North Country Gardening

Annual Appeal

Dear Friends,

With the busy holiday season ahead of us, we’re producing a Nov/Dec issue of North Country Gardening.

Please consider making a donation to Cornell Cooperative Extension this month - we need your support more than ever!

The last page of this issue has a copy of the letter we mailed you last week. You can mail in a check or use the handy on-line payment method at our website: http://blogs.cornell.edu/cceclintoncounty/

Thank you very much!

With best wishes to you and your loved ones for the holiday season,

Amy Ivy
Executive Director,
Horticulture Educator

Long Lasting Squash

After pumpkins, the next most familiar winter squash are butternut, acorn and the huge, blue hubbard squash. Spaghetti squash has become popular recently and is especially fun to cook up with kids. The interior flesh really does look like spaghetti but I find it so bland in flavor it’s the sauce you put over it that makes it so tasty.

The other winter squash I mentioned have lots of flavor. There are many ways to cook them, from simply steaming, peeling and mashing to roasting or baking stuffed with walnuts, spices and maple syrup.

As tasty as the standard types are, I encourage you to try some of the newer types, too. Delicata has been around for a few years now and is both delicious and beautiful (see photo below). It’s medium sized, 6-10 inches long in an oblong shape and the skin is attractively mottled in patches of green, cream and orange. Carnival is another fun type. This is like a Delicata but shaped more like an acorn squash.

The old standards (acorn and butternut) are available year round but you might want to stock up on some of these newer varieties while they’re still available. You can store them at room temperature in a dry, well ventilated location for several weeks at least.

Delicata Squash
Uninvited ‘Houseguests’

By Emily Selleck

Thanksgiving is customarily a time of sharing – families, friends, food...ah, the happy anticipation of smiling faces and contented sighs around the table where one of your signature holiday meals was just consumed with gusto. That was before you saw some small, definitely uninvited creepy-crawlies in the house! Don’t wait until Thanksgiving for these “guests” to appear – start your patrol and control practices now!

Good general upkeep of the home can help prevent pest outbreaks when you least want them. Seal cracks and openings around windows, doors, siding, and utility pipes with a quality silicone or silicone-latex caulk. (An additional benefit of this practice is reducing your winter heating costs!) Be sure to screen attic and/or wall vents and soffits, chimneys and fireplaces to keep out unwanted furry pests such as bats, mice, and squirrels. Eliminate hiding places by removing clutter in basements, sweeping out corners of garages and storage areas.

Inside, vacuum frequently to prevent accumulations of food crumbs, pet hair, and lint. Keep food in sealed containers. Store bulk grains in lidded glass jars. Don’t let fruits and vegetables spoil. Keep all garbage in closed containers and empty them on a regular – daily if possible – basis.

Pet food is also attractive to household pests. If your cat doesn’t eat her breakfast in a timely manner, remove it. She’ll be hungrier by supper. Keep bulk pet foods including wild bird seed in closed containers.

Outside, keep vegetation away from the house and foundation, and refrain from storing firewood next to the house or on a wooden porch. Although it may be convenient for you on cold nights, it also may be convenient for insects that may be living in the wood to move into your toasty house with that next armload of firewood!

Here’s an “Uninvited Guest List” with some suggestions for prevention and control:

**Insects and Firewood** – If the seasoning (drying) operation is done properly, the firewood will dry before the insects complete their development and they won’t survive. Prevention and control – Cutting firewood at the right time of year (during the dormant season – winter) is helpful because most insect activity occurs during the growing season from April to October. From November to March, most insects are inactive. Pile the logs soon after they are cut, preferably off the ground and under cover so the inner bark dries rapidly and thoroughly. If the wood is dried quickly, few insects are likely to survive. Store firewood out of doors, under cover, and near the house. Be certain to keep an air space between the wood and any covering such as a tarp. Better yet, keep it in a woodshed or unheated garage or utility building. Bring inside only what wood will be used within a few days.

