I am not a birdwatcher, but do enjoy seeing and hearing birds. I especially enjoy seeing woodpeckers and have begun doing a little research about them. So far I have learned that I have a lot to learn! I don’t intend to seriously study birds but I am fascinated by what I have learned so far and will share some of the information with you in this issue. 

I recently saw two brownish colored birds with black markings in my backyard. I had never seen these birds before and I usually notice anything different in the yard. They were standing on the lawn pecking at the ground. I didn’t know what they were, but a houseguest recognized them right away and told me they were flickers. I got out my *Birds of New York Field Guide* by Stan Tekiela, looked them up and learned something I didn’t know before.

Northern Flickers are large woodpeckers, about 12 inches long, and are brown with black spots on their breasts and black crescents that form a “necklace” around their necks. When looking at them in flight you will notice they have a white rump and the undersides of their wings and tail are yellow. They have a red patch on the nape of their necks and the males have a black mustache. Flickers are the only woodpeckers that routinely feed on the ground, where they find ants, beetles, and insects.

I was surprised that these birds were woodpeckers since they didn’t look anything like the woodpeckers I am familiar with. Again, I went to my field guide and to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website, [www.cornell.birds.edu/](http://www.cornell.birds.edu/) to check out woodpeckers in New York.

There are nine species of woodpeckers that breed in New York—the red-headed, red-bellied, downy, hairy, three-toed, black-backed, and pileated woodpeckers and the northern flicker and the yellow-bellied sapsucker.

The northern flicker, red-headed woodpecker, and yellow bellied sapsucker are migratory, the others...
Marshmallow Trees

By Paul Hetzler, Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County

I don’t know about you, but I really look forward to those sticky evenings around a campfire. Not the sweltering, sweaty kind of sticky nights, mind you. I’m thinking of those outdoor-night evenings spent with family and friends, dodging mosquitoes and smoke and trying to find the perfect marshmallow stick. I realize campers roast other things on sticks, such as hot dogs and fish (helpful hint: don’t eat the fish sticks), or even beer cans if you’re a college-age male (not that I’d know). For our purposes, though, we’ll stick—so to speak—to marshmallow.

A caller recently asked what kind of tree yields the best marshmallow sticks. It seemed like a silly question since the scientific method for finding the right stick historically involved two criteria: It must be 1) close at hand, and 2) long enough to avoid burning oneself. However, it occurred to me if it’s a fresh-cut green branch, the species of tree is important.

Wild (black) cherry has tasty fruit, but its bark and leaves contain cyanogenic glycosides that are converted to toxic hydrogen cyanide in the body. These chemicals are destroyed when heated to the boiling point, which is why so many animals have been poisoned from consuming black cherry leaves and twigs: they neglected to cook them. Although the amount of cyanogenic glycosides in the tip of a black cherry branch is probably tiny, it’s something to consider.

Yellow and black birch produce wintergreen oil. Not only is a birch branch safe, it’s delicious. Birch twigs were once the source of commercial flavoring for candy, so you’ll get a slightly wintergreen-tasting marshmallow.

Willow branches contain salicin, which our bodies convert to acetylsalicylic acid, or aspirin. Willow has been used for pain relief for thousands of years. Our native black willows, the ones that grow so large on stream banks, have the highest salicin content of any willow. Cut a black willow stick, take two marshmallows, and call me in the morning.

Witch hazel bark is an effective astringent, which means it constricts body tissues. Its leaves and bark are still used to make various over-the-counter products to relieve eczema, hemorrhoids and other ailments. Using this type of branch is perfectly harmless, but unless you need help puckering up, don’t eat the witch hazel marshmallows.

Many of our native viburnums such as wild raisin and arrowwood give off volatile chemicals called butyrates after they’re cut, compounds which smell akin to dirty socks. I don’t know how long it takes a fresh-cut branch to smell funny—feel free to experiment.

Buckthorn is an invasive shrub or small tree that has glossy leaves, and berries that are dark purple to black. As its name implies, it also has thorn-like twig spurs. You’re not likely to choose a live buckthorn branch, but they grow just about everywhere, so watch out. They’re not deadly but they are toxic. A buckthorn marshmallow could leave you guarding the outhouse all night.

