens, according to his students, is that he achieves something on an even broader scale: Students who used to "hate" science come to like it.

Raynor Andrews, a freshman and an offensive lineman on the Rutgers Scarlet Knights football team, said the class has given him a new appreciation for his family, who live in the Bahamas and are farmers.

"I really like coming to this class," Andrews said. "It opened up my mind to the idea of how certain plants can help your body and be good for you. More than that, it gives me a much better sense of what my family does."

"Plants and People" has been designed by Robson as a survey course that any student can take and understand. Because it satisfies the core curriculum goals for the natural sciences set by the School of Arts and Sciences, Robson said the course attracts many nonscience majors.

"The class introduces the student to a key idea: the central dependency of all animals – including humans – upon plants," said Robson, who is also a Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor and dean of the School of Graduate Studies. "Everyone needs to learn how plants contribute to all aspects of human existence and well-being."

Before Cranberry Night could begin, Robson covered his subject by maintaining a conversational tone without dumbing it down. Wearing a T-shirt that displayed the word "photosynthesis" in capital letters, he covered a range of topics.

Robson brought up plant physiology, offering details on how plants grow, develop, reproduce and interact with their environment. He focused on the elemental process of photosynthesis. He highlighted the crucial role of stomata, tiny pores on leaves that function as "breathing" mechanisms. He conveyed the importance of soil pH for plant growth and the essential nature of cold spells for peaches to grow properly.

"There really are no 'dumb questions' for Mark, which is refreshing," said Distinguished Professor William Hallman, who has co-taught an upper-level course on toxicology and risk communication, "Risk, Health and Safety," with Robson for the past 20 years. "He always listens, and he has a nice way of reinforcing what is in the class materials."

Robson knows well that the subject of plants and people can be deadly serious. In his 45-year career as a Rutgers faculty member, he has emerged as an international expert on the toxic effects of agricultural chemicals on farmers and their families. He was honored at the Royal Thai Embassy last week, awarded the "Friend of Thai Science Award" for his long-term efforts in Thailand to teach and promote public health and environmental science.

There's a time for gravity for the subject, but Robson said that, in having fun, his students will forever associate that emotion with science.

With some of the evening's toughest intellectual challenges behind them, Robson and his students moved

on to a celebration of cranberries. As Robson dispensed the classic variety of cranberry juice cocktail in white paper cups to students who crowded around him, others split off to help themselves to a wide range of alternative cranberry products Robson had carefully arranged on a platform facing the classroom.

Students sipped "tropical" cranberry juice and white cranberry-strawberry juice. They chewed on plain dried cranberries sold commercially as "craisins" as well as pomegranate- and cherry juice-infused versions. Some tried, without success, to bounce slightly thawed cranberries into their mouths.

As he snacked on cranberries, Connor Morrissey, a senior majoring in music composition at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, said Robson's class has broadened his world view.

"I spend a large majority of my day eating, sleeping, breathing, drinking and thinking about music, and there are very few opportunities like this class where I'm able to go outside the confines of my major and explore a little bit," he said.

During strolls on campus that Morrissey takes "to get the engine running" and germinate ideas, the student said he finds that he now thinks differently.

Morrissey's classmate, sophomore biochemistry major Jonas Covalessky, who joined him in downing some of the tart fruit, said he is already enthused about science and the prospect of being a student at a moment in history when science is evolving in exciting ways.

"I've always had a passion for science," Covalessky said. "But I've been focusing on human science. Through this class I'm realizing how much there is to know in plant science and how it applies to my everyday life."

In enhancing students' world view to encompass plant science and more, Robson is fulfilling a fundamental role, according to a long-time colleague.

"I think every student coming through universities needs to have a basic understanding of science, scientific concepts and that the scientific way of thinking is important and can apply to all aspects of their life," said Margaret Brennan-Tonetta, senior associate director of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station/Economic Development. "Mark opens their eyes to that world and that way of thinking"

*This article first appeared in Rutgers Today.*

# Outdoor Industry Activities, Consumer Profiles, Gardeners' Attitudes, Household Participation, Insights, Trends, and Retail Sales

(Continued from page 1)

trends in practice at the Flower Show, taking place March 1-9, 2025.

"These 2025 gardening trends aggregate a mix of ideas and approaches stemming from our observations attending professional conferences, exhibitions, visiting countless personal and public gardens, and conversations with horticultural professionals. They are a fantastic reflection of what gardeners are focusing on right now, and the direction the industry at large is headed. From professionals to the beginner gardener, these trends offer inspiration and education that everyone can take something away from," said PHS's Vice President of Horticulture, Andrew Bunting.

This list of the top 10 trends provides gardeners of all experience levels with inspiration, education, and exploration in the garden.

**1. Tropical Foliage** - While many may think drama in the garden comes from bountiful blooms, impactful foliage can be just as stunning. Incorporating plants with great foliage is a simple way to create long-lasting ornament in a home garden, stoop garden, containers, or window boxes. With the introduction

of new annual and tropical foliage plants, there are more options than ever to create a great accent in the summer garden, adding unique color and seasonal flair.

**2. Influencing the Garden** - Garden influencers are taking social media by storm, sharing exciting, educational content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube. PHS offers expert advice (@PHSGardening) through gardening "How-Tos," demonstrations, plant recommendations, and more to help gardeners cultivate their green thumb.

**3. Bringing Nature Home** - Inspired by Doug Tallamy's influential book of the same name, this trend emphasizes climate-friendly, ecologically diverse, home gardening that anyone can implement. With climate change and its effects becoming increasingly prominent, gardeners around the world are turning to approaches that preserve, protect, and restore local ecosystems through incorporating native and pollinator plant species, and adopting climate-friendly maintenance strategies. While many gardeners see winter as one of the dreariest times of year in

the garden, this trend champions the importance of year-round gardening, and positions winter as the ideal time for education and planning to ensure you're set up for success come spring.

Resources such as The PHS Gardeners Blog, and PHS's educational programming are great places to start this education journey and discover new approaches and inspiration in gardening.

Below are just a few trending ways that gardening can promote environmental stewardship:

- Movements like "Leave the Leaves" have promoted using leaves as a natural mulch, which also provides habitat for overwintering insects.
- Planting native plants like milkweeds, *Asclepias*; mountain mints, *Pycnanthemum*, and a host of native asters is a great way to attract native moths, butterflies, wasps and other beneficial insects to your garden.
- Protecting bees via "bee hotels," pans of water, the reduction of lawn, and creating other intentional habitat helps provide homes to over 300 species of native bees.

**4. Gardens under Glass** - Creating gardens under glass is making a comeback among houseplant enthusiasts. Ranging from simple terrariums to large-scale greenhouses, the interest in gardening using a glass environment has boomed. For those with minimal space or light, terrarium gardens offer a particularly unique, personalized, and aesthetic flair. Additionally, because of the enclosed nature of terrariums, they become a micro-ecosystem, allowing you to grow fascinating carnivorous plants and humidity-loving varieties on something as small as a windowsill.

**5. On the Wall** - Living, "green" walls and vertical gardens are popping up as both outdoor and indoor installations. Green walls are especially popular in office buildings and other public spaces, and many incorporate amazing displays of tropical plants. This trend is a great option for gardeners looking to up the aesthetic impact of an indoor space and add a touch of artistic greenery to a room.

Plant Options:

- Outdoor green walls: sedum, Heuchera, hens and chicks, sedges, Liriope
- Indoor green walls: Bromeliads, tropical ferns, pothos, kalanchoe, Philodendron, and Monstera

**6. Urban Gardening** - Gardening is no longer thought of as a suburban or rural activity. Urban gardening is flourishing as city-dwellers transform small spaces—courtyards, stoops,

window boxes, and containers—into vibrant gardens. Community gardens—where people join a shared public gardening space, are also booming, offering access to fresh food, cultural preservation, and shared joy. Meanwhile, efforts to plant fruit trees and expand street tree canopies through community-led stewardship are bringing greenery, resilience, and health benefits to urban neighborhoods across the U.S.