**Cluster flies** – Welcome to the North Country! These rather large flies found blundering about lights and windows, colliding with many objects before dropping to the floor or kitchen counter to lie on their backs and spin noisily until exhausted are the bane of most North Country households. Take heart – they don’t breed in the house, they don’t spread diseases, and they don’t eat your food. They’re just looking for somewhere to hang out for the winter. For modest infestations, fly swatters are useful. Vacuuming may be necessary. Make sure to tie up the bag and dispose of it upon finishing the task. Seal up entry routes, especially cracks and crevices around south-east and westerly facing windows where they’ll congregate on warm days.
Houseguests, continued...

Flour and grain beetles — These are small brown beetles that appear in kitchens near containers of stored grain products, pet food, or birdseed. If you find some, discard all infested food. Clean shelves and cupboards where that food was stored thoroughly by removing all food and dishes, wiping the shelves, and vacuuming and mopping storage area floors. Store uninfested products in tightly sealed containers, and inspect stored food regularly.

Flour and grain moths — Indian meal moths are the most commonly encountered species. Larvae (small caterpillars) feed in flour and grain products, dried fruits, nuts, and dried pet and fish food. Then the larvae crawl up walls to the ceiling to pupate. When cleaning (same as for flour and grain beetles) also make sure to clean the areas in the pantry and/or kitchen where the walls and ceilings meet.

Fungus gnats — Small, dark-colored flies often seen in homes around houseplants. Larvae feed on decaying organic matter. If houseplants become infested, take the plant out of the pot, discard the growing media, and repot the plant in sterile (soilless) potting mix. Make sure to water houseplants correctly, allowing them to dry out between waterings and making sure to empty any water left in their saucers after watering.

Multicolored Asian Ladybugs — As their name implies, they are not native. They have many color forms, ranging from bright red-orange to pale yellow-orange, and may have varying numbers of spots from many to none. We have 12 species of native lady beetles that all tend to behave and overwinter outside under the duff and not in our houses. Not so the imported Multicolored Asian Lady beetles! In large numbers, they can cause as much angst as cluster flies. Ladybugs, like cluster flies, are just looking for a place to spend the winter. If you make them “mad”, or you smush them, they give off an unpleasant odor and can cause a stain on clothing or other material. Control of these ladybugs is the same as for cluster flies.

Larder beetles — Who hasn’t had a kitchen drawer where a few stray crumbs have landed? Or behind the toaster? Both are good situations for larder beetles to set up house! These small beetles (black with a brownish band across the back) are frequent visitors of kitchens and pantries. They are primarily scavengers that feed on dried skin and other soft remains of animals. Their active, hairy larvae feed on all kinds of meat, leather, and other animal products (such as stuffed and mounted heads of deer, etc.) but a drawer full of crumbs will do, too. As with other pantry pests, keeping crumbs down to a dull roar by regularly checking drawers and cupboards and cleaning when necessary is helpful.

The use of insecticides for controlling populations of most household insect pests is not recommended and is in fact strongly discouraged. Again, the best technique for managing them is to prevent their entry into houses in the first place! Or, to make sure whatever attracts them isn’t available!

So, now that you’ve scouted and cleaned and fixed the leaks and mended the cracks and crevices, it’s time to send out the Invited Guest List for that signature Thanksgiving meal you’ve been concocting in your mind all fall!

References — Part One, Pest Management Around the Home, Cultural Methods, Miscellaneous Bulletin S74, Cornell Cooperative Extension Publication; Insects And Firewood, Some Facts... Cornell Cooperative Extension Insect Diagnostic Laboratory Fact Sheet; Insects, a Golden Guide; Peterson First Guides, Insects.

North Country Gardening
I bet I’m not the only one who hasn’t planted spring flowering bulbs yet. I have daffodil, tulip and grape hyacinth bulbs; but I’m sorry to say they are still in the garage. If you haven’t buried your spring blooming bulbs either, you’ll be glad to know that we still have some time.

