You might think that February is a slow month here at the Extension office, but it is anything but. This is the time of year we make plans for workshops, programs, presentations, classes, and any number of projects for the coming spring, summer, and fall. We have some great events in the works, look inside for all the details!  ....Jolene

Groundhogs

By Paul Hetzler, CCE of St. Lawrence County

Researchers are still puzzling over the age-old question, “How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood,” but I may have a solution. Re-brand the woodchuck.

Woodchuck is an Algonquin term meaning “fat fur-ball that can inhale one’s garden faster than one can say ‘Punxsutawney Phil.’” Or something like that, I’m sure. Unfortunately, their name implies woodchucks are somehow employed in the forest-products industry. Woodchucks haven’t the teeth for chewing wood, nor do they have much use for wood in their burrows. (We can only assume their dens aren’t paneled.)

Much as I respect the origin of ‘woodchuck,’ I’m in favor of sticking to one of its other names, groundhog, which is more descriptive. Not only do these rotund herbivores reside underground, they’re such gluttons that I’m pretty sure even swine call them hogs. Tellingly, another common name is ‘whistle-pig,’ referring to groundhogs’ warning call as well as their appetite.

Groundhogs in wild areas mature at around 5-9 lbs. and 15-25” long. With access to lush gardens or tasty alfalfa, though, they can get 30” long and weigh 30lbs. Now that’s a ground hog. Needless to say, vacuuming up fields and gardens has given them a bad name in some circles.

Native to most of North America from southern Alaska to Georgia, groundhogs are a type of rodent called a marmot. They’re related to other marmots and to ground squirrels out west, but in the northeast they have no close kin. Given what a marmot can eat, that’s a mercy.

They may be gluttons, but they’re not lazy. Groundhogs dig extensive burrows up to 5’ deep and 40’ in length, each having two to five entrances.

Continued on page 5...
Food from the Farm:
Eating Local in the North Country

Saturday March 1, 2014
2:00 to 5:00 pm
Plattsburgh City Gym
52 U.S. Oval

Meet the farmers and sample tasty dishes
prepared with local food by Chef David Allen of Latitude 44 Bistro

Admission price is all inclusive:
- Lots to sample, even more food this year
- Door prizes
- Meet your farmers
- Farm products for sale, CSA sign-ups
- Information on gardening and nutrition
- Family friendly fun, kid’s table
- Recipes for cooking with local products
- Mingle with local food enthusiasts
- Support our local food economy!

Admission: $5/adult, ages 5 & under free, $20 maximum per family

Tickets available in advance on-line, at our office, or at the door
http://cce.cornell.edu/clinton
For more information contact Cornell Cooperative Extension
561-7450 or email Amy Ivy at adi2@cornell.edu

North Country Gardening
Amy’s Tips for February

By Amy Ivy

Germination Test

If you’re wondering whether the seeds in a leftover seed packet you just found in the back hall closet are still viable, there’s a simple germination test you can do. Just sprinkle 10 seeds on a damp paper towel, fold it up and place it in a plastic bag. Leave the bag in a warm place out of direct light, such as on top of your refrigerator, for about a week. Once the seeds start to sprout count how many did and didn’t sprout. If 7 or 8 of the 10 seeds sprouted they should do fine for you this year. If fewer than that sprouted, either order fresh seeds or plan on sowing extra seeds in order to end up with enough seedlings.

For future reference, instead of stashing leftover seed packets in the closet, try storing the packets in canning jars with the lid screwed on tightly in the back of your refrigerator. This will keep them at a constant temperature and moisture level.

Sometimes it’s a mystery

Just as we always recommend you choose your outdoor plants carefully to match your site, you must also choose your indoor plants carefully with your household conditions in mind. Some rooms receive very little sunlight in winter while others are flooded by the low rays of the winter sun on a clear day. Houses can be drafty or tightly built, the heat in rooms can vary from hot and dry by a wood stove or heat duct to downright cold in an unused bedroom.

I must include a disclaimer here: sometimes, even with the most careful matching and following of directions, some plants just don’t do well for some people while others thrive. I’ve talked to plenty of people who follow the growing instructions exactly but still can’t make their plant thrive or bloom. I think there are other, more subtle, factors at work and a bit of mystery. It’s what helps to keep gardeners humble.

