North Country Gardening

Harvest Time!

This is the time of year for harvest festivals, feasts and events! One event that’s lots of fun is the 5th Annual Great Adirondack Rutabaga Festival held at Marcy Field in Keene Valley on Sunday, September 23 from 9:00am - 1:00pm.

Check the Adirondack Harvest website: www.adirondackharvest.com for listings of dates and times of this and other events going on this month, all around our region.

Amy Ivy
Executive Director,
Horticulture Educator
http://blogs.cornell.edu/cceclintoncounty/

By Jolene Wallace

What has scales and flies? Are you thinking of a flying fish? That may be, but I’m thinking about butterflies and moths. Did you know that their wings and bodies are covered in overlapping scales? These scales are actually modified hairs. Growing up I was told that if you touch a butterfly, the loss of the colored ‘powder’ that it leaves on your fingers impairs its ability to fly. In truth, that colored powder is actually scales and the butterflies and moths shred them throughout their lives. Handling them gently in order to get a close look at them will not do them any harm.

We normally think of butterflies as colorful, fragile, almost magical creatures that are quite beautiful while moths are dull looking in shades of brown and gray and are always hanging around outside our front porch light at night hoping to get inside so they can eat holes in our woolen clothes. The moth seems much maligned. Consider the old horror movie Mothra. When’s the last time you saw a movie about a butterfly out to destroy the world as we know it? I suspect never.

Moths are most commonly grey, brown, black or white and appear fuzzy-looking. This is because their scales are larger, possibly to conserve body heat as they move about in the cooler nights or to impair bats locating them via echolocation. The swirls and markings on their wings camouflage them during the day when they are at rest. The butterfly is often sleek and colorful and is able to absorb the heat from the sun.

If you are interested in choosing garden plants next spring that will attract butterflies and moths, we have a list of flowers and plants that we would be happy to provide to you. They are great pollinators and as much pleasure as they bring to us, we owe it to them to give them what they need to thrive.
By Emily Selleck

So, you want to have a vegetable garden. Great! You’ve scoped out your yard and found the sunniest area (8 or more hours of direct sun) – perfect for all vegetables, especially the sun-lovers like tomatoes and squashes. But, how about the soil? How do you scope that out?

History is always a good place to start. What do you know about the site? Is there any chance there may have been a garage where oil and gas may have spilled, or a barn where pesticides were stored? In most cases, probably not. Other possible points of contamination may be the site’s proximity to high-traffic areas like busy roads where petroleum pollutants may have wafted over and settled into the ground. Or, is the site close to an existing building that may have been painted with a lead-based paint – or near one that you think may have been there? Old paint peels and flakes and falls off and can over time make its way into the soil...

Now it’s time to get down on your hands and knees and dig in that soil – carefully, of course, using gloves and washing well when you are finished. What is the soil like? Is it sandy? Is it heavy? Is it dark and rich-smelling suggestive of a good amount of organic material? What is the pH? If you have a reliable test kit, you can check it yourself. If not, you can bring a sample into the Cornell Cooperative Extension nearest to you and they will check it for you.

No matter what size your future garden will be, you may want to take more than one sample, especially if there is considerable variability in the samples you dig up as you explore the site. If you have no concerns for contamination, digging down six inches in several locations and mixing them together will be sufficient for pH. This is also fine for collecting a sample you would like to send for a complete soil nutrient analysis. The link below will take you to a complete discussion of how to take and send a soil sample for Nutrient Analysis:

For soil nutrient analysis, you may bring the soil in to your nearest CCE and they will either send it to the lab we use, Agro One; or, they will give you the necessary forms and boxes and instruct you how to package and send it. You may call and discuss the results with someone in horticulture or agriculture at your local Extension if you wish.

For possibly contaminated soils, you’ll need to select a lab and follow their guidelines. Here is a link to NYS Department of Health approved labs:

When you get the results back, what do they mean? Unfortunately, there is no single standard defining acceptable levels of contaminants in garden soil (it’s being worked on). A link to Cornell Waste Management Institute’s Fact Sheet is a place to start:

Now for Best Practices! Start by accentuating the positive! Why are you out on your knees sampling your soil in the first place? Why? Because gardening offers so many benefits! Think of it –

- More fresh and healthy food just steps away! Fruits and vegetables contain fiber, vitamins and minerals and can reduce the risk of stroke, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and some types of cancer.
- You are harvesting when they are at the peak of goodness - just when they contain their maximum amounts of nutrients and are the best-tasting!
- You have more control over whether chemicals are

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used or not to treat pests and weeds.