The term bulb describes a variety of fleshy, underground organs that some plants use to store energy over the winter in order to fuel spring growth. Plants that use these storage organs are called geophytes and come in various forms.

Onions, lilies, daffodils and tulips are examples of true bulbs and their energy is stored in modified leaves that make up the bulb. Crocus and gladiolus are examples of corms; modified, swollen stems. Tubers are thick underground stems and include caladium and in the food world, potatoes. An underground stem that grows horizontally through soil is called a rhizome. Lily of the valley and bearded iris grow from rhizomes. And lastly, tuberous roots are large and fleshy and include dahlias and anemones.

The great thing about bulbs is that they are easy to grow, produce colorful blooms in spring when we really appreciate the color that marks the end of winter, and can provide years of enjoyment for the gardener when cared for properly. As a bonus, bulbs multiply from year to year so are a good investment for your perennial garden. Bulbs can be planted most anywhere but full sun will help them thrive from one year to the next. Avoid planting where there is not good drainage and steer clear of areas where water stands in the spring as the snow melts.

Bulbs buried now should do well in the spring because what they need to bloom is already in the bulb that you bury. Since you want your bulbs to thrive for a number of years, prepare the soil before planting by loosening the soil to a depth of 8 inches or so, adding organic matter as needed, and work a low nitrogen fertilizer into the top 4 to 6 inches.

When planting, keep in mind the height and bloom time of the bulbs so you can achieve the results that you want. Plant your bulbs root end down, pointed side up, at the depth recommended. If the depth is 5 inches, say, that means the top of the bulb is covered by 5 inches of soil, not the root end. Proper planting depth makes quite a difference. Generally, the depth of planting is 2 to 3 times the height of the bulb. We have planting guidelines in the office; if you would like one give us a call.

Spacing between bulbs will vary with the effect you want to achieve. Crocus and grape hyacinth are attractive in groupings of 5 or more planted 2 to 4 inches apart. Larger bulbs like daffodils and tulips can be planted 8 inches apart and won’t need to be divided for several years, but make a more striking display when planted closer together.

A mass planting can be a real show-stopper and is especially nice in a bed that you plant with annuals in the spring. The annuals camouflage the stems and leaves of your bulbs after the blooming period is over. You might consider this if the messy appearance of the greens bothers you. You should cut the seed heads off after blooming but do leave the stems and leaves to wilt, yellow, and die back or you interfere with the process of the plant storing energy in the bulbs which will result in next year’s flowers. You can fertilize at the end of the blooming period to assist in this process.

If you have a problem with skunks, squirrels, or chipmunks digging up your bulbs you may want to avoid using an organic fertilizer like bone meal when planting. Do clean up the bed after planting, removing any ‘skins’ of the bulbs left on the ground. A couple inches of mulch should be applied. There are repellents available that can be used around the plantings, or you can use chicken wire to discourage digging by bulb-snatchers. This can be removed in the spring as the bulbs send up shoots. Once the ground freezes, critters should not be a problem.

I plan to plant my bulbs in areas where I will see the flowers most often; along the walkway to my front door, and in the beds that that are visible from my windows. By the time they break ground and start to bloom I will be more than ready to see the color that marks the end of winter for me and I don’t want to miss a minute of it.
American Herring Gulls

By Jolene Wallace

I have no appreciation for seagulls. I enjoy watching them soar on air currents and I got a kick out of watching the herons chase them from the neighbor’s dock this year but that’s the extent of my admiration. I liken them to pigeons, except near water. I’ve had a couple of ugly experiences with them while I was out and didn’t have a change of clothes handy. If there weren’t so many of them and if I didn’t have to be wary of them flying over me I might feel differently. I guess you either like them or dislike them but you certainly can’t ignore them. You see them in the water, in the air, on docks, in the fields after harvest and even in parking lots. Anywhere there is a food supply and nearby water, you will find seagulls.

