Each year Washington, D.C. celebrates spring with the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival. Thousands of beautiful cherry trees announce that spring has arrived in the nation’s capital; this event is touted as the nation’s greatest springtime celebration. Tourist and locals alike flock to see the spectacle. The National Cherry Blossom festival celebration commemorates the 1912 gift of 3,000 Yoshino cherry trees given to the city of Washington, D.C. from the mayor of Tokyo. This celebration honors the long lasting friendship between the two countries.

Schenectady County, New York has its own cherry blossom festival. It is much smaller in size, but in my view, still packs a spectacular punch! On April 27, 2014 the Congregation Gates of Heaven, a Reform Jewish Temple, held its 22nd Annual Cherry Blossom Festival. This is a community wide fund raising event. This temple has done more to promote the planting of weeping cherry trees than any other entity. As you pass by the intersection of Ashmore Avenue and Eastern Parkway in Schenectady, in late April you are greeted with a spectacular burst of spring. Heads turn, bikes slow and cars stop (mine included) to take in the beauty and majesty of these trees!

If these cherry tree collections have you wanting to join in the fun and acquire one of your own, consider these options. The beautiful trees in Washington, D.C. are primarily Yoshino cherries (Prunus x yedoensis), a tree that is difficult to pin down in its exact parentage or origin. These trees are have a round, spreading, upright habit of up to 20 to 30 feet. The beautiful flowers are slightly fragrant and pink or white, depending on the cultivar. The flowers pop, usually before, but sometime with the unfolding leaves. A small black drupe (fruit), is produced in the summer following fertilization. There are nearly a dozen cultivars on the market, mostly upright forms, but a least a couple of weeping forms exist. This species does best in moist well drained soil and is hardy in USDA Hardiness Zones 5 through 8.
The weeping cherries of Schenectady, commonly called Higan Cherry, Spring Cherry, or Rosebud Cherry, were introduced from Japan in 1894. Botanically they are referred to as *Prunus subhirtella* var. *pendula*. These trees are generally not in cultivation as the species; the weeping form is more popular with the homeowner. The cultivar *P. pendula* Maxim. is grafted onto the rootstock at about 6 foot off the ground. This tree has twig-like branches and slender whip-like stems that bear solitary pink flowers in March to April, held in clusters of 2-5. Some of these whips are more crooked than the elected officials in Washington, D.C. These trees can reach a height of 20 to 40 feet with an almost equal spread. Several cultivars are available on the market, some of which are patent protected. The cultivar ‘Autumnalis’ has an added bonus to its bloom period. In a warm fall, it will throw some blooms (which are a semi-double) prior to leaf drop and still have a full display the following spring. Most of these cultivars also produce a solitary, small black fruit and are hardy in zones 4 through 9. The bloom period is calculated from when 20% of the buds have opened and considered ‘full’ bloom when 70% are open. The entire bloom period, through petal drop, is usually around 14 days. Unseasonably warm temperatures, wind and rain can shorten this. *P. subhirtella* has a fast growth rate, and is considered the most cold, heat and stress tolerant of all the cherries. The bloom season is fleeting, but still spectacular! Weeping cherries bring a unique, artistic beauty to the garden even when not in bloom.

Probably the most universally popular cherry tree is the Sargent Cherry, *Prunus sargentii*. Introduced from Japan in 1890, this cherry is hardy from zone 4 through 7, preferring to stay out of the heat and humidity of the deep South. The large flowers are 1 ¼” to 1 ½” and borne singly on leafless stems. New leaves emerge with a reddish tint before hardening off to a deep, shiny green in the summer. In July, the solitary, purple-black fruit ripens. Fall coloration is a bronze to red. The most popular cultivar, ‘Accolade,’ has 12 to 15 petals in a semi-double flower. It was produced by crossing *P. subhirtella* and *P. sargentii*. The buds are deep rose pink opening to a light blush pink. Flowers are 1 ½” across. Other Sargent cherries include the fastigiated form ‘Spire,’ the earliest blooming cultivar ‘Shosar’ and the vase-shaped form reminiscent of the American elms, ‘Pink Flair.’

