Welcome to 2013!
The days are already starting to get longer, the garden catalogs are piling up, spring can’t be too far away, can it?

Amy Ivy
Executive Director,
Horticulture Educator

Embrace the Seasons!
By Amy Ivy

A lot of people grumble about winter weather but hey, what do you expect in northern NY? I realize gardeners want nice weather for gardening but I like the changing seasons. And since you can’t do anything about it, you might as well figure out a way to enjoy it!

The short days of winter are a great time of year to get caught up on indoor gardening related activities. I have a stack of gardening articles, magazines and books to read that’s been growing all year. There are some days when I am actually glad the weather is miserable so I hunker down at home in a comfy chair and get some serious reading done. This is also a good time to get started on that gardening journal you’ve been meaning to keep. If you get it all laid out now, it will be a lot easier to fill in once the busy season returns.

We finally have high-speed internet at home and I’m amazed by how easy it is to lose track of time looking around the web. There are endless resources available there. Use some caution when you hunt around the web though, since anyone can post anything. There’s plenty of misinformation and hardcore sales pitches out there. A site that ends in “.com” is trying to sell you something so consider their advice carefully. When in doubt look for sites that end in “.edu” which indicates a university source, or go to well-known companies; just remember that they’re in the business to sell.

Caution is also advised for viewing video clips. There are some terrific how-to clips out there, but anyone can post anything. Always consider the source of the information before giving it too much credence.

Here’s a particularly good site to get you started: http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/index.html or you can also find this page by searching for “gardening Cornell” on your search engine.

Embrace the Seasons!
By Emily Selleck

Years ago, when I was living in an apartment I shared with three of my nursing school classmates on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, I used to marvel at the cockroaches that also shared our apartment. Just for fun, I used to sneak up on them when they were just finishing up the left-over crumbs from our last night’s supper. As dawn was breaking, I would quietly open my bedroom door and snap on the kitchen lights. I swear I could hear them running over the metal drain board in the sink as they dashed for safety down the drain or behind the stove or... No matter what we tried – “Roach Hotels”, moth balls (what did I know then?) – The roaches not only survived but multiplied. Looking back now, I was a mere nuisance to those humble creatures that have survived lo 280 million years.

We humans have also proven resilient and adaptable. As a species we have survived World Wars, disease epidemics, and political shenanigans. We have moved into nearly every place on Earth except the oceans. The question now is - How many people can the Earth support? The Earth we live on is finite and therefore imposes limits. Different choices in how we use the Earth in our own backyards, on our farms and forest lands, and in our community spaces lead directly to vastly different outcomes. The choices we are making now may be placing too heavy a load on the Earth’s capacity to support not only us but an enormous range of biodiversity as well.

Putting this into a positive perspective, let’s look at the possible role of community gardens. The history of community gardens as a response to crisis situations is well-known. Consider the 20 million Victory Gardens that were planted under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture. At that time (during World War Two), the appeal focused on self-reliance as an American value. In today’s parlance of “dependence on foreign oil” (which is linked to climate change) we can make a similar bid for self-reliance through community gardens. Present economic conditions further impart a rationale for

North Country Gardening
local, low-cost, food security opportunities.

Carbon sequestration involved locking up carbon in plant materials and soil. Let’s look at community gardens’ carbon sequestration potential. One estimate of carbon sequestration has been calculated for a 0.4 acre organic community garden that had increased its soil organic matter from 1% to 7% in 10 years. Conservatively estimating that soil organic matter was confined to the top 8 inches of soil, this community garden had sequestered 19 tons of carbon from the atmosphere over that 10 year period. Considering the average American releases 6-6.5 tons of carbon into the atmosphere each year, this single community garden offset about 3 years of an average American’s carbon emissions, or more if the soil organic matter ran deeper.