**7. Horticulture as Therapy** - Gardening is gaining recognition as a powerful tool for wellness, with research showing its benefits for mental health and overall well-being. As awareness of mental health grows, hospitals and healthcare systems are increasingly using horticulture for healing. For professionals and amateurs alike, the connection between plants and mental health is inspiring more people to cultivate greenery for both ecological and personal enrichment.

**8. Water-wise Gardening** - As droughts and climate change impact more regions, water-wise gardening is gaining traction worldwide, even in parts of the world that are not known for being extremely arid. For home gardeners feeling frustrated with the constant maintenance of watering and keeping their gardens thriving in increasingly dry climates, waterwise gardening offers a solution. From designing full gravel and crevice gardens, to simply incorporating drought-tolerant plants, this sustainable approach reduces maintenance and helps create resilient gardens, even with increasing periods of drought.

**9. The Houseplant Phenomenon** - Since the COVID-19 pandemic, houseplants have become a global obsession, making gardening accessible for anyone, regardless of space. From homes to offices, houseplants bring beauty and wellness indoors. Dedicated societies like the Gesneriad, Begonia, and Aroid Societies reflect the enduring appeal of this green trend and offer houseplant enthusiasts outlets to engage with other plant lovers to share knowledge.

**10. Backyard Fruit** - Growing fruit is gaining popularity alongside vegetable gardening, appealing to both professionals and hobbyists. Many gardeners are incorporating fruit trees to combine delicious harvests with garden beauty.

**About Pennsylvania Horticultural Society**

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), an internationally recognized nonprofit organization founded in 1827, uses horticulture to advance the (Cont. on Page 17)

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Just driving around local communities on drab winter days highlights the importance of evergreen conifers in the garden. There are many that brighten the winter landscape including *Picea*, spruce; *Abies*, fir; *Juniperus*, junipers and *Pinus*, pines.

There are many great pines that thrive in the Mid-Atlantic. Over time many of these species and cultivars will develop into majestic specimens with great architecture. All pines are evergreen so their importance in the winter landscape can't be denied.

There are many native pines. Perhaps, the most ubiquitous of all the pines is the Eastern white pine, *Pinus strobus*. This pine historically was a popular screening tree between properties in residential areas. It is fast growing and can reach over 100 feet tall. The long, dark green needles create a soft texture. The Eastern white pine is somewhat brittle and can lose branches during windstorms or heavy wet snows, but this only adds to its architectural appearance over time. For the small garden there are many diminutive cultivars, and there is an interesting weeping selection, 'Pendula'. And, for more narrow sites there is an upright cultivar called 'Fastigiata.'

In the New Jersey



## Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

By Andrew Bunting  
Vice President of Horticulture

# Pining for Pines

Pine Barrens, there are two notable native pines. The Virginia pine, *Pinus virginiana* is a short-needled pine that over time develops a somewhat contorted and craggy appearance. Growing in the sands of the pine barrens makes it a good pine for dry or arid sites. As the pinecones open, the seed becomes available to native birds. At maturity, it will reach 60 feet tall with a spread of 30-40 feet.

A dominant tree in the Pine Barrens is the pitch pine, *Pinus rigida*. It reaches 40-70 feet tall at maturity and also, like the Virginia pine, develops a twisted and contorted appearance. It grows in nutrient poor soil making it a could candidate for growing in urban areas.

For years it was thought that one of the native southeastern U. S. species, the loblolly pine, *Pinus taeda* was only marginally hardy in this area. Commonly also referred to as the Southern

yellow pine, it is one of the most important pines for the timber industry. Some pines in this area that were misidentified as the Austrian pine, *Pinus nigra* are being discovered to actually be the loblolly pine. This pine has proven to be a fast-growing stalwart pine. The leaves are stiffer than those of the white pine, therefore, the texture is a bit more course.

There are also many non-native pines that do very well in the area. A favorite is the lacebark pine, *Pinus bungeana*. It is called the "lacebark" pine due to the decorative mottling patterns on the trunk that develop with maturity. This mottled pattern can have patches of purple, white, army green, beige and brown. Over decades the pattern can become mostly white and green patches and on very old trees it can be a nearly pure alabaster white. This can be a very long-lived pine.

*Pinus flexilis*, the limber

pine is named for its very long tail-like branches which are surprisingly flexible. 'Vanderwolf's Pyramid' has silver-blue needles and an upright pyramidal habit. 'Cesarini Blue' has deep glaucous-blue needles. At maturity, the limber pine can reach over 75 feet tall.

There are multiple white pine relatives which all have soft needles and will grow into large stature trees over time. The Korean pine, *Pinus koraiensis* most resembles the Eastern white pine except the needles are slightly twisted which creates a slightly more textural aspect. *Pinus parviflora*, the Japanese white pine has relatively small needles and fairly rigid horizontal branching which adds considerable architecture to this tree. The Himalayan pine, *Pinus wallichiana* has long and somewhat pendulous needles. There are excellent specimens of all of these at the Scott Arboretum

of Swarthmore College and other arboreta in the area.

There are over 100 species of pines worldwide. The Mid-Atlantic region is an optimal climate for growing many of the exotic species, native species and cultivars. A single specimen of a pine added to your garden will create a great winter display for decades to come.

**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>

## USDA Now Accepting Applications for the 1890 National Scholars Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting applications for the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program, which aims to encourage students at 1890 land-grant universities to pursue career paths in food, agriculture, natural resource sciences, or related academic disciplines. The application deadline is March 1, 2025.

Young people around the country are invited to complete and submit their applications online through an e-application. Administered through USDA's Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE), the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program is available to eligible high school seniors entering their freshman year of college as well as rising college sophomores and juniors.

The USDA 1890 National Scholars Program is a partnership between USDA and the 19 land-grant universities that were established in the Morrill Land Grand Act of 1890. USDA partners with these 1890

universities to provide scholarship recipients with full tuition, fees, books and room and board. Scholarship recipients attend one of the 1890 land-grant universities and pursue degrees in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, or related academic disciplines. The scholarship also provides work experience at USDA through summer internships. Scholars accepted into the program are eligible for noncompetitive conversion to a permanent appointment with USDA upon successful completion of their degree requirements and program requirements by the end of the agreement period. The program awarded 94 scholarships in the 2024 cohort of 1890 Scholars.

Learn more and apply online at USDA 1890 National Scholars Program. [https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/staff-offices/office-partnerships-and-public-engagement/usda-1890-national-scholars-program?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/staff-offices/office-partnerships-and-public-engagement/usda-1890-national-scholars-program?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

USDA has a long history of developing the next generation of agricultural leaders at, and providing support to, public land-grant universities, such as those established under the Second Morrill Act of 1890. These institutions emphasize building and sustaining tomorrow's food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences workforce.

The 19 members of the 1890 universities system are: Alabama A&M, Alcorn State University, Central State University, Delaware State University, Florida A&M University, Fort Valley State University, Kentucky State University, Langston University, Lincoln University, North Carolina A&T State University, Prairie View A&M University, South Carolina State University, Southern University and A&M College, Tennessee State University, Tuskegee University, University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Virginia State University and West Virginia State University.

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## Kawasaki Motors USA Recalls John Deere ZTrak Zero Turn Mowers with Kawasaki Engines Due to Fire and Burn Hazards

**Name of Product:**

John Deere ZTrak™ Zero Turn Mowers with Kawasaki Engines

**Hazard:**

The voltage regulator in the mower's engine can fail during use or while the product is being stored, causing the engine to overheat, posing fire and burn hazards.