- More opportunity for you to exercise and connect with nature!
- Less need to transport food from distant farms (these fruits and vegetables are harvested when they are not ripe!)
- Lower fruit and vegetable bills at the grocery store!

Now for the garden itself! When in doubt – or if your soil is “boney” (rocky, gravelly, crummy in general) – raised beds or containers is the ‘way to grow’. It is not advisable to use treated lumber (until 2003, treated lumber was made with arsenic, chromium, and copper), old tires, or railroad ties. Rough-cut hemlock, black locust, and cedar will hold up for several years. Fill the beds with clean soil (“clean soil” for sale means no stones or gravel but does not necessarily mean no weed seeds!) and clean compost (sludge is not recommended). Adding compost will volumetrically dilute any possible contaminant in the existing surface soil. But, the contaminant – lead, for example – will still be there in the same amount. Added organic materials like compost will also bind lead and other contaminants making the contaminants less available for plant uptake. You’ll need to replace the compost periodically, however, because it – unlike the contaminants – breaks down. Lastly, check the pH – you’ll want to have your garden soil as near to neutral (7.0) as possible.

You might consider placing a barrier such as cardboard between the existing soil and your bed. A more permanent solution would be landscape fabric, but not plastic as you want the bed to drain. (A quick word about landscape fabric: it can be a nuisance in the landscape, especially in flower and ornamental shrub beds where proper root growth may be an issue. And, once down, it’s almost impossible to remove. But, under a raised bed on “iffy” soil as long as the bed is deep enough (12” or more) to accommodate what you want to grow – beets and carrots, for example – landscape fabric is OK.)

Consider mulching any garden paths between the beds and the gardens if they are large. This will keep soil in place, minimize dust in the paths, and maintain even soil moisture in the beds. Mulching will also help keep weeds at a dull roar.

Finally, think about crop selection and good hygiene: if soil contamination is a concern, go easy on root crops and even leafy vegetables. Consider planting more “fruiting” crops like tomatoes, peppers, squash and cucumbers that you can trellis. As for good hygiene – apart from washing your hands and keeping garden soils outside (leave your shoes outside!) – make sure you wash all your produce well, and depending on your level of concern, you should peel the root crops (you’ll lose some nutrients in the peels, though). And, most of all have fun!

Cornell Waste Management Institute has more great information. Here are two other links: [http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm](http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm) and [http://www.cwmi.css.cornell.edu/healthysoils.htm](http://www.cwmi.css.cornell.edu/healthysoils.htm) For more on soils in general, go to [http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/soilandcompost2012](http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/soilandcompost2012)
The Wonder of Webs

By Jolene Wallace

I was on the west coast for 10 days in August and when I came home I was happy to see that the spiders had been extremely busy building all types of webs in our yard. I think that spider webs are the most amazing structures, although I don’t appreciate them in the corners of my living room. But outside, if you look at them closely you can’t help but marvel at the efficiency of them. And you can’t help but be grateful for all the flies and insects caught in the webs that are not going to come through the front door behind you.

Spiders have up to seven pairs of silk spinning glands called spinnerets on their abdomen, each of which enable them to spin a different type of silk depending on its purpose. The silk is produced as a liquid but leaves the gland as a solid fiber as the spider moves away from where he has attached it. Amino acids and protein crystals account for the strength, flexibility, and stiffness of the silk.

The silk produced by spiders is used for building webs, catching prey, storing food, escaping from danger, making egg sacs, sending and receiving signals, and for transportation. Remember Little Miss Muffet and the spider who sat down beside her? That spider was on a silk dragline!

A spider’s web is an extension of its sensory system, enabling it to detect enemies or prey via vibrations transmitted through the strands of silk. The form of web that a spider makes depends on the type of spider and the way it captures and stores its food.

There are webs we are likely to see around our homes and gardens if we look for them. An Orb web is the most common and consists of an outer frame with spoke-like silk going from one side of the frame to the other. The spider creates the spirals connecting the spokes last and works from the center outward using sticky catching silk.

Orb Spider Web from http://www.nps.gov/features/yell/slidefile/arthropods/spiders/Page-1.htm

(For a detailed diagram showing orb web construction visit http://ednieuw.home.xs4all.nl/Spiders/Info/Construction_of_a_web.html)

Another amazing web is the Triangle web. The shape is triangular, as the name implies, and consists of silky strands and spokes with a spider waiting at one end. When an insect lands the spider shakes the web, trapping the insect.