Roughly estimating the potential carbon sequestration contribution over the past 10 years of the estimated 10,000 community gardens already in the U.S., community gardens have sequestered 190,000 tons of carbon, offsetting about 1 year’s worth of carbon emissions for 30,400 Americans. If half as successful as the Victory Gardens movement, there could be 10 million gardens. Assuming the same calculations used in the analysis above and projecting 10 years ahead, these 10 million community gardens would sequester 190 million tons of carbon, offsetting 1 year’s worth of emissions for 30,400,000 Americans – about 11% of the U.S. population!

Let me leave you with this thought: Gardening gets you outside productively and pleasantly occupied for at least an hour - an hour not spent in driving, not spent using a computer or other appliances, and not spent indoors in an environment that uses energy-dependent cooling/heating/lighting. Now what could you make of them apples?

**Attributions:**
“Community Gardening: A Parsimonious Path to Individual, Community, and Environmental Resilience”, by Heather A. Okvat and Alex J. Zautra, American Journal of Community Psychology, 2011

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**Pots for Houseplants**
*By Amy Ivy*

Pots are made of all kinds of materials. Unglazed clay pots are traditional and work quite well, but because they not glazed they are porous. This means the potting mix will dry out more quickly since some evaporation occurs through the walls of the pot, and they are a little harder to disinfect between uses. Also, if you over-fertilize, white crust will form on the inside rim and sometimes the outside of the pot which may make them unsightly.

Plastic and glazed pottery pots are not porous. Plastic pots are lighter and easier to handle, but with taller plants the weight of a pottery pot can help stabilize it. I have a large, broad jade tree at home that would topple right over if I grew it in a plastic pot.

It’s also important to match the size of the pot to the size of your plant. Avoid using a pot too large for the rootball of your plant. When repotting to a larger sized pot, increase the size by only a couple of inches in diameter. Move your plants up gradually in pot size, rather than jumping from a four inch pot to a twelve inch pot all at once. This gives the roots time to expand into the new mix without becoming waterlogged in the excess. This may not make sense to you if you haven’t tried it, but experienced houseplant growers know what I mean. Trust me on this one!
Watch Where You Throw That Snow!

By Jolene Wallace

You may think that now that it’s officially winter you have several months before you need to think about your garden or landscape. After all, it’s cold, everything is dormant, the ground is frozen, and we’ve had our first snow. The tools are put away, maybe even sharpened and oiled in preparation for next spring. Garden hoses have been disconnected and drained. The lawn mower is at the back of the garage and the snow blower is in the front. Instead of a flowering plant and a watering can you have a snow shovel and a bucket of ice salt next to the front door. Besides perusing seed catalogs during the winter, what else is there to do with the garden?

A surprising number of things you do and choices you make this winter can have an impact on your yard and garden in the spring, particularly when it comes to snow removal and keeping your walkways free of ice.

Did you ever think about how ice forms and how it melts? The freezing point of water is 32°F Fahrenheit so when the temperature of water falls below 32°F the movement of the molecules slow and it freezes. Because most ice has a thin film of water on it, salt sprinkled on ice dissolves and mixes with the water. The resulting salt water has a lower freezing point than water alone so it does not refreeze. This makes the sidewalks safer for walking on. While doing our sidewalk cleanup after subsequent freezes we may shovel or snow blow this ice/snow/salt mixture into or in the direction of a flower bed or landscape planting or it may drain into those areas. This can result in damage to your plants that won’t be evident until the following spring or summer.

If you take a tablespoon of salt and add a few drops of water at a time you will see how quickly salt absorbs the water. The same is true of any salt that is deposited at the base of your plantings. The water that the salt is absorbing is the water that the roots of your plants would normally take up. You may think that your plant is getting plenty of water but won’t know that the plant does not have access to it until the plant shows signs of drought or root damage injuries. In addition, the chloride ions that separate from the salt in water can be taken up by the plants. Unfortunately you may not make the connection that the leaf scorch, yellow foliage and even premature fall coloration is due to something that transpired the previous winter.