**Remedy:**

Repair

**Recall Date:**

January 02, 2025

**Units:**

About 39,000 (In addition, about 2,600 in Canada)

**Description:**

This recall involves John Deere ZTrak Zero Turn Mowers with model numbers Z720E, Z730M, Z740R and Z760R with Kawasaki engines. The recalled mowers are green and yellow and have the model number and "John Deere" printed on the front of the mower below the seat. The serial number is located on the right side of the machine near the rear tire.

**Remedy:**

Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled mowers and contact an authorized John Deere dealer for a free repair. Kawasaki and John Deere are contacting all known purchasers directly.

**Incidents/Injuries:**

Kawasaki has received five reports of fires and 26 reports of melting and/or smoking. No injuries have been reported.

**Sold At:**

Authorized John Deere dealers nationwide from October 2018 through September 2024 for between \$8,000 and \$11,500.

**Manufacturer(s):**

Kawasaki Motors Manufacturing Corp. U.S.A. (engine manufacturer), of Maryville, Missouri

**Retailer:**

Deere & Company, of Moline, Illinois

**Manufactured In:**

United States

**Recall Number:**

25-083

**Consumer Contact:**

Deere & Company at 800-537-8233 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. ET Saturday, or online at [www.deere.com](http://www.deere.com) and click on "Recalls" on the drop-down menu under "Parts & Service" located at the top of the webpage or click on <https://www.deere.com/en/parts-and-service/recall-information/> for more information.

Kawasaki Motors Corp. USA toll-free at 866-836-4463 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET Monday through Friday, or online at [www.kawasakenginesusa.com/product-recall.html](http://www.kawasakenginesusa.com/product-recall.html) or [www.kawasakenginesusa.com](http://www.kawasakenginesusa.com) and click on "Product Recalls" at the top of the homepage for more information.

Source: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

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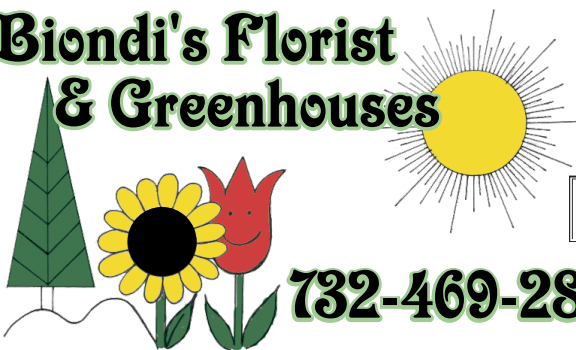
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## In the Chef's Corner

By Andy Lagana  
Chef

# Italian Wedding Soup *Minestra Maritata*

Hello *Gardener News* readers. In honor of my heritage, I'd like to share a great recipe for Italian Wedding Soup.

The ancestor of this familiar classic is an ancient Neapolitan soup called *minestra maritata*, which means "married soup" and refers to the marriage of meats and green leafy vegetables that comprise its main ingredients. Some say the recipe goes back to ancient Roman times and was made from various leftover scraps of cured and fresh meats plus a mixture of leafy greens that could be bought in the market or found in the countryside.

Although this is an inexpensive soup, it is tasty and very filling - a perfect example of *la cucina povera*, "the cooking of the poor," the kind of stick-to-the-ribs eating that fueled hard-working farmers and tradesmen back in the day. It is the kind of cuisine that was once looked down on by the middle and upper class Italians, but has lately become popular in Italy and even worldwide.

You can feel free to experiment with ingredients other than the ones I have listed here. The mix of meats and vegetables, as well as the proportions, can serve as a guide. Feel free to personalize the soup by mixing and matching meats that you like, adding more or less to your taste. For example, if you can't find broccoli rabe, then using regular broccoli will work just fine.

Although this is a basic recipe, it takes a bit of time to make, in particular the initial simmering of the meat which needs about 2-1/2 to 3 hours. To serve 4 - 6 people, you'll need 1-1/2 lbs. pork ribs, 3/4 lb. salt pork, 3-4 large mild Italian sausages (about 1 lb.), 1 large salami, salt and pepper, and aromatics to flavor the broth (a couple onions, carrots and celery stalks plus a few sprigs of fresh parsley).

For the vegetables, gather 1 head of escarole - trimmed and roughly chopped, 1 head of chicory - trimmed and roughly chopped, 1 small head of green cabbage - trimmed and sliced thin, and 1 bunch of broccoli rabe - trimmed and roughly chopped. You'll need 8 oz. of Parmesan cheese cubed plus salt and pepper to finish the dish.

Start by blanching the salt pork for a few minutes in unsalted water to remove the excess saltiness.

Add the salt pork and other meats to a large pot and cover by at least 2 inches with water. Salt the water lightly and bring the pot to a simmer, skimming carefully to remove the scum that will rise to the top. Then add your aromatics. Continue simmering for about 2-1/2 to 3 hours, until the meats are very tender and the broth is flavorful.

Let the soup cool, ideally overnight in the refrigerator. The fat will have risen to the top of the pot and solidified. Remove most of the fat, then bring the pot back to a simmer. Fish out

the meats and aromatics with a slotted spoon, and discard the aromatics. Pull the pork off the ribs and cut up the other meats into bite-sized chunks and set aside, with a ladleful of the broth to keep it moist.

Fill another large pot with water, salt lightly and bring it to a boil. Chop or slice your vegetables. As soon as the water comes back to a boil, drain them in a colander, rinse with cold water and then, using a spatula or wooden spoon (or even your hands) press out as much water as you can.

As soon as the water comes back to a boil, drain them in a colander, rinse with cold water and then using a spatula or wooden spoon, or even your hands, press out as much water as you can.

Add the blanched vegetables to the broth along with the cubed cheese. Mix and bring it all to a simmer. Let the pot cook gently for about 30 minutes, or until the vegetables are very soft. You'll add the meats back about 10 minutes or so before the vegetables are done.

Serve hot, with some good crusty Italian bread dipped in extra virgin olive oil and additional grated Parmesan cheese on the side. Wines that pair well with this soup would be dry white wines such as Sauvignon Blanc, Unoaked Chardonnay, or Pinot Grigio. For reds, try a Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Poulsard or an Italian Red Blend. These wines complement the savory and earthy flavor of the soup. Come to the table and enjoy!

## USDA Releases the 2023 Census of Aquaculture Results

Total sales of aquaculture products in 2023 were \$1.9 billion, an increase of 26% from 2018, according to the 2023 Census of Aquaculture released today by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. In 2023, there were 3,453 aquaculture farms with sales in the United States, up 18% from 2018. Five states - Mississippi, Washington, Louisiana, Florida and Alabama - accounted for 55% of aquaculture sales and 49% of aquaculture farms in 2023. Food fish and mollusks were the largest product categories for sales, with catfish and oysters the top species.

"The 2023 Census of Aquaculture, conducted every 5 years, expands on the data collected during the 2022 Census of Agriculture providing up to date detailed information about the production and marketing practices in the aquaculture industry," said NASS Administrator Joseph L. Parsons. "These valuable data tell the story of U.S. aquaculture. The information in this report helps trade associations, governments, agribusinesses, and others learn about aquaculture and make informed decisions that have a direct impact on the future of the industry."

The 2023 Census of Aquaculture provides detailed information about production and methods, surface water acres and sources, sales, point of first sale outlets, and aquaculture distributed for restoration, conservation, enhancement, or recreational purposes. Data highlights include:

- The average sales per farm was \$552,569.
- Sales of food fish was \$819.6 million, an increase of 14% from 2018.
- The sales of mollusks was \$575.5 million, an increase of 30% from 2018.
- Crustacean sales in 2023 was \$175.7 million, up 75% from 2018.
- Catfish sales, valued at \$480.0 million, accounted for 59% of all food fish sales in 2023.
- Oyster sales, valued at \$327.0 million, accounted for 57% of mollusk sales in 2023.
- Mississippi led the nation in total aquaculture sales in 2023 with \$277.0 million.