Go ahead and try some different types of plants, but you’ll probably find there are a few you can grow well without even thinking, and a few that just don’t respond. This varies from house to house.

A friend of mine grows wonderful hibiscus that bloom all winter, but has a terrible time with cape primrose (streptocarpus) while I am just the opposite. I hardly look at my cape primrose and it blooms for weeks, but the hibiscus from the same stock as my friend’s doesn’t look nearly as vigorous and healthy as hers.

Continued on page 6...
Re-Think Your Drink

By Chelsea Baxter, 4-H and Nutrition Educator

After the holidays people are feeling the crunch. Trying to get things done with less daylight can be very exhausting. During this time people may feel inclined to stop by the drive-thru and pick up a soda or a coffee to help them re-energize and get through the day. However, it’s shocking how much sugar is in the drinks most people consume on a daily basis.

Re-thinking your drinks means stepping back and taking a look at the labels on the cans or bottles of drinks you purchase. I have used this lesson many times with my adult and youth groups to show how much unnecessary sugar is added to their day through drinks alone. You will be surprised to see how much sugar is in the juice or sports drink you, your children, or grandchildren may be drinking daily.

Materials:
Blank paper to write down drinks
A calculator to calculate how much sugar is in the drinks you like
Pen or pencil to write with
Empty drink containers
A bowl of sugar
Teaspoon

Directions:
1. Grab an empty bottle, something you have drank lately and read the label.
2. Look at the serving size (a 20 oz. bottle of cola calls a serving size 1 cup or 8 oz.)
3. Look at the servings per container (this same bottle of cola has about 2.5 servings in the bottle)
4. Now look at the amount of sugar, it’s listed in grams *this amount of sugar only tells you the amount of sugar in ONE serving.
5. If your bottle has more than one serving you must multiply (this is where your calculator comes in handy if math is not your strong suit, like me!) the servings per container by the grams of sugar in one serving.

Example: If you are using a 20 oz. bottle of cola and it has 2.5 servings per container and the amount of sugar in one serving is 27 grams you should do this: 2.5 X 27 = 67.5

6. Next, you will take the 67.5 and divide it by 4 since there are 4 grams of sugar in 1 teaspoon

In total your math will look like this:

\[2.5 \text{ (servings per container)} \times 27 \text{ (number of grams of sugar in one serving)} = 67.5 \text{ grams (number of grams of sugar in the whole container)}\]

\[67.5 \div 4 \text{ (number of grams in one teaspoon)} = 16.87 \text{ or 17 teaspoons of sugar in the entire 20 oz. bottle of cola.}\]

7. Using the sugar and teaspoon, measure out the number of teaspoons of sugar and put it into the bottle/container. This helps to visualize the raw amount of sugar you are consuming inside those delicious liquid beverages.
Groundhogs continued...

Supposedly, the average groundhog moves 35 cubic feet of soil excavating its burrow. (I’d like to know who measures these things.) Alfalfa rustling is bad enough, but this digging hobby really riles farmers. Groundhog holes and soil piles can injure livestock, weaken foundations and damage equipment. Many a farmer trying to mow hay has cursed the groundhog when the haybine ‘found’ a soil pile. Hard to appreciate groundhogs’ cuteness while you replace cutterbar knives for the tenth time.

True hibernators, groundhogs usually den up in October, their winter body temperature dropping to 50°F and their heart slowing to a few beats per minute. Groundhogs might emerge in February in Pennsylvania, but up north you won’t find one blearily sniffing around for a mate that early. I’ve seen a burrow entrance in March with a halo of dirt scattered on the snow from where the critter had recently burst out, a squint-eyed dust mop looking for love.

The notion that sun on February 2 means a late spring began in ancient Europe. That date marks the pagan festival of Imbolc, halfway between winter solstice and spring equinox. Imbolc was supplanted by Candelmas as Christianity spread, but both traditions reference the “sunny=more winter; cloudy=spring” idea.

Mostly because Europe lacked groundhogs, Groundhog Day was invented in the New World, first popping up among Pennsylvania Germans in the mid-1800s. Though Punxsutawney Phil was the original prognosticating marmot, others like Wiarton Willie, Jimmy the Groundhog and General Beauregard Lee followed.