So what can you do this winter to minimize damage to your landscape? The most important thing is to be aware of where you shovel or blow snow. If you have other options avoid depositing snow where you have plantings or plan to plant in the spring. Use ice melting products sparingly where you need it the most; along the walkways and on the driveway of your home. Wait until it stops snowing and the shoveling is done before applying de-icing products. Certainly, the safety of you and your family when walking on slick surfaces is your first priority but when you have options it pays to think ahead to spring.

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North Country Gardening
In January when I return from vacation I am going to hang suet feeders for the birds that spend winter in the North Country. I would have hung them earlier but I knew I was going to be away for a while and didn’t want them to depend on my having food for them. I know that winter birds forage for berries and seeds in addition to feasting at feeders and that they wouldn’t go hungry, but still….

On cold, windy days and even colder nights, meeting the needs of our birds is something you may want to help out with. Birds need 3 things, regardless of the time of year; food, water, and shelter. As you can imagine meeting these needs is easier in the summer when there are plenty of insects, water, and leafy trees and bushes. In the winter when the insects are gone or have gone dormant, the trees and bushes are mostly bare and water sources are frozen, it can be rough going for our feathered friends. Hanging bird-seed feeders or suet feeders gives the birds a place to come when food is scarce or harder to access. If you choose to feed the birds this winter keep in mind that they are more likely to come to your feeders if they are hung close to a place where they can take refuge if a predator is nearby. This may be shrubbery, a tree, or evergreens about 10 feet from the feeders. This distance keeps squirrels and cats from jumping onto the feeder or the birds.

Water is essential to the birds during the winter and a watering station at your home will ensure you a steady supply of feathered visitors. Birds need to bathe even in the winter to keep their features clean to insure proper insulation. Birds normally drink and bathe in puddles so a supply of water close to the ground would be super. A shallow pan or garbage can lid is easy to clean and can sit just about anywhere. Sand at the bottom will help with the bird’s footing and small twigs will enable the birds to drink without getting their feet wet. Immersion style water heaters can keep the water from freezing and are available where bird feeding items are sold or at a hardware store. You can also use a light bulb in a flower pot with the water container on top to prevent freezing. If neither of these is an option, try putting out fresh water each day, maybe in the morning as you are heading to work.

The website www.allaboutbirds.org from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a wealth of year-round information about birds, bird feeding, and bird watching, including information on 585 species of birds and identification tips, sounds, and videos of 133. You and your family may be interested in becoming part of the Project Feeder Watch, available from this same site under Get Involved. This Citizen-Science program uses your help to gather information about the birds visiting your feeders. There are a number of programs to choose from based on your interests and the time you have to spend. What a great winter project for the whole family!
By Lisa Caito

A group of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Clinton County 4-H youth members were awarded the First Place Champions Award at the First Lego League (FFL) Competition held on December 1, 2012 at Clarkson University in Potsdam, NY.

The team named the “E.N.I.A.C. Masterbots” consisted of homeschool 4H middle-school students: Sullivan Kyle of Hemingford, QC, Vienna Ainsworth of Plattsburgh, Liam Sayward of Peru, Benjamin Caito of Jay, Bradley and Christopher Neureuther of West Chazy, and Trent Yourdon of Keeseville. Homeschooled high-school sophomore Vaughn Bernard of Peru provided guidance and instruction in robotics. At the competition, the team was evaluated in three areas: project development, robot performance/design and teamwork. Sixteen teams competed in the Northern New York Championship Tournament. The E.N.I.A.C. Masterbots have been invited to participate at the national FFL World Festival in St. Louis, MO in April 2013.

The First Lego League is a national program that combines robotics, computer programming and engineering by using Lego building blocks to construct robots and to program them to successfully complete tasks. The students also are expected to demonstrate the FLL Core Values (teamwork, Cooperation and Gracious Professionalism ) and complete a project based on a theme. The theme of this year’s competition was Senior Solutions.