An aquaculture farm is defined as any place from which \$1,000 or more of aquaculture products were produced and sold or distributed for restoration, conservation, enhancement, or recreation during the census year. Aquaculture is defined as the farming of aquatic organisms, including baitfish, crustaceans, food fish, mollusks, ornamental fish, sport or game fish, and other aquaculture products. Farming involves some form of intervention in the rearing process, such as seeding, stocking, feeding, protection from predators, etc. Fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and other aquatic products caught or harvested by the public from non-controlled waters or beds are considered wild caught and are not included as aquaculture.

The Census of Aquaculture is a Census of Agriculture special study, or follow-on, that expands on the data collected for 2022. The last Census of Aquaculture was conducted in 2018.

\*This census was released on December 16, 2024.

## USDA FSA Supporting New Jersey Farmers: Key Updates and Deadlines

As winter continues to blanket New Jersey, it's an ideal time for farmers to plan and prepare for the upcoming season. The Farm Service Agency remains dedicated to providing resources and support to help farmers succeed. This month's column highlights the New Jersey Agriculture Convention, important program deadlines, and opportunities to contribute as a loss adjuster.

With this new year, the New Jersey FSA is also welcoming a transition in leadership. Lindsay Caragher, who has served in many roles with the agency, including District Director and Deputy Director, will now serve as Acting State Executive Director. Lindsay brings a wealth of knowledge in FSA farm programs and loans and remains committed to supporting the agricultural community.

### New Jersey Agricultural Convention

The New Jersey Farm Service Agency is grateful for the opportunity to present again this year at the New Jersey Agriculture Convention. Special thanks go to Rutgers, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, and the New Jersey Fruit and Vegetable

Growers Association for their coordination and preparation to make it a success. It is shaping up to be another outstanding convention.

The FSA will host several sessions during the convention, including:

February 4, 2:00 PM: **How Can USDA FSA Help You? All Things NAP** – An overview of the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and its benefits for farmers.

February 4, 2:30 PM: **FSA Farm Loan Programs & the New Enhancing FLP Rule** – Insights into farm loan programs and recent enhancements.

February 4, 3:00 PM: **Why COC Elections & Acreage Reporting are Important** – Understanding the significance of County Committee elections and accurate acreage reporting.

February 4, 3:30 PM: **How Can USDA FSA Help You? Marketing Assistance Loans & Farm Storage Facility Loans Overview** – Information on available loan programs to support your farming operations.

We encourage everyone to attend these sessions to gain valuable information and connect

with FSA representatives.

### Important Program Deadlines

Staying informed about program deadlines is crucial for maximizing the benefits available to your farming operation. Here are key deadlines approaching in the coming months:

#### February 17, 2025:

FSA offices will be closed in observance of Washington's Birthday.

#### March 15, 2025:

Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) & Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Program Annual Election & Enrollment Deadline – Ensure your enrollment to receive financial protections against market fluctuations.

Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Coverage Deadline for Current Calendar Year Spring and Fall Crops – Apply for coverage to safeguard your non-insurable crops against natural disasters.

March 29, 2025: Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Sign-Up Deadline – Participate in CRP to receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance for establishing long-term,

resource-conserving plant species.

March 31, 2025: Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL) and Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP) Deadline for Prior Year Harvested Wheat, Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, and Sesame Seed – Apply for MALs or LDPs to assist with cash flow and marketing needs.

April 29, 2025: Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) Program Deadline – Enroll in DMC to protect your dairy operation against volatile milk and feed prices.

Timely action is essential. Please contact your local FSA office to ensure you meet these deadlines and to receive assistance with the application processes.

### NJ Farm Service Agency Seeks Dedicated Loss Adjusters

The NJ FSA is on the lookout for individuals passionate about agriculture to fill crucial positions as Loss Adjusters. These roles play a vital part in supporting farmers facing crop losses due to unforeseen circumstances.

#### Role Overview:

Loss Adjusters are integral to the FSA's Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and Tree Assistance

Program (TAP). They must possess a solid understanding of field and specialty crops, coupled with expertise in executing crop adjusting guidelines and program provisions.

### Qualifications and Responsibilities:

Prospective candidates should have at least two years of college education or relevant agriculture-related experience. Key responsibilities include conducting field inspections, measuring fields, discussing findings with farmers, and thoroughly documenting crop damage investigations.

#### Training and Certification:

To become certified, individuals undergo specialized training, including classroom sessions and field exercises. Additionally, annual update training is mandatory to maintain certification.

**Editor's Note: For inquiries or to express interest in these positions, individuals can contact Aly Dyson, NJ FSA Farm Program Disaster Specialist, at [Alyson.Dyson@usda.gov](mailto:Alyson.Dyson@usda.gov) or 609-438-3147.**

The famous white oak, *Quercus alba*, in Basking Ridge, NJ was 619 years old when it died in 2016. This is the tree which sheltered George Washington and Lafayette's picnic and witnessed colonial troops drilling on the adjacent village green during the American Revolution.

Although the tree was reported to be the oldest of its kind, white oaks are generally expected to live 200 to 300 years. Other record-breaking white oaks are over 200 feet high and 13 feet wide at the base. Average trees are about 90 feet tall and 2 or 3 feet in diameter. *Quercus* is Latin for oak and *alba* means white.

The state trees of Connecticut, Illinois, and Maryland are white oaks. A likeness of the Connecticut Charter Oak can be seen on the reverse side of the Connecticut State Quarter. The hollow trunk of this 500-year-old oak was the hiding place for the Connecticut Royal Charter of 1662. Colonists hid the Charter there to prevent its confiscation by British authorities. Another famous white oak is the 500-year-old Bedford Oak of Bedford, NY



## The Native Plant Society of New Jersey

By Hubert Ling  
Horticulture Chair

## Plan 600 Years Ahead

which is celebrated as Bedford's 'most venerable citizen'.

Identification of white oaks can be relatively easy, even in winter, by the presence of fallen and persistent leaves with rounded, deeply cut lobes, and medium sized acorns about 1/2 inch wide and 3/4-1 inch long. The bark is an ashy white, tan, or light brown. Often white oak trees have a prominent bulge at the base of the trunk, and a dead give-away for positive ID is smooth patch disease where the rougher darker bark has peeled away and is replaced by smoother lighter colored bark. These smooth patches are caused by a fungus and although harmless can be large: up to 3 or more feet high and extend all around the tree trunk.

White oak is an important

lumber tree. The wood is an ashy gray to light tan thus the common name white oak. The wood is durable, heavy, strong, and tough. White oak wood is considered closed-cell, which means that wood cells as they reach full maturity are filled with rot resistant chemicals. Thus, white oak heartwood is used to make leak resistant wine and whisky barrels and in shipbuilding. It is also considered a superior furniture wood.

The wood does not easily splinter on impact and is extensively used in traditional Japanese martial weapons such as the jo and bokken. The USS Constitution, 'Old Ironsides', is made of white oak and southern live oak. White oak is also used by the Deering Banjo Company

for several of its 5-string banjos since it has a mellow timbre. Native Americans used white oak for basketry since the fresh wood can be split into thin, tough strips.

White oaks are the only known host plants for *Bucculatrix* moths and are well known as being very valuable ecologically; oaks host many other moths and butterflies especially hairstreak and duskywing. Although deer will decimate young white oak seedlings, the foliage is considered mildly toxic to horses and people. White oaks have mast years 4-10 years apart, but the acorns are very valuable to wildlife because they are the least bitter of the oaks. Medium-sized and large birds aggressively seek out

white oak acorns when available and black bears, deer, raccoons, and rodents utilize these acorns which fall in early October.