There are over 400 species and hybrids within the genus *Prunus* which includes flowering plums, peaches, apricots, almonds and cherries. Several of these beautifully flowering trees are often mistaken for cherries, as many bloom at the same time in spring. Cherry cultivars can be found blooming from Maine to Florida in the spring. In colder climates we can reliably count on *P. sargentii* and *P. subhirtella*, leaving the *P. × yedoensis* for a more southern garden.

For more in depth information on Cherries check out these two publications:

Text and photos by Chuck Schmitt
Every year I grow enough butternut squash to harvest approximately 100 squash come September. I figure each vine will produce about 4 decent sized fruits, so 25 plants need to go into the garden in late May.

Most winter squash varieties produce long vines. I always devote the west side of our garden to my expansive friends. One year I’ll plant them against the fence on the west side and train the plants to grow in an easterly direction. The next year I plant the squash 20 feet east of the west side fence and train the vines to grow towards California.

In the space where the vines will be growing toward I plant garlic. Since garlic goes into the garden in mid October (after the squash have been harvested) and come out in early to mid July (before the squash vines reach them), I find this is an ideal rotation. That’s not to say there aren’t other equally effective rotations possible, but this one seems to work well for me.

For no particular reason I always start my winter squash in two inch peat pots in early May and put them out approximately three weeks later. I space the plants about 15” apart, peeling back the top part of the peat pot before putting them into the ground. Since squash like warm soil, I spread clear plastic over the planting beds about the same time I start the seedlings.

Once the vines begin to lengthen I educate them to grow in that year’s assigned direction. I mound a little soil over the vine 6 to 18 inches from the plant. This anchors the vine and also encourages the vine to develop additional roots at the spot of the soil mounding.

By late August the vines have taken over the west side of the garden. At this point, if I can do so without trampling the vines, I will remove flowers and undersized fruit in order to let the plant devote more of its energy toward the larger fruits.

Winter squash should be harvested before the first frost which is often toward the end of September in our locale. Cut the fruit off the vine with a pair of sharp hand clippers, leaving as much stem on the fruit as practical. Ideally the squash should be an even color (often tan) when harvested but don’t be too concerned if some appear a bit mottled.

Winter squash should ideally be cured several days in a warm, dry location. A garden shed works well, but leaving them in the garden also works well for me (but not if a frost is forecasted).

Once cured, I carefully place the squash in 5 gallon buckets and place the buckets in a warm, dark location. Handle the squash gently to avoid bruising (which can lead to spoilage). Check the squash on a weekly basis – despite your best efforts some will spoil.

I’m still eating butternut squash (the best keeper) as late as June (that’s 8 months). Most winter squash sweeten as they age in storage. Regardless, they’re always delicious.
Life Below The Maple

One of the best parts of writing my newspaper column, “Green Thoughts,” as well as writing for this newsletter is getting email from readers. A gardener named Laura recently wrote in and we commiserated over the question, “What can be grown under a Norway maple?” This, along with scaling Mt. Everest and bringing about world peace, is sometimes considered one of life’s greatest challenges.

The oldest successful gardening trick in the book is to carefully examine the site and then match your plant palette to it. Many beginning gardeners labor under the notion that shade is damp, but in reality the soil under tree-shaded areas is often bone dry. This shouldn’t be surprising, given the dense network of established roots which suck up every drop of moisture and nutrients, such as nitrogen. These same roots also deplete soil oxygen and physically take up a lot of space. Given these hostilities, it is a wonder even moss can survive.

So while planting shady characters which are also drought tolerant is in order, next consider the dozens of permutations of shade. The high shade of old trees with some of their limbs removed (ampu-trees?) can be much brighter than the deep gloom beneath a heavily branched tree, or several trees growing close together. Sometimes dependable beams of light, heaven sent, will fall below a tree each morning or in the late afternoon for a short while, making otherwise full shade into partial shade (Photo 1). Morning light is softer, and comes when the day is cooler, than afternoon sun, another nuance to consider.

A tree with small leaves, such as a honeylocust, will cast a much lighter shade than the aforementioned Norway maple. The dreadful Norway (ask the gardener who owns one) also puts out its huge sun-intercepting solar panels much earlier than our native sugar maple; it is therefore easier to grow the early ephemerals (plants which pop up, flower, then disappear in early spring) under a sugar than a Norway.