We know groundhogs can hog a lot of ground, especially if beans and peas are growing on it. I say we pull those researchers off the wood-chucking quantification project and have them find how to make all Groundhog Days overcast.

Check out our upcoming events on Page 11!
Rooting Cuttings

This is the time of year I often come home from a friend’s house or gardening meeting with a handful of cuttings. I also like to prune a lot of my houseplants now, and that produces lots of cuttings as well.

Many folks have success rooting houseplant cuttings by sticking them in a glass of water until the roots form, then setting them in a pot of soil. If you’re happy with your results, don’t change a thing but the recommended method is actually a little different.

The roots that form in water are a different structure than the roots that form in soil so your plant is going to have an adjustment period after being potted. I find it simpler in the long run to stick my cuttings directly into a pot filled with moist, good quality potting mix rather than a glass of water. I use the same peat-based mix I grow all my houseplants in and stick 3-4 cuttings per 4-inch pot. I cover the cuttings loosely with a plastic sandwich bag and set the pot in indirect sunlight, watering the pot whenever the soil gets the least bit dry. When new growth begins I know roots have formed and I remove the bag.

Fuzzy leaved plants such as geraniums and African violets don’t need the extra moisture from the bag and are very easy to root. The woodier or browner the stem of your cutting, the harder it’s going to be to root. Try to choose sections with green stems and sturdy, healthy growth.

Wood Ashes

Every winter we get calls from people asking if they can use the ashes from their woodstoves on their gardens. Hardwood ashes contain some potassium, which is beneficial, but if you are going to add more than a bucket or two, you need to pay attention to your soil pH.

Wood ashes are half as potent as lime in raising soil pH, so it really helps to know your soil pH, and then only add extra wood ashes if the pH needs raising. It is very easy to get your pH too high; in fact, more than half the soil tests we do show a reading too high. Don’t add lime or wood ashes to your soil unless you know your pH is low and needs correction.

We test soil pH at our office and we can tell you exactly how much, if any, lime or wood ashes are needed. Again, if you only have a bucket or two of ashes, don’t worry; just scatter them over the garden. But if you have more than that, it is helpful to test your soil pH before adding many ashes.

Instructions for pH Testing

If you would like to have us perform a pH test on your soil, there are sampling instructions that we need you to follow in order to get accurate results. Note that the soil needs to be thawed and not muddy so wait until spring to get your sample. We charge $2 to cover the supplies used in testing.
1. Decide what area you want tested; a vegetable garden, flower bed, lawn, etc. Each different area should be tested separately.
2. Take a number of samples from the area to be tested. Make the samples random, not just the corners, or along one side of the bed or garden.
3. Your sample should include soil from a depth of 4-6 inches, the depth where the roots obtain nutrients.
4. Mix your samples in a plastic pail and take 1/4 cup, place in a plastic bag or container. Don’t use metal containers.
5. Bring the sample to us. We will dry it, test it, and notify you of the results.
Soup. Every winter I am drawn to soup recipes. Not only are they versatile and tasty, but it feels so good to hold a steamy bowl or mug in your semi frozen fingers and allow the soup to do its magic and return your body to the appropriate temperature. But in this article, I want to focus on one ingredient: lentils.

Depending on your feelings towards lentils, you probably had one of these reactions, the first being “yuck” or “lentils are not just for soup.” If you are in the former category, please keep reading, I have some suggestions that will make lentil soup radically different from the brownish lumpy soup you are likely envisioning.

There are a variety of lentils to choose from and I know at least a few are available for sale locally. Brown lentils are the most commonly used lentil for soups, they cook in about 30 minutes and keep their shape pretty well once they are cooked. Green lentils are a little more flavorful and also relatively firm, but have a longer cooking time, around 45 minutes. My favorites are red lentils, which cook in only 20 minutes and become soft once they are cooked. The variety I buy is actually bright orange and produces a beautifully colored soup. The texture of a soup made with red lentils is also a little smoother than a soup made with brown lentils, which can be a good thing if you are not currently a fan of lentil soup.

The recipe on page 10 is for a very basic, traditional lentil soup but can be easily modified to a range of taste and ingredients. Here are a few suggestions for variations.

Curry Lentil Soup: Use red lentils. For the vegetable mixture, omit celery, switch green pepper for a red pepper, and add 3 cloves of chopped garlic. Season with a half tsp. of turmeric, 1 tsp. of paprika and a tsp. of curry powder or more, to taste.