The trees generally grow best with full sun at low altitudes in rich, slightly acid soil. However, they are sometimes found at elevations up to 5249 feet and be found in damp, dry, and slightly alkaline soils. White oaks are a climax tree since seedlings can survive and grow slowly in dense shade and later take advantage of breaks in the canopy. Propagation of oaks is by acorns which should be planted immediately since viability is lost during storage.

Consider growing a white oak for its broad round crown, dense foliage, and long life. The fall colors are generally dark reddish brown, but occasional leaves may be green, brown, and light rose. The trees are resistant to black walnut, drought, fire, heat, and salt damage.

**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](mailto:milhubling@verizon.net).**



## New Jersey Agricultural Convention and Trade Show February 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th.

Join us at Harrah's Conference Center in Atlantic City for the NJ Agricultural Convention and Trade Show!

We're expanding beyond just vegetables! Get ready for thrilling new sessions covering:

Livestock - Value-Added Products - Soil Health - Agritourism - Health and Safety - Beginning Farmers - Direct Marketing and so much more!

Don't miss our special guest speaker, Merideth Bernard from "This Farm Wife," who will join other female farmers for a panel discussion on Wednesday.

Free lunch on Tuesday for our 2nd annual "Lunch and Learn". Free self parking. Discounted hotel rooms.

There's even more to look forward to: a 6 core credit class on Pesticide Safety will be held on Monday afternoon!

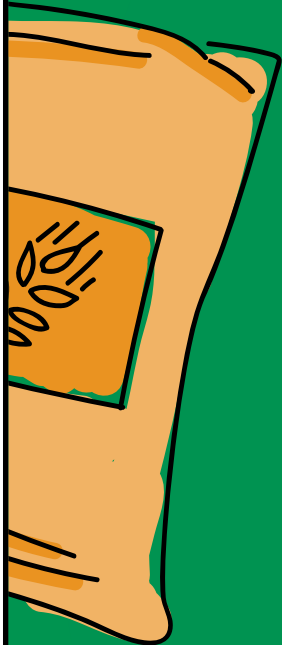
Our trade show floor will be open on Tuesday and Wednesday, along with two special workshops on Thursday for FSMA Produce Safety Rule Grower Training and Stop the Bleed training.

Join us on February 4th and 5th, with bonus sessions available on the 3rd and 6th (pre-registration is required for these sessions). Visit [www.vganj.com](http://www.vganj.com) to register now!

Harrah's Conference Center  
777 Harrah's Blvd.  
Atlantic City, NJ

Visit the Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey at [www.VGANJ.com](http://www.VGANJ.com) for the complete session schedule.

For additional updates, follow us on Facebook and Instagram @vganj.



## Outdoor Industry Activities, Consumer Profiles, Gardeners' Attitudes, Household Participation, Insights, Trends, and Retail Sales

(Continued from page 8)

health and well-being of the Greater Philadelphia Region. PHS programs create healthier living environments, increase access to fresh food, expand access to jobs and economic opportunity, and strengthen deeper social connections between people. PHS's work spans 250 neighborhoods; an expansive network of public gardens

and landscapes; year-round learning experiences; and the nation's signature gardening event, the Philadelphia Flower Show. PHS provides everyone with opportunities to garden for the greater good as a participant, member, donor, or volunteer. For information and to support this impactful work, please visit [PHSonline.org](http://PHSonline.org).

### Next up are the survey results from Axiom.

Since 1993, Axiom has served North America's best known horticultural, agricultural, building products and utility companies.

Axiom, headquartered in Minneapolis, uses market insights to drive strategies in sales, innovation, and marketing communications, which accelerates purchase decisions and business growth.

Axiom's deep experience in agriculture and horticulture helps accelerate outcomes among B2B and B2C clients in these industries. Through market insights, they're using their legacy knowledge to deepen the understanding of market needs, and align agriculture and horticulture sales and marketing goals.

According to Axiom, fewer respondents spent more time gardening in 2024 than in 2023 or 2022.

Their goal with this study is to learn more about how much money and time home gardeners spent on their gardens in the past year (2024), and their views about gardening in the coming year (2025.)

Here are some of the results.

### More Time in the Garden

- 35.9% of respondents spent more time gardening in 2024 compared to 2023; however, this figure is down 10.9 percentage points from 2023 and 8.5 percentage points from 2022.
- Gen Z (65.4%), Gen Y (47%) and male (43.4%) respondents reported the greatest increase in additional time spent gardening in 2024 compared to 2023.
- Top 3 reasons for participation in gardening included: enjoy being outside (63.2%), like to grow things (58.2%) and producing fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs (53.3%).
- 40.8% of respondents reported time was the #1 barrier to gardening more.
- Only 12.2% of respondents reported spending less time gardening in 2024 compared to 2023.
- Working more and weather were cited as the top 2 reasons for spending less time gardening.

### More Dollars Spent on Gardening in 2024

- 44.4% of respondents spent more money gardening in 2024. This figure is (Cont. on Page 22)



Tom Castronovo/Photo

Todd Pretz, left, Barry Green Sr., center, and Barry Green Jr. of the New Jersey based Jonathan Green Company. Since 1881, Jonathan Green has been perfecting quality grass seed and lawn care products to create premium lawn solutions.

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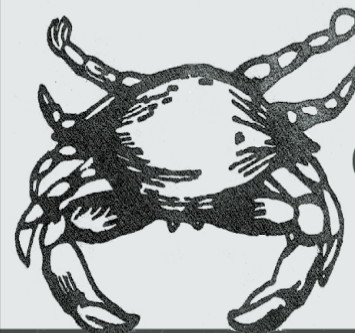


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## New Basil Everleaf™ Lemon Receives 2025 Professional's Choice Green Thumb Award

Leading seed breeder of ornamental and edible garden plants, PanAmerican Seed®, is proud to accept a 2025 Professional's Choice Green Thumb Award in the "edible" category from the National Garden Bureau (NGB). Basil Everleaf™ Lemon was selected by a panel of NGB expert horticulturalists members. The Green Thumb Award is an annual competition recognizing outstanding and innovative new plants and garden products.

The Everleaf collection features basil plants that are tall, upright and highly branched for plenty of harvest potential. They are also very late to flower — up to 8 weeks later than standard basil — for season-long enjoyment of tasty leaves. Everleaf Lemon is the first lemon basil bred for this collection. It has a bright lemon flavor perfect for adding to dressings, marinades, and fresh salads. The plants are versatile and perform well in-ground and in patio containers.

"Home gardeners continue to explore unique flavors from their garden, while still seeking easy plant care for busy lifestyles. Everleaf Lemon Basil meets all those needs," says Dylan Sedmak, Vegetable Sales Account Manager for PanAmerican Seed. "We are pleased the industry has recognized our seed basil this year as a product innovation, and all thanks go to our amazing breeding team."

For more information about PanAmerican Seed Vegetables, visit [www.panamseed.com/vegetables](http://www.panamseed.com/vegetables) or reach out to your preferred seed supplier.

## Organic Final Rule Published for Mushrooms and Pet Food

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) published the final rule on Market Development for Mushrooms and Pet Food. This change to the USDA organic regulations will promote a fairer market for all mushroom and pet food producers and encourage growth in these sectors by ensuring that USDA-certified organic products are produced to the same consistent standard. The rule will provide increased certainty to support conditions necessary for growth in the organic mushroom and pet food markets and markets for related inputs (e.g., organic production by-products).

What does the rule do?

The rule adds consistent standards for organic mushroom production and pet food handling. It clarifies the requirements for these products to ensure the standards are consistently applied and enforced. In general, the rule will:

- Clarify which crop production standards mushroom producers should use, and which new requirements should be followed for mushroom substrate and spawn used in mushroom production.
- Standardize existing practices in organic pet food handling by applying the regulations for organic processed products to pet food.
- Allow the synthetic amino acid taurine to be used in organic pet food.