Finally, what to plant. I queried the Master Gardeners, our seventy-two volunteers who easily have 3,600 years of gardening experience amongst them. They provided many of the following suggestions.

Under the best of these conditions, meaning that your spot either gets a little sun or has bright shade, there are a good number of possibilities. These include Jack-in-the-pulpit (Arisaema), bleeding heart (Dicentra), shooting star (Dodecatheon), hostas, Solomon’s seal ( Polygonatum), European and American ginger (Asarum), and various ferns, such as Christmas and maidenhair. Adding a little fertilizer and organic mulch, and watering during the driest periods, will undoubtedly help.

In a darker situation, pachysandra, barrenwort (Epimedium) and carpetbugle (Ajuga) are recommended. The last one can be invasive if happy, so use cautiously.

It really comes down to trial-and-error. If those don’t work, try annuals, such as pansies or impatiens, in containers. Locate your potting bench or store other equipment under the tree. Stop gardening and take naps in the shade. Or, mulch the area neatly with wood chips made from other Norway maples.
**Some Shade Tolerant Perennials**

*Aconitum napellus* - Monkshood  
*Adiantum pedatum* - Maidenhair Fern  
*Alchemilla mollis* – Lady’s Mantle  
*Arisaema triphyllum* - Jack-In-The-Pulpit  
*Asarum canadense* – Canada Wild Ginger (Photo 7)  
*Asarum europaeum* - European Ginger (Photo 2)  
*Astilbe sp.* - Astilbe  
*Athyrium niponicum ‘Pictum’* - Japanese painted fern (Photo 5)  
*Brunnera macrophylla* – Siberian Bugloss  
*Carex siderosticha ‘Variegata’* - Variegata broad-leaf sedge (Photo 3)  
*Chelone glabra* - Turtlehead  
*Cimicifuga racemosa* - Snakeroot  
*Convallaria majallis* – Lily-Of-The-Valley*  
*Corydalis lutea* – Yellow Corydalis  
*Dicentra cucullaria* – Dutchman’s Breeches  
*Dicentra eximia* – Fringed Bleeding Heart  
*Dicentra spectabilis* - Common Bleeding Heart  
*Digitalis lutea* – Yellow Foxglove  
*Dodecatheon meadia* - Shooting Star  
*Epimedium sp.* – Bishop’s Miter (Photo 9)  
*Gallium odoratum* – Sweet Woodruff  
*Geranium macrorrhizum* – Big-root Geranium (Photo 6)  
*Hosta sp.* - Hostas (Photo 4)  
*Iberis sempervirens* - Candytuft  
*Ligularia sp.* - Ligularia  
*Matteuccia struthiopteris* – Ostrich Fern  
*Osmunda cinnamomea* - Cinnamon fern  
*Osmunda claytoniana* – Interrupted Fern  
*Pachysandra procumbens* – Alleghany Pachysandra  
*Pachysandra terminalis* – Japanese Pachysandra*  
*Polygonatum sp.* – Solomon’s Seal (Photo 8)  
*Rodgersia sp.* - Rodgersia  
*Sanguinaria canadensis* – Bloodroot  
*Thalictrum rochebruneanum* – Meadow Rue  
*Trillium sp.* – Trillium

*Possibly invasive or a bit thuggish*
Sure. You want a lawn as lush as fine carpet and pool table green. But did you ever consider what your lawn wants? Like every other living thing, your lawn has specific needs; needs that may not be understood or appreciated.

**You should know:** When it comes to cutting, just a little off the top please. The ideal lawn height is three inches. And when mowing, you should never take more than one-third. So let it grow to four inches, then trim by one inch. Keep it at three and your lawn will return the favor by defeating weeds that may want to take up residence.

**You should know:** For a lawn to look sharp, your blade must be sharp. Dull blades, like dull razors, rip and tear. As a general rule, you should sharpen your mower blade after eight hours of use. Since the statistics say you’ll spend 40 hours trimming your lawn, which suggests five sharpenings each season.