Garden Lentil Soup: Use brown or green lentils. For the vegetable mixture, omit carrot and celery, but add one cup of chopped summer squash (from frozen if you saved any), 1-2 handfuls of chopped kale and a few cloves of garlic, chopped. Reduce water to 7 cups, but add one can of stewed tomatoes 14.5 oz. or 1 pint jar. Season with basil and oregano, roughly 2 tsp. each.

Spicy Lentil Soup: Use any lentils. For the vegetable mixture use ½ to one cup each of onion, bell peppers, and tomatoes (or canned tomatoes). For flavor add a few cloves of garlic, chopped jalapeños, one or two, remove seeds and membranes if you like a milder flavor, 1 tbsp. of chili powder, and 1 ½ tsp. of cumin.

Continued on page 10...
Spring Can Be A State of Mind

By Jolene Wallace, Horticulture Program Educator

Now that the holidays are over and we no longer have our homes decked out in greenery, festive décor, and colorful lights, the landscape is looking pretty stark. I don’t mind winter (although the ice gets old really fast) but the white, gray, and black hues of the landscape can be pretty tedious sometimes. I’m already looking forward to colorful flowers, green leaves on the trees, and all things spring. But, spring is a very long way off.

If you find that winter starts to get you down try adding some warm colors to your surroundings. Some bright yellow, orange, or green throw pillows in the room where you spend your free time may energize you. If you have “summer linens” pull them out of the closet and start using them. A brightly colored tablecloth lightens up the dining area. I have a number of colorful shower curtains and swapping them out every few weeks helps keep the bathroom feeling fresh. Brightly colored towels add an energizing touch. Getting ready for work while it’s still dark outside, knowing that the car will be cold when you pull out of the driveway, can start your day on the down side. Try showering with a pleasantly scented soap, use a citrus scented shampoo, or anything a little different than what you are used to. You may find that it lifts your spirits.

When winter days are long and dark, keep more lights on. Wear bright, cheerful colors that you really like. I have sweatsuits in purple, bright green, and royal blue that I wear on weekends or change into when I get home from work. Try to stay away from dark, dull colors if you can. Go through your closet and put the colorful winter clothes in the front. Add a colorful scarf to your wardrobe. You may feel your spirits lift, and the people who see you may get a lift too.

There are certain foods that I associate with the seasons. Winter usually means cold weather foods like stews, chili, turkey and dumplings, and soups. The other night I made hamburgers; something I usually associate with summer. They were great. Cole slaw or potato salads aren’t just for summer you know! Have a picnic on the living room floor!

If you have children or grandchildren put them to work cutting out colorful designs for the windows. Some construction paper and scissors are all you need to spend a fun afternoon with the family. The kids will have a ball making yellow flowers, orange cats, purple snowflakes, and any number of things that will brighten their day and your windows.

If you like to read, choose a storyline set on the beach. Leave the dungeons for summer when it’s hot and you want to feel cooler. It may be “mind over matter” but for me it makes a difference. When you are stuck inside, it helps to do things that can put a “spring” in your step.

This newsletter is also available on our website: http://blogs.cornell.edu/cceclintoncounty/
Every other year we hold Gardeners March Madness and 2014 is the year! Many of our programs focus on vegetable gardening, composting, landscaping, pest management, and all things horticultural. The theme for Gardeners March Madness 2014 is Do-It-Yourself Garden Design.

If you have never designed a garden bed, or if you have an idea of a bed you would like to have but don’t know quite how to achieve it, or have been disappointed in the way your beds have looked in the past, this is the workshop for you. DIY Garden Design will be broken into four 1-hour long segments consisting of an oral or PowerPoint presentation followed by hands-on opportunities to put into practice what you have learned.

Using what you currently have to work with at home or starting from scratch point, we will cover the basics of flower garden design; qualities of plants and principles of design, including use of focal points, after which you will plot out a design that you might like to develop in your garden this spring.

In addition, we will cover the how’s and why’s of dividing perennials, edible flowers, and using certain vegetable plants to add to the flavor of your garden.

Before the end of the day you will learn about planting attractive container gardens and how their placement in your landscape can make your garden “pop”. Each participant will plant and take home a Small container garden to get them started.