Triangle Spider web from http://insectzoo.msstate.edu/OrkinZoo/spiders.html

A Sheet web is quite ingenious. It is flat with criss-crossed threads over the top of it. The spider spins
Spider Webs, continued….

it between blades of grass and when an insect hits the upper layer he bounces into the sheet below where the spider waits. If you go out into your lawn in the morning when there is dew on the grass you may see many of these small sheet webs.

If a spider web can be called sweet it would be the Nursery web that has that distinction. Some female spiders carry their eggs in a silk sac close to their body until a short time before they are about to hatch. She then attaches the sac to a leaf and builds a protective web around it, and stands guard until the spiderlings hatch. The spiderlings may then leave the nest by means of a single silk threat that carries them to another location where they begin life on their own. This method of spider transport is called “ballooning”.

The Tangled web looks just like it sounds and you may find them where your ceiling meets your walls. We frequently refer to this type as a cobweb and it usually is not noticeable to us until it has dust and dirt sticking to it.

My favorite web is the Funnel web. There are several of these in my yard right now; one on the cover of the spare barbeque, and two on small evergreens in my front yard. The Funnel web looks like a small dark cave made of white silk at the low end of a large, flat, horizontal web. This horizontal web is not sticky but when prey lands on it, the spider feels the vibrations and scurries out from funnel to bite the insect and carry it back into the funnel. The funnels are open at both ends, allowing the spider to make a quick escape from predators if necessary. These are frequently found on the ground but check places around your yard that are not often disturbed and see if you can find one of these.

A spider repairs or replaces its web whenever it loses stickiness or has become damaged in some way; even if that’s every day. Fortunately, the silk threads of webs are incredibly strong. Weight for weight this silk is stronger than steel of the same diameter and can stretch up to 40% without breaking. In fact, it is so remarkable that research is being done around the world in an attempt to replicate it for medical and industrial use.
Apples seemed to have arrived early this year! While many grocery stores are now carrying local apples, as well as other local produce, if you are able you should check out a local orchard. Not only visiting an orchard a great North Country fall tradition, but many orchards carry a variety of apples, each with their own unique characteristics.

**Empire:** These apples are very juicy and I have found their crisp flesh does not brown quickly, making them a great choice to cut up and eat fresh, but also good for cooking.

**McIntosh:** This tangy apple is a local favorite. They are especially delicious in the fall when they are very firm and are good for eating and baking.

**Jonagold:** This apple is a cross between the tart Jonathan apple and Golden Delicious apple. It is also very versatile and works well for cooking while tasting great fresh.

**Honeycrisp:** This is a relatively new apple that is very popular, due to its amazing taste and crispness. They taste so great fresh and are usually a more expensive apple so you may not want to bake with them, though you certainly can.

These are just a few varieties, but many more are grown locally. Often, orchards will allow sampling so you can get the perfect apple to fit your preference. Apples are very nutritious. One medium apple contains about 80 calories, no fat or sodium, and 5 grams of fiber. They are the ultimate snack food both because they are filling yet low calorie and perfectly portable.

Besides snacking on whole apples, try adding them to meals. Apples taste great cut up in salads, shredded in coleslaw, sliced on sandwiches, both peanut butter and ham and cheese, and roasted with meat or potatoes. Diced apples can be chopped up and added to quick breads, pancakes, and cookies. Other snack ideas are dipping them in peanut butter and yogurt or eating slices with cheese and crackers.

### Apple Salad

**Ingredients:**

- 1 cup diced apple
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ½ cup diced celery
- ½ cup grated carrot
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ cup low-fat vanilla yogurt

* Note: Wash apples, celery and carrots before dicing and grating.

**Directions:**

1. Toss apples with lemon juice.
2. Add celery, carrot and raisins.
3. Fold yogurt into apple mixture.
4. Cover. Chill for at least 1 hour before serving.
5. Refrigerate leftovers.

Yields about 6 servings

Source: Adapted from Eating Smart, Being Active, California EFNEP and Colorado EFNEP

North Country Gardening
By Amy Ivy

If you have plants in your yard that usually look nice into the fall, it’s worth it to give them a little extra care right now. But do not fertilize or prune them! This will only make them less winter hardy, now is not the time for that. But do give them a good soak if recent rain showers don’t amount to much.

The flowers on my sedum ‘Autumn Joy’ have barely begun to turn color and these are the high point of my perennial garden in fall. I cut back my cushion spurge (Euphorbia polychrome) in mid July and it will turn gorgeous shades of red and orange this fall so that’s another perennial I’m going to keep watered. I cut my beebalm to the ground a week or two ago, it wilted badly after flowering but I’m confident it will be just fine next year.