Hawthorn, on the other hand, is OK to use. An ambitious (and very cautious) camper probably could impale and roast half a dozen marshmallows on the long thorns of one hawthorn branch.

The resin in conifer branches is nontoxic, but they’re seldom used. No sense getting sticky before the marshmallows go on, right? Dogwood, ash, maple and elm make good marshmallow sticks; safe but plain. But then maybe after some of the alternatives, we should stick with boring.

For help with tree identification go to http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/tree/trees.htm or call the office.
By Amy Ivy

Iris

Bearded iris foliage can be very showy in the garden, long after the early blooming flowers are past. But often these irises develop leaf spot diseases, one is bacterial and one is fungal. The best way to deal with this problem is to cut off the affected foliage, and if the spotting isn’t too severe, try to just live with the damage. The plant can easily tolerate a mild infestation; it just won’t look quite as attractive.

This type of iris benefits from being divided every 3 years or so and late summer is an ideal time to do it. Dig up the entire clump and using a sharp knife, cut off the outermost rhizomes that have leaves attached. Discard the old, inner rhizomes and replant the outer rhizomes in groups of 3, spaced 2-3 inches apart. Trim the foliage to a few inches tall and make sure the tops of the rhizomes are above the soil line.

Saving Seeds

If you want to save the seeds from any of your plants it is important to let them develop and ripen fully on the plant before harvesting them. If you pick them while they are still green they won’t be fully developed. Watch the seed pods carefully because just as they are ready to harvest they will start to separate and drop. Let the seeds air-dry completely on a tray before storing them for the winter. Squash and melon plants cross pollinate and their seeds produce very odd, unpredictable fruit the next year, such as a round zucchini or cucumber. Don’t save these seeds unless you want to have some fun. And the seeds from hybrid plants don’t come true; they instead show a variety of their parent’s characteristics. For more information on saving seeds, look for The Seed Starter’s Handbook by Nancy Bubel at your library.

Fall Crops

Mid to late August is the time to think about planting some fall vegetable crops. Spinach is one of the best fall crops; it loves the cool weather and often will keep producing right up to Thanksgiving. The hardest part is getting the spinach seed started in August. Unlike the other possible fall crops, lettuce, peas and other greens, spinach will not germinate in warm soil. Set up temporary shade over

Continued on next page...
the seedbed and mist it daily with water to keep it cool. Once the seed sprouts the plants aren’t so fussy and soon the fall weather will encourage them to put on a flush of growth.

Cover Crops

You don’t have to wait until your garden is completely harvested before you start planting cover crops. Once a row is harvested, put the plants into your compost bin, rake it smooth and scatter cover crop seed over it. In August good choices are oats and winter rye or wheat. Buckwheat will grow well during the warm days of August, but it dies with the first killing frost. For more information on cover crops or composting, ask our office for our free leaflets on these subjects.

Biennials

A biennial is a plant that grows leaves one year, flowers and sets seed the second year, then dies. Some familiar biennials are Foxglove (except for the perennial yellow type), Sweet William, Hollyhocks and Canterbury Bells. Queen Anne’s Lace and parsley are biennial, too. Biennials may seem like perennials since once you plant them they usually reappear in your garden for years. But what is usually happening is the plants drop lots of seeds which self-sow or volunteer, so after a year or two your garden will contain a steady assortment of one and two year old plants.

These true biennials can be planted from seed in mid-summer in a nursery bed. You can then transplant them to their final garden site in the fall and they’ll bloom next year. Perennial flowers can be started from seed in the same way which is a very economical way to produce many new plants. Seed sown this time of year will need a little extra care, however, to protect it from hot sun and heavy rain. Taller plants or even a burlap screen can be rigged up to provide some temporary afternoon shade until they get established.

Attracting Hummingbirds

Everyone knows hummingbirds are attracted to the color red, but they are also attracted to blue, yellow and pink flowers, especially if the blossoms are tubular in shape. Some of their favorite flowers include: delphinium, petunia, fuchsia, bee balm, trumpet vine and columbine.