**You should know:** When it comes to watering, one inch a week should do nicely. Lawns like to drink early in the day. It keeps the roots damp, less water will evaporate and the leaves will be dry by the time the sun shine gets really strong. If you water just before dark, you are inviting fungus. Since over watering can lead to disease, you might want to use a rain gauge to keep track of moisture your lawn gets from the hose and the heavens.

**You should know:** Not all lawns have the same appetites. But the prime times are easy to remember. High maintenance lawns should be fed on Memorial Day, Labor Day and just after Halloween. Medium maintenance? Fertilize on Memorial and Labor Day. And for the lawn we wish we all had, the low maintenance wants to eat once a year ….Labor Day. Plan on spreading about one pound of nitrogen for every one thousand square feet. And use the slow release type for it keeps providing nutrients over several weeks.

**You should know:** Lawns need vacations too! During the dog days of summer, lawns tend to go dormant. Growth slows. But as August cools, the lawn begins to recover from summer stress and renews its active growing.

If you follow these tips, you’ll have a better lawn. With less work….which means more hammock time for you.

*Text by Rensselaer County Master Gardener Don Maurer*
As a natural curmudgeon, I try to cajole myself into finding good even in horticultural disasters as an amusing change of pace. Given our winter-injured boxwoods, spruces, hollies and other landscape plants, my positive spin is that they make great photo-ops. We don’t see winter injury to this extent every year or maybe even every decade, so I’ve been out taking digital pictures of brown, tan, beige and orangey-dead plants to update my old teaching slide set.

So what happened? To me, it seems we had the classic conditions for a perfect storm of evergreen misery. Since both needled and broadleaved evergreens continue to respire during the dormant season, they need to replace that moisture. But soils were frozen for months, limiting the plant’s ability to take up water. Next, consider the wind, which felt especially strong, day after day. Warm periods or breaks in the cold were scarce. And maybe some of us, who would normally spray an anti-desiccant or put up a wind screen, didn’t do it last fall, as winters past have been relative walks-in-the-mildish-park. I admit, I skipped my usual November applications of Wilt-Pruf.

So now we are left to prune out the dead parts and wait and see what, if anything, grows back. If in question, do the scratch test. When the bark is scrapped from a twig, is it green (good), beige (iffy) or brown inside and crunchy (dead)? Some plants may surprise us in their ability to bounce back, but others are so ugly and aesthetically-challenged that the owner’s will want to replace them so as not to be reminded of the “polar vortex” in July.

As I’ve been playing photo-journalist out in the real world, the hollies and the boxwoods seem the most damaged. Hollies can be replaced without too much cogitation, but my concern with boxwood stems from the fact that boxwood blight, a terrible plant pathogen, has sometimes been introduced into existing plantings from infected nursery stock. Anyone planting new boxwoods should take the time to read and follow the precautions put forth by the University of Connecticut (available on the internet). I’ve seen many boxwood plantings where only some of the plants need to be replaced, so carelessly introducing problem plants might make the entire situation worse, not better.

Here’s guessing why some dwarf Alberta spruces are a toasty brown while others appear unscathed. We might expect those in the windiest places or driest soils to have the most damage. But also, perhaps, plants stressed with bountiful summer populations of spruce spider mites may have headed into winter weaker. The gnome-like dwarf Alberta is a mite favorite, so every owner should do a mite-check during the growing season. This involves holding a piece of white paper beneath a branch, tapping said branch, then checking the debris which falls for mites using a hand lens or magnifier. If mites are found, a summer treatment may make the plant healthier and prepare it for the (dare I say) winter to come.

Text and photos by David Chinery
A New Blue Berry

Many backyard gardeners want to grow blueberries but their naturally occurring soil pH is often too high (alkaline) and so the quest for the crop becomes a disaster not to mention a financial loss. Cornell recommends to gardeners not to try to grow blueberries if the soil pH is 7 or higher. The reality is that a soil pH over 6 requires a lot of work and vigilance as the pH must be monitored and amended as necessary along with using a fertilizer for acid loving plants if blueberries are to grow well and be productive. Blueberries are true acid loving plants that thrive in a soil pH of 4.5 to 5.5. Botanically known as *Vaccinium corymbosum*, blueberries are highly prized for their health and nutritional benefits. The berries can be used fresh or in cooking and baking, and they freeze well and make wonderful jam. No wonder most people love them and gardeners want to grow them!