The gulls we see here in the North Country are American Herring Gulls. They are large, stocky, birds with hefty bills that patrol our shorelines, water, picnic areas, and landfills. They are scavengers but also highly predatory. They are one of the most common coastal birds and along the coast fish, mollusks and algae make up the bulk of their diet. They carry hard-shelled mollusks into the air and drop them on a hard surface to break open the shells. Inland, they feed on insects, earthworms, small rodents, the eggs and young of other birds.

The breeding range of the American Herring Gull has expanded since the 1950’s from a southern limit of Maine, and now includes the North Country. In early spring the Herring Gulls form monogamous pairs for the duration of the breeding season. Both the male and female build a nest by filling a hollow spot on the ground with feathers, vegetation, and bits of found materials. Generally three olive green eggs are laid and incubate for 23 to 27 days.

It takes four years for the young to develop their adult plumage. At birth the chicks are black-spotted and can walk within a day. The juvenile’s feathers are mottled brown and gray for the next few years. At four years the adult plumage is white with gray wings with black tips and white heads and under parts. At all stages the legs are a dull pink color and the eyes pale yellow. The yellow beak of the Herring Gull has a red spot near the tip of the lower half which the young chicks peck at to stimulate the adult’s regurgitation of food. The young are fed for about 12 weeks.

When the breeding season is over, adults and their young may leave the nesting site but the adults stay in the general area year round as long as food and open water are available.

Herring Gulls have adapted to our changing landscapes and according to Audubon Magazine, by studying them we can learn about tool use in animals, and gather information about pollutants in our environment. I guess they’re not so bad after all.
Turkey Posole  
(A Mexican Soup/Stew)  

Ingredients:  
1 Tbs. olive oil  
1 cup onion, chopped  
1 medium red pepper, cut into 1/2 inch strips  
4 jalapeno chilies, seeded, minced  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 teaspoon chili powder  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
30 ounce can hominy (posole), rinsed and drained  
14.5 ounce can low sodium, low-fat chicken broth  
2 cups cooked turkey meat  
1 cup loosely packed, fresh cilantro leaves, chopped  
2 tablespoon lime juice  

Directions:  
1. In a 5 quart Dutch oven or sauce pot, heat oil over medium heat until hot. Add onion and red pepper; cook until vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes.  
2. Add jalapeno and garlic, and cook 1 minute longer. Add chili powder, cumin, coriander, and cayenne pepper; cook 30 seconds, stirring constantly.  
3. Add hominy (posole), chicken broth and cooked turkey to mixture; heat to boiling over high heat. Reduce heat to low; cover and simmer 5 minutes to blend flavors and heat through.  

Remove Dutch oven from heat; stir in cilantro and lime juice.  

Yields about 8 servings  

Source: Recipe modified by staff at CUCE-Cortland County from a recipe found at www.goodhousekeeping.com/recipes  

Recipe analyzed using The Food Processor® Nutrition Analysis Software from ESHA Research, Salem, Oregon.
Plan To Be Active!

By Jordy Kivett

Spring, summer and early fall are busy times for gardeners. Gardening not only gets you outside, but it is also a great form of physical activity (as you probably already know). As the weather cools, many of us get less physical activity than we should. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommend that most adults ages 18-64 should be moderately active at least 2 hours and 30 minutes per week. Any activity that elevates your heart rate or gets you breathing harder, while still being able to carry on a conversation is considered moderate. Once the snow, and ice, covers the ground, locally this becomes more of a challenge.

Not only do we have to battle the weather, but the beginning of the coldest season is also marked with holidays that promote lots of eating. There seems to be a parade of baked goods from November to January, which should be a motivator to be more active, but seems to have the opposite effect, at least for me. We also get busy with planning holiday events and spending time with friends and family, which may also cut into your active time. So how can you combat this?