During the competition, teams sent their robots through an obstacle course of sorts, programming them to complete tasks related to activities that would be of interest to senior citizens or related to issues senior citizens experience. For example, one exercise required the robot to turn on a video device that seniors might use to stay in contact with their loved ones. Teams accumulated points based on successfully completed tasks.

While this was certainly the most exciting part of the event, it was only one aspect of the competition. In addition, each team was required to give a group presentation on how they portrayed the FLL Core Values and participate in a team challenge where they were evaluated on their teamwork ability. The Masterbots talked about the challenges they overcame and the friendships that were formed.

Lastly, each team was asked to develop a solution to a problem senior citizens experience. Each team identified a senior partner to work with and interview. The Masterbots chose to work with a local retired college professor who expressed his biggest daily obstacle was misplacing important things he needed. Other team members’ grandparents echoed his issue. The team evaluated current products on the market and identified changes and modifications that would be needed, believing that if an effective product existed, seniors would already be using it. The team then designed a device and interface system that would assist senior citizens in locating important items. The team applied for a provisional patent with the help of the Shipley Center for Innovation at Clarkson University.

North Country Gardening
Watering Houseplants in Winter

By Amy Ivy

Pity our houseplants this time of year. Most of them are tropical, meaning they naturally grow where it’s warm and humid. Now consider your living room in January; ‘tropical’ is probably the last word you’d use to describe it! Our bathroom feels pretty tropical for about 10 minutes after someone takes a shower but otherwise our heated homes are extremely dry with very low humidity. Some rooms may be overly hot from a woodstove, a lot of rooms are chilly to conserve fuel. There may be cold drafty windows and doors and/or hair-dryer type air from a forced air furnace or wood fire.

Giving your plants the right amount of water to meet their needs is critical to their survival over the winter. The number one killer of houseplants is improper watering. People always ask how much or often they should water, and the only correct answer is to water as much as the plant needs.

Most plants do best if you let them become slightly dry between waterings. Roots need air just as much as they need water, so you want to be sure they get both. When soil stays soggy, most of the air spaces are filled with water and the roots can literally drown.

Some plants, especially those with thin leaves, give you clues they need water by wilting. Catch them just as they begin to droop and give them a good soak. Others, especially those with thick, fleshy or leathery leaves don’t change that much. I’ve grown jade trees long enough now that I can tell by the shine of their leaves when they are thirsty. Then I poke the soil in the pot with my finger to be sure. Another way to tell is to heft the pot. With practice you’ll get to know what each plant normally feels like, and as it dries out it gets lighter. I find this helps with some of my larger pots. I don’t have to pick up the whole pot, I just try to lift or tip it a bit to get a sense of its weight.

When in doubt, wait a little longer. For most plants it’s better to let them get a little too dry between waterings than to keep them too wet. There are exceptions though, so it’s always best to start by reading up on each houseplant you have, to learn about their particular quirks.

Local youth, continued...

The team will continue to improve their robotics design and further develop their product as they prepare to attend the World Festival. They will be among only 85 teams from around the world who are invited. Winners from the various state, regional, and country competitions receive invitations to attend the World Festival based on a lottery system. This year the 1st Place Winner of the Clarkson Competition was invited to attend.

“All the team members enjoyed their experience” said Trent Yourdon of Keeseville, “I learned a lot about robotics. But even better I learned more about my friends. I made good friends.” Bradley Neureuther of West Chazy summed up the thoughts of the team members when he said, “I am definitely doing it again next year. I learned a lot and it was a whole lot of fun.”
Pork Chops w/ Mandarin Orange Salsa

Submitted by Jordy Kivett

A savory fruit-based salsa anchors this colorful, fruit- and vegetable-rich meal. Tender pork chops slowly marinated and baked to perfection are highlighted by the lime and orange undertones of this flavorful experience.