If you hang a hummingbird feeder, fill it with a boiled solution of 4 parts water to 1 part white, refined sugar or use a commercial ‘nectar’ mix. Do NOT use honey because it can produce a fungal disease fatal to hummingbirds. Clean sugar-water feeders every 3-5 days using a brush and mild detergent. Rinse them well before refilling.
By Carl Kokes, Master Gardener Volunteer

Editor’s note: Carl and Sally Kokes, both Master Gardener Volunteers, live in Peru and have combined Carl’s interest in trains, Sally’s interest in gardens, and their mutual interest in music in a delightful way.

The train garden idea began in 1995 when Sally and I were in Orlando, Florida. I stopped at a hobby shop where they had a garden railroad setup in the store. I became “hooked” on G scale trains. “G” - or garden size, is larger than the traditional sets that most people have in their basements or attics. This is a scale with a minimum radius of 4 feet.

A magazine that specializes in this scale led me to the Vermont Garden Railway Society, a group of like-minded people. I purchased a starter set with an engine, a few cars, track, and a power pack. In the past 20 years my collection has certainly grown but I still have that starter set. Sally was not terribly thrilled with the fact that I was usurping more and more of our yard. I almost blew it the day I decided that the track that was placed on mulch was not really working too well in this northern New York climate and I ordered 29 TONS of crushed gravel. It was delivered and was the largest pile I have ever seen. After it was dumped in my driveway, a friend came by and asked what I was doing and I said “I am in trouble”. He said, “I see that” and proceeded to drive off. He came back about 30 minutes later with a front end loader and within a few hours, I was re-laying track on the spread out gravel. It is still there today...

When I visited a former student at her garden nursery in Vermont, I told her I thought a train setup would be fun for their end of the season sale. We went with the idea and the display was a huge success, though bringing all the necessary materials to set this up was a quite a project.

Being a retired orchestral director with a profound love of music, I have included music in my garden railroad ... softly playing classics and sometimes, railroad themes, provides an ambiance that is fun and interesting. My railroad is the BACH YARD AND MEDITATION STATION GARDEN RAILROAD.

The entire train set is visible from our new 20 x 40 deck which we added in 2013 as a 50th wedding anniversary gift we gave ourselves. For me this hobby is fun, family oriented, sometimes challenging, but always entertaining. Many people ask to come and see our train garden and I am happy to oblige.
Woodpeckers continued...

are year round residents. We get calls every year about damage done to trees by the yellow-bellied sapsucker and when I was in the Pacific Northwest this summer I saw a lot of sapsucker damaged trees.

These birds are 7-8.5 inches long, black and white with a red cap. The male also has a red throat. Woodpeckers drum (hit trees repeatedly with their beaks) to announce their territories and attract mates. Their usual preference is for dead or dying trees where they can find insects easily. Unlike other woodpeckers, the sapsucker may drum on a sign, chimney, or other object, and it’s drumming does not necessarily have a pattern.

The sapsucker drills sap wells beginning in early spring when the sap is moving under the bark up to the branches. After the tree branches out, the sapsucker drills shallower wells to access the sap moving down from the leaves. These wells need constant maintenance so the sapsucker spends more than half its time feeding and tending to sap wells.

Using their brush-like tongue, they lap up the oozing sap. This oozing well can also trap insects which the sapsucker feeds on. New holes are lined up with old holes, making the damage very distinct.

Sapsuckers nest in cavities of dead or dying trees. The female lays a clutch of four to six eggs that hatch in 10 to 13 days. They begin their migration in September or October and winter as far away as Panama.

The pileated woodpecker also leaves distinct damage to trees.

The pileated woodpecker is about the size of a crow, is black and white with a red triangular crest on the back of its head. The male has a red stripe on its cheek. Both male and female have long chisel-like bills with which they drill rectangular -shaped holes in dead or dying trees. These holes provide the woodpecker access to carpenter ants and other insects that are feeding on the rotten tree.