Establishing clear and uniform standards will give organic mushroom and pet food producers the confidence and certainty to know they are operating in a fair and competitive market.

When must organic operations comply with the rule?

The final rule goes into effect on February 21, 2025.

USDA AMS is allowing an additional two (2) years for organic operations to comply with the requirements of the final rule. All organic mushroom and pet food operations must comply with the rule by February 22, 2027. However, organic operations may choose to comply with the final rule prior to the compliance date.

Happy Valentine's Day! Last month I wrote about the winners of the NJLCA's Landscape Achievement Awards. We held the awards gala, which was such a rewarding and exciting evening that not only recognized the amazing work of the winners, but also those who didn't win as well.

This year's judging was definitely the hardest ever, with projects that would have won losing out by the smallest details. Some recommendations for next year are: to enter projects that have matured a bit in order for them to look how they were intended; learn how to use the features on your cellular phone well (lighting, image options, editing) if you are not having professional pictures taken; be sure to take pictures during the proper weather and lighting to highlight the work you do for final photos; always take final photos right after a cleanup and remove leaves and debris, along with equipment; don't include photos of dormant turf; for lighting photos, turn on the lights in the house; and most of all, keep up the fantastic craftsmanship and enter again if you didn't win the first time!

Next up we have our biggest event of the year, Landscape New Jersey 2025 on Wednesday, February 28, 2025, from 8:00 am – 3:30 pm at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, NJ. The show features more than 340 exhibit booths with over 175 vendors highlighting the latest and greatest products and services. In addition, NJLCA organizes a full day of education that is purely industry based.

In an increasingly interconnected



## The NJLCA Today

By Gail Woolcott  
Executive Director

# It's Trade Show Season

world, industry trade shows and trade associations offer unparalleled opportunities for growth, learning, and networking. Trade shows serve as vital hubs for professionals, businesses, and educators to engage with the latest trends, innovations, and challenges within their respective fields. The value of attending trade shows and participating in trade associations extends far beyond the immediate benefits of exposure and interaction; it contributes to long-term professional and organizational success.

Trade shows and trade associations provide a unique environment where professionals can meet like-minded individuals, potential collaborators, and industry leaders. The connections made at these events can lead to new partnerships, mentorship opportunities, and even career advancements. Unlike virtual meetings or email exchanges, face-to-face interactions foster trust and deeper relationships, laying the groundwork for meaningful collaborations.

Networking at trade shows often results in new clients, suppliers, or distributors. Exhibitors and attendees alike can exchange ideas, share resources, and discuss solutions to common challenges. These interactions often lead to mutually beneficial relationships that can propel an organization's growth and stability.

Another one of the key advantages of participating in trade associations and attending trade shows is access to educational opportunities. Landscape New Jersey features seminars in both English and Spanish delivered by industry experts. Attendees can learn about emerging technologies, innovative practices, and regulatory updates in the landscape and outdoor living industries. For professionals, continuous learning through such opportunities ensures that their skills remain relevant and competitive in an ever-evolving marketplace.

For businesses, exhibiting at a trade show or being an active member of a trade association enhances brand

visibility. Participating in these events demonstrates a commitment to the industry and positions the company as a leader in its field. Companies can showcase their products and services to a targeted audience, gaining exposure that is difficult to achieve through traditional marketing channels.

Beyond professional development, attending trade shows and participating in trade associations foster personal growth. These experiences often challenge attendees to think creatively, adapt to new ideas, and embrace innovation. The inspiration drawn from these events can lead to increased motivation and productivity on behalf of owners and employees.

Companies that actively engage with trade associations and invest in attending trade shows often experience increased employee morale, enhanced knowledge-sharing, and a stronger sense of community within the workforce. These factors contribute to improved overall performance and long-term success.

We hope to see everyone in the landscape, hardscape, agricultural and outdoor living industries at Landscape New Jersey 2025 for the unofficial kickoff of the spring season!

**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.**

A symbol of longevity, strength, and durability, the White Oak *Quercus alba* is a very admirable favorite tree of many, including myself. Often, they are our oldest trees due to the strength and rot resistance of their wood. This rot resistance is due to tylosis, a physiological process which protects the tree from decay. The wood becomes somewhat impervious to moisture, which is why casks and wine barrels are made from White Oak.

In colonial times, the wood was important in ship building, again due to the wood being water resistant. Our family's home in Millington, New Jersey was surrounded by large oaks, many of which were white oaks that are now approaching 300 years old. Relatively slow growing, it is not uncommon for White Oak trees to surpass 500 years old.

Often called the mighty oak due to its incredible strength and endurance, a classic White Oak, when open grown, will display a rounded crown comprised of large, stout limbs irregularly spaced, and often very horizontal lower limbs. These trees will attain impressive heights of 100 feet or more, especially in a competitive forest setting. When grown in the



## Tree Notes

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

# Beauty and Versatility of Oaks

open, its crown spread sometimes surpasses its height.

Its elliptical leaves are 4 to 9 inches long, 2 to 4 inches wide, with 5 to 9 lobes, and widest at their middle and tapering to the base. A key identification feature is its smooth, rounded lobes in contrast to the pointed lobes of red oak and pin oaks. The trunk of a mature tree will average 3 to 4 feet in diameter and its bark will be light gray, shallowly fissured into long, broad, scaly plates often loosely attached. Acorns are 1/2 inch to 1 1/2 inch egg shaped, being a quarter enclosed by a shallow cap and maturing in one season. Although able to produce acorns each year, typically every 3 to 4 years they will put forth a bumper crop. The acorns are prized by wildlife especially deer, turkeys, bear, and squirrels. Its

foliage is bright green above and whitish or gray green beneath. The white oak's fall foliage is another favorite characteristic of mine as its deep rich, burgundy color is often stunning. Preferring moist but well drained, fertile soil, it adapts to both uplands and lowlands. Its native range is basically the entire eastern portion of the U.S. from Maine to east Texas and north to east central Minnesota.

A closely related oak, the Swamp White Oak *Quercus bicolor*, has become a popular nursery tree due in large part to its ease of transplanting. Key identification features separating it from *Quercus alba* are its rounded or blunt leaf tips along with its deeper furrowed bark. Although the preferred habitat of the Swamp White Oak is wet soils of lowlands, floodplains, and swamps, it will

tolerate and thrive in drier soil conditions.

Another great oak of mention is the Live Oak *Quercus Virginians*, whose coastal range extends from south east Virginia to south Florida and west to central Texas. Called the Live Oak because of its shiny green evergreen foliage, it has very long, stout, horizontal branches often draped with Spanish moss which comprise its very spreading canopy. The broad main trunk and its large limbs are often buttressed, adding to its interest. It is a handsome shade tree, very popular in the southeast where it can attain a large size often wider than tall.

I will be in Apopka, Florida soon and climbing these magnificent spreading Live Oaks as I'll be returning to compete in the Legend of the Geezers tree climbing event. This is where I initially became

exposed to climbing these trees, which truly tests a climber's balance and limb walking skills. The Legend of the Geezers tree climbing competition was started to give aging tree climbers (40 years and older) this platform of a fun climbing competition. I started attending this competition 10 years ago and always look forward to returning, especially since I have a motivating goal associated which I have not yet achieved. The Legend of the Geezers tree climbing competition has grown immensely since I've been participating in it. There are over 60 competitors this year, mostly from the US, but climbers also come from Canada, Europe, South America, and beyond. It's an incredible time to share with tree climbing friends I've made through this event. Our common bond is our deep passion for trees and climbing!