Plan, plan, plan! The more you plan, the more successful your physical activity will be. Plan around your barriers. If you do not like walking in the cold, or if the ice makes this particularly dangerous for you, choose another location for being active. You may want to change your routine altogether and try a swim or aerobic program for the winter months. A less expensive option may be to find a safe place to walk, like the mall, or an indoor track, possibly at your local school.

Schedule the activity. This may be preset, if a school has a set track walking time, or if you enroll in an exercise class. If this is the case, look at this as an appointment, and only break for things that are truly worth it. If you are setting the schedule, find a regular time and days of the week that work for you and stick to them. I find, with a gym membership, it helps to break down the number of times I get to the gym per week with a cost. If I go three times instead of four I am getting more for my money, which is a great motivator.

Enlist family and friends. Try to find ways to incorporate others into your activity routine. If you are going to mall walk, you will probably find that you get up and out more often if you have a friend waiting for you. Also initiate physical activities at family gatherings. While a few people would rather stay on the couch, some family members and friends will likely be thrilled to have a chance to go for a walk. The walkers will probably feel better after the big meal too.

Physical activity has so many benefits, from lowering risk of chronic disease to reducing stress, that you should really make being active regularly a priority. If 150 minutes a week sounds overwhelming, start in just 10 minute increments and increase the duration gradually. If you make being active a part of your routine, you will most likely enjoy more holiday seasons and enjoy each holiday season more.
On-bill recovery financing: saving energy and money

By Peter Hagar

Making energy-saving improvements can seem expensive, but now there’s a budget-friendly way to make energy saving improvements to your home and upgrade its value. With the new On-Bill Recovery Financing program, the amount of your monthly repayment is pegged to your projected energy savings.

Get a free comprehensive home energy assessment. Available free to most New Yorkers and performed by a Building Performance Institute (BPI) accredited Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® contractor. In addition to measuring your home’s energy performance, your Home Performance contractor will perform important health and safety tests to ensure major combustion appliances (furnace, boiler, water heater, stove) are operating properly.

Install upgrades. A Home Performance contractor will do the work and install the upgrades that you choose. There are a number of approved upgrades you could make, like replacing a water heater or furnace, insulating your attic, weatherizing your home and more.

Pay for the Upgrades. The cost of your upgrade is added to your monthly utility bill and spread over 5, 10 or 15 years and the monthly cost is pegged to your projected savings. If you decide to sell your home, the remaining monthly installments will be billed to the new utility account holder. And you don’t pay anything up-front.

Locally, customers of New York State Electric and Gas Corporation & National Grid are eligible for the On-Bill Recovery Financing Program.

For more information about the Home Performance with EnergyStar Home Energy Assessment and On Bill Financing, contact Peter Hagar, Energy Program educator at 561-7450 or email phh7@cornell.edu

New Master Forest Owner Volunteer in Clinton County

Dennis Easley has just finished his Master Forest Owner (MFO) volunteer training through the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell and is now ready to schedule 4-hour site visits with forest owners in Clinton County.

The MFO training is 4 days long, where they learn about sawtimber and wildlife management, forest economics, and ecology. The MFOs continue to receive information updates, attend refresher classes and maintain contact with natural resource managers from private, public, and academic organizations.

For more information about the MFO program visit http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/mfo/ To schedule a time for Dennis to come by, contact our office at 561-7450 and we’ll give him your contact information. Then he’ll be in touch with you to set up a time to meet.

Thanks very much to Dennis for offering his time and expertise!
The 2012 Eco-Bot Challenge

By Chelsea Baxter

Do you like designing things or finding out how things work? October 10th was National 4-H Science day and millions of youth across America became scientists for the day by exploring, designing and using their science skills during the 2012 Eco-Bot Challenge!

This challenge gave youth the opportunity to enhance their engineering skills by learning to think like an engineer while assembling their own robots called Eco-Bots! The Eco-Bot is an environmentally friendly robot engineered by youth scientists to clean up a simulated oil spill on Bailey Beach. This challenge gave youth an opportunity to learn more about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) careers and community service outreach in an encouraging and positive environment.