Preparation time: 45 Minutes (not incl. marinating time)
Serves: 4
Cups of Fruits and Vegetables per Serving: 1.5

Ingredients:
4 4-oz. boneless pork loin chops, raw
8 clementines (aka Mandarin Oranges)
½ cup orange juice
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
1 teaspoon onion powder
2 teaspoons salt substitute seasoning
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 tablespoon cucumber, diced
2 tablespoons grape tomatoes, quartered (about 4)
1 tablespoon bell peppers, diced
2 lime wedges, juice only
2 cups brown rice, cooked
2 cups spinach, cooked, drained

Instructions:
Place pork chops in casserole dish. Peel, seed, and section the clementines. Place half of the clementine sections in a small bowl (chop the other half, reserve and refrigerate for later use in salsa). Use a fork to press half the sections into small pieces. Add orange juice and soy sauce and mix together well. Pour mixture over pork chops, being sure that the chops are completely covered with marinade.

Cover the dish and refrigerate 4-6 hours or overnight. Pre-heat oven to 350°F. In a small dish, blend onion powder, salt substitute seasoning, and chili powder. Remove chops from marinade and season both sides with spice mix. Bake in the oven for 22-28 minutes, depending on the thickness of the pork chops.

Combine the cucumber, grape tomatoes, bell pepper and lime juice with the remaining clementines to make a fruit and vegetable salsa. Prepare brown rice and spinach according to directions on package. Serve each pork chop with equal amounts of clementine salsa, 1/2 cup of brown rice and 1/2 cup of spinach.

Each serving provides: An excellent source of vitamin A, vitamin C, folate, calcium, magnesium, potassium and fiber.

Credit: Recipe was developed for Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) by Chef Mark Goodwin CEC, CNC. This recipe meets PBH and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) nutrition standards that maintain fruits and vegetables as healthy foods.

Nutritional Information per Serving
Calories: 467  Carbohydrates: 55g
Total Fat: 15.2g  Cholesterol: 67mg
Saturated Fat: 4.9g  Dietary Fiber: 9g
Protein: 31g  Sodium: 310mg
% of Calories from Fat: 28%

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North Country Gardening
Winter is Citrus Season

By Jordy Kivett

The winter months are a great time to buy fresh citrus, both because they tend to be less expensive and can add a lot of freshness, though it is cold and dark outside. Citrus refers to a variety of fruit that is typically juicy and thick skinned. Oranges, lemons, limes and grapefruit are all types of citrus and each type has many varieties. When shopping for citrus choose pieces of fruit that feel heavy for their size, as this is indicative of juiciness. This time of year fresh citrus is in season and an even wider variety of fruit can be found at your local grocery store.

Lemons- look for brightly colored fruit and use their tart juice in dressings and marinades or drinks.

Meyer lemons- a sweeter variety of lemon with thinner skin and are often used in baking or making lemonade.

Limes- look for bright green limes, though they commonly have brown marks, and use juice in dressings, marinades and drinks.

Key limes- often used in drinks and are tarter than regular limes.

Navel oranges- this fruit should be easy to peel and very juicy and is best for eating fresh.

Valencia oranges- the skin is more yellow and green than that of a navel orange, and flesh is a little tangier. They are great for juicing.

Tangerines- very sweet and juicy, with a distinct taste, they are less acidic than oranges.

Clementine tangerines- very sweet and easy to peel, these petite citrus are great for snacking.

Minneolas (photo below) - this fruit has a bump on one end, making it sort of pear shaped, it has a great tart taste and is a good choice for eating fresh.

Grapefruit- both red and white grapefruit have a tart, fresh flavor, often served with a sprinkle of sugar or salt to cut the sourness.

Uniq or ugli fruit (photo below) - large bumpy green and yellow skinned citrus, that truly does look ugly (in comparison), but is a cross between a tangerine and a grapefruit and is best enjoyed fresh.

All varieties of citrus are good sources of vitamin C and have fiber, which is important for many health reasons. While citrus is in season try to choose the actual citrus fruit instead of the juice more often, as it is lower in calories, higher in fiber and also cheaper than juice. Get creative both with types of citrus and also with using it in cooking. Adding citrus to the menu can really brighten up a dark winter night. A citrus salsa tastes great on fish or chicken and citrus makes a great marinade base for pork or beef. Using the juice or zest in baking can make a quick bread or other baked good distinct. Check out the produce section and try something new!