If you are still in the market for growing blueberries, consider the Canadian cousin, the Saskatoon (a.k.a. Juneberry). Not a true blueberry but an *Amelanchier*, the fruit is a pome (like apple and pear) and not a true berry but most people would liken it closely to the blueberry in looks and taste. Native to North America, the Saskatoon is adaptable to a wide range of soil types but a well-drained soil is ideal. A soil pH range of 6 to 7 is preferred but they will tolerate lower or higher pH. Most Saskatoon cultivars are self-fruitful so backyard gardeners could plant just one (no cross pollination needed). *Amelanchier alnifolia* is the one to look for and while most Saskatoons grow 12 to 20 feet high and half as wide, the variety ‘Regent’ is a good choice for homeowners as it matures to six feet high by six feet wide, making it a good size for a garden or useful as a landscape plant. Saskatoons are grown commercially in the Canadian prairie provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan; in the U.S. Cornell University has been leading the research to try to establish it as a commercial crop known as Juneberry. Hardy to -60 F, Juneberry is a good choice for upstate NY, the Finger Lakes and the Lake Champlain area where it has been trialed since 2010.

Plants can be obtained as bare root or container specimens and are planted without additional fertilizer and pruning except for any damaged branches. Like blueberries, Juneberries need little pruning until the age of 3 or 4 years when removal of older branches makes the plant productive. Maintaining an open shape for light penetration and air circulation reduces disease issues and IPM techniques manage pests. Plants begin to fruit at an early age, usually three to four years after planting. Juneberries begin to ripen in July and will continue to ripen after picking. The fruit can be used in many of the same ways as blueberries. Juneberries are also high in vitamins, antioxidants and fiber and so belong to the league of “super fruits.” If you are looking at choices for an edible landscape that will also reward you with lots of tasty and nutritious fruit, take a close look at the Juneberry as it is a lot of bang for your gardening buck.

Sources:
* “Researchers try to establish Juneberry as commercial crop,” Mary Esch, The Associated Press, 2014
* www.junberries.org

Text by Sue Pezzolla
As I was putting together this month’s issue, I realized that we have lots of pretty plant photos but no people! So here are some of the folks involved with Cornell Cooperative Extension (going clockwise from top left). Hassleer Jacinto-Whitcher (Photo 1) and community members (Photo 2) show off their annuals at Schenectady’s Adopt-A-Space Plant Distribution. Master Gardeners Pat Thorne and Mary Abbott keep out the weeds at the Demonstration Garden in North Greenbush (Photo 3). Marcie Vohnoutka models an elephant ear transplant bound for the Schaghticoke Fair (Photo 4). Master Gardener Doug Pratt explains propagation during the “Tomato Transplant Workshop (Photo 5). Participants hear about composting at Capital District Community Garden’s Urban Grow Center during the Master Composter Training (Photo 6). Plant shopping is a thrill at Garden Education Day (Photo 7). Master Gardeners staff the education table at “Go Green Day” (Photo 8) — David Chinery
What to do in June?

* Pinch back established mums and asters to reduce legginess and encourage fuller growth.
* Cut back foliage from spring bloomers as it yellows.
* Prune spring blooming shrubs.
* Plant flowers for the pollinators in the vegetable garden: dill, cosmos, marigolds, etc.
* All summer-loving vegetables should be in the ground and not in the six-pack or seed packet!
* Mulch, mulch, mulch and weed, weed, weed.

* Turn your compost pile and add green and brown material, such as grass clippings and dry leaves.
* Plant lettuce seed every two weeks for a continual harvest.
* Stake and/or cage tomatoes.
* Thin carrots, beets, lettuce and other row crops to allow each plant adequate space.
* Water if not provided from the heavens above. Gardens generally need one inch of moisture per week.

* Toward the end of the month, watch for Japanese beetles: knock them into a can of soapy water.
* Fertilize roses and deadhead (cut off) the spent blooms.
* Protect yourself from the sun. You know the drill: sunscreen, hat, longsleeves if needed. And of course, remember the ticks!
* Thin apples, pears, plums and other tree fruit to one fruit every six inches of stem.
* Divide and transplant spring blooming perennials as they finish flowering.