This workshop is designed for all levels of gardening experience, from beginner to advanced. Because of our small group break-outs, each participant will have the attention they need to succeed!

This workshop will be held on Saturday, March 22 from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm at the Plattsburgh Elks Lodge on Cumberland Avenue. Pre-registration is required. The fee for the workshop is $20 and includes all your materials, coffee, drinks, and snacks. You will bring your own sack lunch.

Your paid registration guarantees your place at the workshop. For more information or to register call the office at 561-7450 or contact Jolene at jmw442@cornell.edu.

Are you curious about all that’s going on 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/
Using Lentils, continued...

Hopefully you find something here that appeals to you. Lentils are a great source of fiber and protein (check the nutrition facts for the soup recipe) and they are inexpensive and filling. Enjoy!

Lentil Stew

Ingredients:
- 8 cups of water
- 1 pound lentils, washed
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 large green pepper, diced
- 1 cup carrots, diced
- 1 cup celery, diced
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, if desired
- 1 teaspoon salt, if desired

Directions:
In a large pot, boil water. Add lentils and return to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer.

Heat oil in a frying pan. Add onions, green pepper, carrots, celery and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the vegetable mixture to the pot of lentils; simmer for 1 hour. Season with pepper and salt (if desired).

Yields about 8 servings

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Source:

A “Save Energy, Save Dollars” Event for those who missed it

“Save Energy, Save Dollars”, will be repeated on Tuesday, February 11, at 6:00 pm, at the Clinton County Cooperative Extension Office located at 6064 Rte 22, Suite #5 in Plattsburgh.

Instructor, Peter Hagar from Cornell Cooperative Extension, will explore the many ways to reduce your energy bills through no-cost/low-cost energy actions. **FREE Energy saving items will be provided.**

**Fun, Free and Open to the Public. Bring a Friend!**

Please be sure to register so we can notify you of any changes due to weather, etc.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension at 561-7450.

See you then!

North Country Gardening
Tuesday, February 11 — In case January’s cold weather kept you home, there will be a repeat of the FREE workshop: “Save Energy, Save Dollars” on Tuesday, February 11 at 6:00 pm, at the Clinton County Cooperative Extension Office located at 6064 Rte. 22, Suite #5 in Plattsburgh. See previous page for details.

Food From the Farm — Saturday, March 1 we will be holding our annual Food From the Farm event at the Plattsburgh City Gym from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. This popular event gives you and your family a chance to meet the farmers and local food producers in our region and sample some of their great products. Have fun and how your support for our local farmers and food producers at the same time. See page 2 for all the details.

ABA Annual Home and Garden Show — Saturday, March 8 and Sunday March 9 the Master Gardener Volunteers will be at the Adirondack Builders Association Home and Garden show with a great display on “What’s Bugging You?” There are ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’ in the insect world; do you know which are which? Most insects are harmless, but some can be a threat to our forests. Join the Master Gardener Volunteers for an interesting look at the insect world.

Gardeners March Madness — Saturday, March 22 Do-It-Yourself Garden Design is the theme for this workshop which will run from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm at the Elks Lodge in Plattsburgh. The workshop combines presentations with hands-on, break out groups to put into practice what you have learned. See page 9 for details.

We are interested in your ideas!

Do you have ideas for articles you would like to see in North Country Gardening or topics that you would like to know more about? This is a newsletter we put out for you so your thoughts and interests are important to us. Contact Jolene at 561-7450 or jmw442@cornell.edu if you have suggestions for us.

Program Outreach

One of my goals for 2014 is to make horticulture programming more available to some of the outlying areas of Clinton County and to many of our senior citizens who have a love of, or an interest in, gardening. I recognize that at the end of the day, with dinner to prepare and evening activities, it’s not easy to travel to a presentation, workshop, or program, even if it is of interest to you. The Master Gardener volunteers are more than happy to make things easier by bringing programs to you. If you provide the audience, we can manage the rest. We have put together a “menu” of programs you may be interested in. For you seniors out there, we want to help make it easier for you as well. Senior centers, living facilities, or organizations are encouraged to contact me to explore the possibilities of getting back to gardening. I look forward to hearing from you. Jolene 561-7450, jmw442@cornell.edu

North Country Gardening