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/
Energy Saving Tips

By Peter Hagar

I don’t know of anyone who isn’t interested in saving money on their energy bills these days. There are quite a few simple, no cost or low cost things you can do to cut back on your home energy use but still stay comfortable.

As part of NYSERDA’s EmPower NY Program, we at Cornell Cooperative Extension are offering some free programs to explain some of these simple money-saving steps you can take.

On January 22nd, 2013 we will hold a workshop here at the Extension office in Plattsburgh from 6-8:00 pm.

We’ll be scheduling more during the winter in various locations around the county so keep in touch to find out about them.

We start with heating your home since that’s where most of your energy dollars go. There are ways you can stay comfortable and still use less energy to keep warm. Lowering your thermostat at night and when you’re out of the house can really make a difference, and it’s a lot cheaper to use an electric blanket instead of keeping your bedroom at a higher temperature.

We all have drafts in our house to one extent or another and blocking those drafts can save a significant amount on your energy bill. We’ll explain some ways to do that at our workshops and every family will receive a free kit of energy-saving items.

Many people are surprised to learn they can lower their hot water heaters to 120 degrees – that’s plenty hot for dishes and laundry. CFL’s or compact fluorescent light bulbs use 75% less energy than regular bulbs giving off the same amount of light. If every household would change just a few of their bulbs to CFL’s there would be a big reduction in our overall energy use.

So check your calendars and try to make one of our workshops to learn some simple ways to lower your energy bill.

For more information contact Peter Hagar, CCE Clinton County by calling 561-7450 or email phh7@cornell.edu

Lost Color

When choosing a houseplant, be realistic about the growing conditions in your house, especially if you are looking for plants with colorful leaves. Solid green leaves have more chlorophyll. This lets them soak up the available light in a room so in general they can tolerate lower light conditions. Variegated leaves have less chlorophyll, so in general they need a more intense source light to compensate. Often, variegated leaves will revert to a solid green color if the light levels are too low. The plant may continue to grow as well with these green leaves, but the variegation will be lost.

The croton pictured to the right is a good example. It has beautifully colored leaves all year long, as long as it gets enough light. This plant needs a bright sunny window to look its best. It will survive, but not thrive, in lower light. By Amy Ivy
**Events and Happenings**

### Growing gourmet mushrooms for forest farming in the Northeast

If you’re interested in growing mushrooms outdoors, check out this new web site from the NY Forest Mushroom Growers Network. This web site is an initiative of a larger forest cultivated mushroom research and extension project at Cornell University, and a Northeast SARE funded research/extension project, "Cultivation of shiitake mushrooms as an agroforestry crop for New England"

[http://mushrooms.cals.cornell.edu/](http://mushrooms.cals.cornell.edu/)

In addition to providing information about the mechanics of how to cultivate specialty forest mushrooms based on experience as well as extensive resources available online and in print, this website is also intended to foster communication and cooperation among amateur and professional mushroom growers, and those who are interested in trying.

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### Save The Date

**Saturday March 2, 2013**

**Meet the Farmer Local Food Event**

Full details in our February issue

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### Maple School

For current producers and anyone interested in getting started!

**February 2, 2013**

**All day event**

**Brushton-Moira Central School**

758 County Route 7, Brushton, NY

Sponsored by the Franklin County Maple Producers and the Brushton/Moira FFA. Cost of admission is $20 in advance and includes a pancake brunch.

Seminars, vendors, demos, equipment consignment auction. Early registrations will be taken at the NENYMPA meetings starting in November or you may contact John St. Mary at jstmary@mail.fehb.org, 529-7342 ext. 1204.

Note: This event will replace the usual January maple school at the Miner Institute.

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This newsletter is also available on our website:


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