Pileated woodpeckers are monogamous and build their nesting cavities in dead trees or branches. The nesting cavity can be 10 to 24 inches deep and take three to six weeks to dig. The female lays a clutch of 3 to 5 white eggs that hatch in about 18 days. These woodpeckers do not usually use the same nests in successive years, so owls, birds, and sometimes even bats will move into the abandoned cavity.
Woodpeckers continued...

The woodpeckers that come to my suet feeder and get an occasional drink from the hummingbird feeder are the downy woodpecker and the hairy woodpecker. I admit that it is often difficult to tell these two apart. The downy is the smaller of the two, 5 to 7 inches while the hairy is 7 to 10 inches long. Hairy woodpeckers have a much larger bill so can reach into areas that the downy cannot, but the downy, being smaller, can perch on small twigs and even some grasses in order to have access to insects and seeds.

Both are patterned black and white with boldly striped heads and the males have a small red patch on the back of their heads.
Giant Germs!

By Chelsea Baxter, 4-H and Nutrition Educator

Summer is a reason for celebration on its own, not to mention all of the other festivities that are included during these short months of warmth. Now more than ever we are embracing the nice weather and eating outdoors on picnics or at barbeques, but how much are we washing our hands?

We know that we cannot see germs on our hands with the naked eye. Germs, bacteria and viruses hide in the cracks of our fingers and under our fingernails and wait for their turn to enter our bodies and make us sick. This activity is designed to demonstrate how germs hide all over our hands and to teach children about proper hand washing techniques.

What you need:
- Brown sugar (to act as the germs)
- Vegetable oil
- A sink
- Hand soap

Directions:
1. Apply a ½ to a full tablespoon (depending on the size of their hand) of vegetable oil to your child’s hand.
2. Add a tablespoon of brown sugar to the vegetable oil
3. Rub the mixture together as if applying lotion (make sure they rub it in between their fingers)
4. Look at all the “germs” on their hands
5. Have them wash their hands as they normally would
6. Evaluate the level of cleanliness on their hands

Questions:
- Did you get all of the germs off?
- How long should you wash your hands with soap and water? (at least 20 seconds or the amount of time it takes to sing happy birthday twice or the alphabet once)
- What will we do better next time we wash our hands?
- Where did the germs hide?

Follow up with a “Giant Germs” snack
Recipe on page 11

For more information about this activity & to find other activities like it go to:
http://www.kidsacookin.org

This newsletter is also available on our website:
http://blogs.cornell.edu/cceclintoncounty/ under Gardening: News

North Country Gardening
Summer Vegetables

By Jordy Kivett, Nutrition Educator

After all of the countless hours spent hunch-backed, fighting off bloodthirsty bugs, hoeing, planting, and weeding, delicious vegetables are now available right in your own backyard. If that is the case for you, or you have a CSA membership, or you just love to pick up produce from your local farm stand or market, you may be getting creative with your use of fresh vegetables. After all, there are only so many nights a week you can make grandma’s zucchini casserole. When you have a surplus of a few foods and you are getting a little tired of the same dishes there are some things you can try to break up the routine.

An easy way to use some of these garden regulars is to add them to some of your standard dishes. Some dishes are great for adding in those garden extras, like soups, lasagnas, and stir fries, but there are so many dishes that could use a little change of pace; mix it up! Try adding raw or lightly steamed greens and summer squash to a pasta salad, thinly sliced snow peas to a wrap or a sandwich, raw green beans with dip as a side with pizza.

Another way to use more of your garden’s vegetables is to go beyond dinner. Making each meal an opportunity for vegetables will help to deplete your supply of fresh goodies. Lunches could be a caprese salad, you cannot go wrong with fresh mozzarella, basil and lots of tomatoes or leftover sautéed onions, zucchini, and peppers piled into a tortilla. Vegetables go so well with eggs that you can use anything and simply fold them into an omelet or add them to a quiche.

Of course you can always go searching online for new recipes. When you are looking online I urge you to check out sites where users can rate recipes and comment on them. If a recipe has received poor ratings, pass it by. Reading reviews can not only give you an idea of flaws that others found in the posted recipes, but often have tested tips for increasing healthfulness, as in how this dish will taste if I substitute whole wheat flour, or good ideas for substitutions if you do not have every ingredient. Blog posts often do not have ratings, or relevant comments to the dish beyond, “sounds yummy” but that said, if you are a confident cook, they are great for inspiration with many innovative dishes and beautiful photographs.