Part One: Build Your Bot
Youth assemble their Eco-Bot and discover how the robot functions.

Part Two: The Goal is Control
Youth design a set of control surfaces to program the Eco-Bot to perform a simulated environmental clean-up project.

Part Three: Make a Clean Sweep
Youth then measure the effectiveness of their control surfaces by recording how much of the spill is “swept up” by the Eco-Bot.

CCE Clinton County 4-H held an Eco-Bot Challenge at the Champlain Centre Mall in Plattsburgh on Saturday October 27th, 2012 in the food court near Best Buy. Any youth in 2nd – 12th grade was able to participate in this event. We worked with more than 20 youth. The eco-bot challenge was a success! Thanks to Jeffords Steel who sponsored our kits, which allowed the youth participants to bring their eco-bots home with them to share and experiment with their families!

Take this 4-H challenge home with you by ordering a kit at: www.4-hmall.org
On this website you will also find a PDF version of the youth and the facilitator guides, as well as a printable challenge mat to test out your experiment.

The eco-bot is easy to assemble once you have all of the required materials.
♦ Cut off the end of the toothbrush so you have the end with the bristles.
♦ Attach a 3cm piece of double sided mounting tape to the top of the toothbrush.
♦ Attach the 10mm pager motor to the end of the toothbrush head with the rotating motor hanging off like a propeller.
♦ Attach the button cell watch battery with the positive side facing up and the red wire under it.
♦ Place a 1cm piece of double sided mounting tape to the blue wire.
♦ Press the blue wire to the top of the battery and watch your eco-bot come to life!

Happy Experimenting!

Are you curious about all that’s going in our 4-H program?
Check out the Clover Express at the link below! Call our office if you’d like to find out more about how you can get involved.
http://www.ccecc4hce.blogspot.com/
Wreath Making with Natural Materials

Saturday, December 1st
10:00 am to noon
With Jolene Wallace

Jolene Wallace will hold a hands-on workshop on making wreaths and centerpieces using natural materials. Your $22 registration fee includes an 18 inch grapevine wreath and a variety of pinecones, pods, nuts, and other gifts from nature to augment your supply.

This is a great workshop for those of you who think you are not creative! Bring a friend or make one here for an enjoyable morning activity and go home with a wreath that is as individual as you are and that your family will enjoy year after year. Pace is limited so register now!

Call us at 561-7450 or email Jolene at jmw442@cornell.edu.
Dear Extension Friend,

Last week we sent you a letter on bright green paper, asking you to consider a donation. Here is the heart of the letter as a reminder. In addition to receiving this newsletter perhaps you’ve participated in one of our many programs, or maybe you’ve contacted us with a question or brought in a sample for us to diagnose.

Thanks to past donations and sponsors we have been able to provide our newsletters at no charge to you. We also do not charge for consultations and diagnoses of plants, pests, and problems. We do this in an effort to reach as many people as possible.

**But we need your support.** Please consider how we have helped you this past year, and then consider a donation. Your support sends a strong message to our funders during these tough financial times that you value us as a resource.

**County, state and federal funding make up only 55% of our total operating funds, the rest we must raise through grants, program fees and donations.**

New this year, if you use the internet you can send in your donation on-line via PayPal or Google Wallet, which saves you the cost of postage and writing a check. Just visit our website at [www.cce.cornell.edu/clinton](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/clinton) or google “CCE Clinton” to find a link to our site and then click on the link on our home page that says *Donate Here*. You do not need to have a PayPal or Google account to use this service to pay with your credit card.

You can also send in or drop off a check (payable to *Cornell Cooperative Extension Clinton County*). Either way, my whole staff and I thank you very much for your support!!

With thanks,

*Amy Ivy*
Executive Director/Horticulture Educator

Name: ___________________________________________  Email: ______________________________

Address: ___________________________________________  Phone: _____________________________

Amount: _____ $20  _____ $40  _____ $60  _____ Other

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*North Country Gardening*
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