"June is bustin' out all over
The feelin' is gettin' so intense,
That the young Virginia creepers
Hev been huggin' the bejeepers
Outa all the mornin' glories on the fence!
Because it's June..."

Oscar Hammerstein II

Text by Master Gardener Janet Poole. Photos by David Chinery
“Men can’t be trusted with pruning shears any more than they can be trusted with the grocery money in a delicatessen...They are like boys with new pocket knives who will not stop whittling.”

Phyllis McGinley (American essayist, writer)

Gardening Questions?
Call The Master Gardeners!

In Albany County: Call 765-3514 weekdays from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM and ask to speak to a Master Gardener. You can also email your questions by visiting their website at www.ccealbany.com

In Schenectady County: Call 372-1622 weekdays from 9:00 AM to Noon, follow the prompt to speak to a Master Gardener and press #1. You can also email your questions by visiting their website at http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/schenectady/

In Rensselaer County: Call 272-4210 weekdays from 9:00 AM to Noon and ask to speak to a Master Gardener. You can also email your questions to Dhc3@cornell.edu

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“Root Concerns: Notes from the underground” is a shared publication of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer, Albany and Schenectady Counties. It is published by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County.
Rensselaer County Master Gardeners present the

2014 Garden Tour

A self-driven, self-guided tour of home gardens in Troy and Brunswick, New York

Thursday, June 19
4 to 8 PM

Maps sold from 4 to 7 pm on 6/19 at:
Troy Masonic Community Center
39 Brunswick Road
Troy, N.Y. 12180

Visit these private, often hidden gardens and see what other Rensselaer County gardeners are up to!

Admission $10.00 per person
(up to $30.00 per car for 3 or more people)
Parking at each garden is limited, so carpooling is suggested.

Held rain or shine!

Individuals with questions or special needs requiring accommodation should contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at (518) 272-4210 or dhc3@cornell.edu.
CCE provides equal program and employment opportunities.
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County’s

Summer Gardening Programs

Held at:
The Demonstration Garden
at The Robert C. Parker School
4254 Route 43, North Greenbush (Wynantskill), NY 12198

Admission to all programs is FREE!
Rain or inclement weather at the start of the program may cancel it

“Backyard Chickens 101” Thursday, June 26 from 7 to 8 PM. Having chickens in your backyard is one of today’s hot topics, but how do you get started? CCE of Rensselaer County Educator Kirk Schoen will tell us the beginning steps for success with a home flock.

“Weed Identification: Friends or Foes?” Wednesday, July 23 from 7 to 8 PM. Come learn about the many sides of weeds. Some are wildflowers, some garden invaders, some useful plants, and many are all of the above! Master Gardener Cathy Town will show us how to identify some common weeds as well as share some of their background lore.

“Country Garden Faire” Saturday, August 2, from 10 AM to 2 PM. Demonstrations, Plant Sale, Gardening Q & A Table, Raffle, Favorite Garden Tools Display, and More!

“Weed Management Basics” Wednesday, August 6 from 7 to 8 PM. Weeds are one of the gardener’s biggest challenges and there are several strategies to keep them at bay. We’ll look at various options, including both organic and non-organic herbicides, for weeds in garden beds as well as in lawns. Presented by David Chinery, CCE of Rensselaer County Educator.

“The Wide World of Grasses” Tuesday, September 9 from 7 to 8 PM. A discussion of the magnificent ornamental grasses found in the garden, as well as good grasses for lawns and the weedy grasses found in gardens and along roadsides. Presented by David Chinery, CCE of Rensselaer County Educator and Master Gardeners.

For more information, call Cornell Cooperative Extension’s Horticulture Program at 272-4210 or e-mail dhc3@cornell.edu

Directions: From Interstate(1-90) Exit 8; east onto Rte 43; pass through Rte 4 intersection towards West Sand Lake; (approximately 2.1 miles); Left at Robert C. Parker School.

Individuals with questions or special needs requiring accommodation should contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at (518) 272-4210. CCE provides equal program and employment opportunities.