I hope you are enjoying some freshly picked vegetables this season. If you have more than you can eat, feel free to contact our office for tips on freezing and other preservation guidelines. Remember that local food shelves are also happy to pass out those freshly grown goods and the recipient will be thrilled by your generosity. Many using the food shelf are unable to garden, for a variety of reasons, including unstable housing or physical disabilities, but nearly anyone can appreciate the amazing taste of fresh from the garden vegetables.

Recipe on page 10...

Have a garden or agriculture related business? This space is available for your business card! Contact us at 561-7450

North Country Gardening
This meal is a personal favorite. It is beautiful with the dark greens and the bright yellow yolk of a pastured chicken egg. I sometimes add a small potato diced in the beginning of the cooking or enjoy with a piece of toast.

**Ingredients:**
1 small yellow onion
1 large handful of kale, rinsed and torn into bite size pieces (about 1 cup)
6 cherry tomatoes
1 tbsp. olive oil
1 large egg
A dash of pepper
Optional: a sprinkle of grated cheese

**Directions:**
- Heat a non-stick skillet over medium heat and add the oil and onion. Cook until the onions are translucent and beginning to brown.
- Add the kale and cherry tomatoes, stir occasionally. As the tomatoes soften, gently crush them to release the juice and seeds and cook until this mixture is beginning to dry out a bit, about 5 minutes.
- Turn the heat down to medium low and crack the egg over the mixture. Sprinkle with pepper and cheese if you choose then cover and allow to cook until the egg reaches the desired doneness*.
- When the dish is done, slide it onto a plate and enjoy!

***Warning: eating undercooked eggs may increase your risk for food borne illness.
Woodpecker Damage?

By Jolene Wallace

If a woodpecker is continually drumming on your house you may be concerned that damage is being done. At the least, this persistent behavior is annoying. According to Cornell’s ornithology site www.cornell.birds.edu, woodpeckers peck houses for four different reasons:

- To make noise
- To find food
- To store food
- For housing

Determining why the woodpecker has chosen your home is the first step to eliminate the drumming.

Most drumming is to attract mates or to establish territory. The louder the drumming, the larger the territory being claimed. Pecking on siding, or objects other than wood is usually for this purpose. Denting may result.

When woodpeckers detect carpenter ants in siding they drill holes to get to them. If you see lines of holes, you want to check into the possibility that you have an insect infestation.

If no underlying problem exists, you may be able to deter woodpeckers by hanging a mylar balloon, pinwheel, or aluminum foil as close to the drumming site as possible. Shiny, moving objects have a good chance of scaring birds away for a reasonable length of time.

Events

Share the adventure of Families Cooking Together, a FREE nutrition class for families with elementary school-age children. Wednesdays August 13, 20, and 27th from 2:30-4:30 PM at the Babbie Rural and Farm Museum in Peru. Learn new recipes, plan meals, add more vegetables ad local foods to your menus, while having fun and being active with your family.

Space is limited—register by calling our office at 561-7450

Farmers Market in Rouses Point

The Rouses Point Friends of the Library are sponsoring a Farmers Market to be held at the Dodge Memorial Library, 144 Lake Street on Fridays from 3:30 – 7:00 pm. Check out the local goods and enjoy a Friday evening on our beautiful Lake Champlain.

Office Hours

Our office, located at 6064 State Route 22, Suite 5, is open from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday. We will be closed Monday, September 1 in observance of Labor Day.

Giant Germ Snack ....

What you need:

- Round crackers
- Pretzel sticks
- Peanut butter or cream cheese spread (to act as the glue)
- Raisins
- Grapes

Directions:

- Spread the cream cheese or peanut butter on the cracker
- Use the pretzel sticks as legs for your germs
- Add a second cracker on top of the other one to keep the legs in place
- Spread cream cheese or peanut butter on top of the second cracker and add the raisins or grapes as the eyes and mouth
- Enjoy!!!
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