**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**

# 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.*

## CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Ring in the New Year with CT Grown Gear

Connecticut Department of Agriculture Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt announces that ConnecticutGrownStore.com is restocked for the New Year with branded Connecticut Grown apparel and accessories, including fan favorites and fresh designs, for consumers and producers alike.

“Our team has curated new designs inspired by their own farming backgrounds and the producers we work with throughout the year,” said Commissioner Hurlburt. “We are pleased to offer a mix of items suitable for various adventures, from farmers’ markets to field work, for all ages and weather condition.”

#### New Products and Designs

New to the online store are stylish market bags for consumers to proudly display their support for the farming community at local markets. These spacious reusable bags will fit your favorite CT Grown products and fold down to a smaller size for easy storage when not being used.

For the cold winter months, a high-quality, insulated pom-pom winter hat is available in classic blue, featuring the CT Grown logo. Its exceptional warmth and universal sizing make it a smart choice for barn chores or running errands.

The addition of a three-quarter length raglan sleeve cotton color block jersey celebrates the next generation of farmers in training in an adorable, fun way. For the grownups, an updated long-sleeve cream-colored cotton shirt features the CT Grown logo on the front while the back has: “Eat. Sleep. Farm. Repeat. A Way of Life”. Ideal for the transitional seasons, this also provides essential protection from the elements and protects your arms from the sun.

#### Back by Popular Demand

The Connecticut Grown infant onesies have been restocked in both six and 12-month sizes. Great for gifting to friends and family welcoming a new addition.

Baseball hats, a six-panel unstructured cotton twill cap with CT Grown embroidered in white on the front, have also be replenished. Available in two color choices – green or blue – these are a must year-round.

Additional items are available online including reusable water bottles, insulated lunch bags, and coffee mugs. All proceeds benefit the Connecticut Grown program, which promotes Connecticut’s farmers and the diverse array of agricultural products they produce.

Connecticut Grown is a multifaceted program developed in 1986 and administered by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to support the diversity of Connecticut Grown products in local, regional, national, and international markets through both direct-to-consumer and wholesale-oriented program components.

## NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### New York State Department of Agriculture Provides an Update on Spotted Lanternfly, Urges Residents to Scrape Egg Masses

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets announced new findings of the Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) in additional locations across New York State. SLF is an invasive, non-native insect that feeds on more than 100 plant species, including tree-of-heaven, and plants and crops, such as grapes, that are critical to New York’s agricultural economy. The Department is now urging residents of a number of upstate counties, including Albany, Schenectady, Ontario, and Seneca counties, to report any additional sightings and scrape egg masses, which will help inspectors to assess impacted areas and slow the spread of SLF in New York State.

State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball said, “We have been working with our partners for years to contain SLF and minimize the spread of this invasive species, which can cause extensive damage to plants and crops that are critical to New York’s agricultural economy. We are incredibly grateful for the help New Yorkers have provided in the last few years and urge residents to continue eliminating egg masses by scraping them off trees, structures and outdoor furnishings now that the cold weather is here. We’re optimistic that through education and continued collaboration with our partners and the public, we will be able to manage SLF and mitigate the impact to the grape growing industry in the years to come.”

SLF is an invasive insect that was first found in Pennsylvania in 2014. It has since been detected in 18 states including New York. New York’s first detection was in the late summer of 2020 on Staten Island. SLF has continued to expand its range in New York State, and in July 2024, the Department confirmed the presence of SLF in Romulus, near the grape-growing region of the Finger Lakes. During the 2024 survey season state inspectors confirmed new populations of SLF in Geneva, Ontario County; Romulus, Seneca County; City of Schenectady, Schenectady County; and Cohoes, Albany County.

As part of the state’s response efforts, the Department’s Division of Plant Industry staff are working diligently with partners and stakeholders to determine the extent of the population in these newly reported areas.

The Department is also urging any travelers leaving a SLF-infested area to thoroughly inspect vehicles, luggage and gear, and all outdoor items for SLF egg masses. If egg masses are found, travelers should destroy them by scraping them.

#### Identifying SLF and SLF Egg Masses

Adult SLF are easy to identify and are approximately one inch long and half an inch wide at rest, with eye-catching wings. Adults are active from July to December and begin laying eggs in September.

Eggs are laid in one-inch-long segmented rows of up to about 50 eggs covered in a creamy-white, putty-like substance that becomes pinkish-gray as it

dries. After a few weeks the covering turns a darker tan and starts to crack, resembling a splotch of mud. Depending on the substrate, egg masses can be difficult to see and may be laid in protected locations that are difficult to inspect thoroughly. Photos and additional information about identification and SLF lifecycle is available on New York State Integrated Pest Management’s (IPM) website.

#### Scraping Egg Masses

SLF can lay their eggs on any number of surfaces, such as vehicles, stone, rusty metal, outdoor furniture, and firewood. Scrape egg masses off their surface using scraper cards, credit cards, or anything else that is hard, tapered, and flat. Kill the eggs by putting them into a re-sealable bag that contains rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer and dispose of them in the solution to be assured they will not hatch. Each egg mass contains up to 50 eggs, so removing as many as possible can reduce the numbers that will hatch in the spring.

#### SLF Impacts to New York Agriculture

SLF feeding can stress plants, making them vulnerable to disease and attacks from other insects. SLF also excretes large amounts of sticky “honeydew,” which attracts sooty molds that may interfere with plant photosynthesis, negatively affecting the growth and fruit yield of plants and negatively impacting agriculture and forest health.

The estimated total economic impact of invasive insects in the United States exceeds \$70 billion per year, and if not contained, SLF could have an impact to New York State of at least \$300 million annually, mainly to the grape and wine industry, which ranks third in the country in production. SLF also has the potential to significantly hinder quality of life and recreational activities due to the honeydew and the swarms of insects it attracts.

#### New York State’s Response

Since the first detection of SLF in New York on Staten Island in 2020, the Department (AGM), the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and New York State Integrated Pest Management (IPM) have been working closely with partners statewide and nationally, such as the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Department of Transportation, Thruway Authority, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Cornell Cooperative Extension network to slow the spread of this invasive insect. SLF has since been reported in all New York City boroughs, Long Island, and several areas in Upstate New York. The State’s work focuses on slowing the spread of SLF and protecting vulnerable areas, such as vineyards and apple orchards, where SLF could inflict damage on New York’s agricultural and agritourism industries.

Learn more on the Department’s website at <https://agriculture.ny.gov/spottedlanternfly>.

# DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE NEWS

## NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### New Jersey Department of Agriculture Honors School in New Brunswick for Fruit and Vegetable Program

Representatives from the New Jersey Department of Agriculture presented Lord Stirling Community School in New Brunswick, Middlesex County with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program VIP Award during a school assembly.

The award highlights schools in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) that are doing an exceptional job at promoting fruits and vegetables and healthy lifestyles to their students. Lord Stirling was selected for the first-place prize for providing an extensive program integrating the entire school community in wellness activities.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is a federally funded initiative that offers grants to schools to provide fresh produce as snacks to students in schools where 50 percent or more of the students receive free or reduced-price meals. There are 188 New Jersey schools participating in the 2024-2025 school year's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which has grown from 33 schools when it began in 2008.

Students at Lord Stirling are served Jersey Fresh produce at least 12 times throughout the year as FFVP snacks. These have included apples, cranberries, butternut squash, cucumbers, yams, Asian pears, and blueberries. Lord Stirling also participates in the Road to Reading Challenge, which includes books about growing produce, and celebrates National Garden Month and the school district's March Snackness Month.

Lord Stirling Community School serves FFVP items two or three days a week and participates extensively in Farm to School Week in September, which includes learning about farmers markets, having a day to dress up like a fruit or vegetable or a farmer, and trying a locally grown snack at the end of the week. The school also is in the USDA National School Lunch, School Breakfast, After School Snack, and Local Food for Schools programs.

The United States Department of Agriculture has allocated \$5,429,429 to New Jersey for this school year's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, to provide fresh produce to 96,500 students in 49 districts throughout 14 counties during the school day. The students also receive nutrition education.

Nearly 80 percent of the 188 schools have agreed to link their FFVP to the Jersey Fresh Farm to School Program.

## VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets Begins On-Farm Bulk Milk Sampling Program

Since the first detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, or HPAI, in Texas dairy cattle this past March, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFMM) has worked to promote awareness and prepare for the possibility of the disease's arrival in our state. To date, this has not occurred. USDA recently mandated bulk milk sampling throughout the country, including Vermont, to proactively identify any currently unknown infected cattle. The goal is to test all milk that is eligible to cross state lines (Grade A) so any unknown infections can be identified and HPAI can be contained.

VAAFMM employees will sample unpasteurized milk on all Grade A milk producing farms in Vermont each month. The samples will be tested in a lab for the HPAI strain that has infected dairy cattle in 16 states. Vermont has not seen any indication of this HPAI strain, though Vermont has experienced isolated incidents of the avian, or bird flu strain of HPAI, including as recently as last week.

The milk testing program is designed to identify any currently unknown pockets of the dairy cattle HPAI strain to help eradicate it in the United States, protect animal and human health, and safeguard the food supply from disruptions. Importantly, eliminating this version of the HPAI virus would prevent it from mutating into a strain that could threaten human health.

Before starting this USDA funded sampling program in Vermont, VAAFMM notified dairy farmers statewide by letter (see attached) and worked with affiliated dairy co-ops and partners to help spread the word. Specially trained Agency employees will visit each dairy farm once a month to sample the farm's milk. Farms will not bear any costs of the sampling program, and no related changes in operations are expected.

If a sample tests negative, no further action will be taken. If a sample test is positive, the dairy farm will be notified, and Agency dairy officials will work with the farm to ensure all unaffected raw milk is pasteurized before being marketed. Any abnormal milk produced would be disposed of safely. This would occur in conjunction with the Vermont State Veterinarian and Animal Health staff working to ensure that each farm has the resources in place to help prevent spread of the virus to other locations, while also supporting on-site care to affected cows.

Since the first impacted dairy herds were identified in March of 2024, pasteurization has proven effective at inactivating the HPAI virus, which makes milk safe for human consumption. However, infected cows often produce "abnormal" milk, which requires disposal. Infected dairy cattle usually do not experience life-threatening illness and recover. Moreover, only a small number of humans have contracted infections from working with infected dairy cattle, and nearly all infections have been minor. The risk to humans is considered to be low, but in particular for farmers and others who work with raw milk or animals, it is important to be knowledgeable and vigilant. The Agency wants to help Vermont dairy farms to remain HPAI free and testing milk for HPAI in our state will help ensure that any infections are known and properly addressed.

## DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Rooted in Tradition: 160 Delaware Farms Celebrate Over 100 Years

Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse and state legislators inducted five Delaware farms into the Century Farm Program, honoring the farm families' commitment to keeping farmland within the family for 100 years.

"By far, the Century Farm Program is one of my favorite events each year," said Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse. "It's an opportunity to celebrate the families who have been committed to keeping our top industry alive for 100 years and are looking to the younger generation to continue the tradition of feeding our neighbors for another 100 years."

The Delaware Century Farm Program was established

in 1987 to honor farm families who have owned and farmed their land for at least 100 years. The farms must include at least 10 acres of the original parcel or gross more than \$10,000 annually in agricultural sales.

With the announcement of these four new families and five farms, Delaware will have recognized 160 Century Farms over the past 37 years. Delaware Century Farm families receive a sign for their farms, an engraved plate, and legislative tributes.

#### 2024 Delaware Century Farm Awardees

Beauchamp Family Farm (Harrington and Greenwood, Kent County): The Beauchamp family is recognized for their

two farms, purchased in 1903 and 1915, respectively.

Culver Family Farm (Laurel, Sussex County): The Culver family was honored with the Century Farm Award for their farm in Little Creek Hundred.

Ellis Farms (Millsboro, Sussex County): Ray and Barbara Ellis were presented with the Century Farm Award for their family farm, which is located in the lands now between Laurel, Millsboro, and Gumboro, just off Lowes Crossing Road.

Fifer Orchards, Inc. (Wyoming, Kent County): The Fifer Family was presented with the Century Farm Award for their family farm, located on Allabands Mill Road in Wyoming.

# Outdoor Industry Activities, Consumer Profiles, Gardeners' Attitudes, Household Participation, Insights, Trends, and Retail Sales

(Continued from page 17)

8.5 percentage points higher than 2023 and 2 percentage points higher than 2022.

- Groceries, travel and eating out were the top 3 reasons cited among respondents who spent less on gardening in 2024.
- Money/budget cited the #2 barrier to gardening more.

## Increased Gardening Spending and Time in 2025

- 39.8% of respondents reported they expect to spend more money on gardening in 2025.
- Gen Z (46.2%) and Gen Y (43.9%) were the top two segments which expect to spend more money on gardening in 2025.
- 44.4% of respondents reported expecting to spend more time gardening in 2025.
- Gen Z (69.2%) and Gen Y (51%) were the top two segments which expect to spend more time gardening in 2025.
- Top 3 garden projects for 2025 include: front of the house plantings to increase curb appeal, creating vegetable gardens and adding outdoor lighting.

## Key Information Sources

- Top two information sources on new plants and gardening supplies included: websites (28%) and IGCs (Independent Garden Centers) (16.8% down 11% percentage points from 2023).
- YouTube (38.5%) cited as the #1 most important

social media site to learn about new plants and gardening supplies.

- At 25.7%, IGCs remained the #1 information source for garden questions; however, Home Depot was #2 at 23.7%.

## Lower Increased Planting/Garden Size in 2025, Garden Success and Satisfaction High in 2024

- 55.9% of respondents reported planning to plant more and expand their gardens in 2025; however, this figure is down 8.8 percentage points from 2023.
- Gen Z (63.1%) and male (59.8%) respondents were the top two segments which are planning to plant more and expand their gardens in 2025.
- 74.1% of respondents felt successful or very successful in their 2024 garden pursuits.
- 38.8% reported wanting more blooms, fruits, and vegetables.

## Home Depot Dominates Garden Purchases, IGCs Have Better Plants and Store Associates

- Home Depot was cited as the #1 purchase outlet for gardening supplies and garden plants in 2024.
- At 32.2%, Home Depot garden supply purchases were down 3.8 percentage points from 2023. At 33.9%, Home Depot garden plant purchases increased 4 percentage points from 2023.
- When asked where they find the highest quality plants, 30.3% of respondents named IGCs.
- When asked which store associates are most

knowledgeable, 25.6% of respondents named IGCs.

- Top 3 respondent needs for visiting their local IGC include: more plant choices (29.9%), new plant varieties (17.4%) and help choosing the right plant (13.8%).

I'm glad that I could help you learn more about the health and wellbeing benefits of gardening and nature. I can't wait to visit the PHS Philadelphia Flower Show on March 1-9 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center to see futuristic gardens and gardening trends first-hand.

In conclusion, I think gardens are safe spaces. There is also increasing awareness among researchers and health practitioners of the potential health benefits derived from gardening activities.

*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 Valentine's Day!

## Full Moon

# ● February 12, 2025 ○

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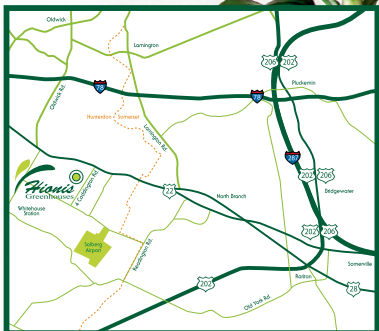


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