My phlox has almost finished flowering. In a wetter year I leave that standing into the fall but if it looks bedraggled from drought I’ll cut it to the ground. This late summer pruning of your perennials is really just a matter of aesthetics. If you don’t like the looks of a plant after it blooms, cut it down.

Another reason to cut down certain perennials is if they were infested with an insect or disease, then by all means cut them down and keep the debris out of your compost pile.

I have a few ornamental grasses that will really stand out all fall and winter. My favorite is switchgrass, it has more airy seedheads than the more common miscanthus and I enjoy the different texture between the two grasses.

I like to mix a few shrubs into my perennial garden to provide some interest during the winter. Right now clusters of fruit on my highbush cranberry are gorgeous and eventually those leaves will turn scarlet. I have a ninebark ‘Diablo’ that has deep purple leaves all summer. It doesn’t really change color in the fall but the steady purple is lovely next to the changing greens, yellows, oranges and reds of the other plants.

North Country Gardening
**Crabgrass**

Crabgrass is an annual weed, meaning that it sprouts from seeds each spring and dies with the first hard frost each fall. It produces lots of seeds that persist for a long time. Its light green color and coarse, flat texture make it stand out in contrast to the desirable grasses in your lawn. It is sensitive to cold and turns purple with the first frost.

The best way to prevent crabgrass is to keep your lawn thick and lush so the weed seeds have nowhere to sprout. There's no point in applying any kind of crabgrass treatment now because the plants will die soon with the first hard frost. So what can you do now?

The key is to remember that a dense lawn will discourage crabgrass seeds from sprouting and establishing. September is the best month of the year to establish a new lawn and it's the best time to repair and bare spots and get desirable grass species established. The new grass will have the rest of the fall to thicken up and by next spring your turf should be as dense as possible to crowd out the emerging crabgrass.

Here's a process to follow this fall:

1. First cut the areas with crabgrass very short with your lawnmower
2. Use an iron rake or de-thatching tool to rip up the crabgrass as much as possible and expose the soil beneath.
3. If your soil is compacted, now would be a good time to core-cultivate your lawn.
4. Broadcast good quality grass seed and fertilizer over the area (perennial ryegrass and fine fescue establish the quickest)
5. Rake the area lightly to mix the seed with the soil and to help it settle below existing grass blades
6. Roll entire lawn to press seed into the soil (very important for good germination!)
7. Keep area watered until new seed sprouts

*By Amy Ivy*

**Compost Tip - Size Matters!**

There are two important areas where size matters in composting: bin size and particle size. Remember though, compost is going to happen, these tips will just make it happen more quickly and efficiently.

Setting up some sort of bin to hold your compost really helps speed the process along, makes the set-up more attractive, and makes the pile less appealing to critters looking for a snack. The bin doesn't have to be fancy, just heavy wire rolled into a cylinder supported by stakes will do, though you may find a simple plastic or wooden bin easier to work with. These bins are available at garden supply stores and range from economy models to luxury lines. Simple is fine.

The size of the bin is important, the ideal size is 3 feet on each side. This results in a pile that is deep enough and tall enough to really build up heat in its center. A pile on the ground will keep spreading out and cooling off.

The size of the materials you add to the bin makes a difference, too. The smaller the particle size, the more surface area there is for the microbes to reach. The result is - the smaller the particle size, the faster the breakdown. You don't have to go crazy here but just remember whenever it's possible or convenient to chop things up before adding them to your bin.

Mowing your leaves before adding them to your bin is an easy way to reduce the particle size. With kitchen scraps, chop the watermelon rind into smaller chunks. Weeds and dead flowers are harder to chop up without a shredder, so try spreading them out in the bin and chopping them some with a shovel after adding them.
For the past few years, our family has cultivated a very large home garden, the size being sort of a holdover from our commercial market garden years. It’s absurdly large, really, but we tend to get carried away in the spirit of spring catalog browsing — everything looks so good and the old habits of growing in quantity to feed our community are hard to break. It all starts out well enough, but in the frenzy of tending, weeding and just plain eating the fresh vegetables, we frequently run out of time and energy to put food by for the winter. So I’m here to remind you, if you’re trying to eat local foods it’s now time to be thinking about how to continue the trend through the fall and into the winter. You’ll be able to get fresh local products for several more months but the search will get increasingly challenging. You can purchase surplus food now to preserve for the sparse seasons ahead, but it will take a bit of planning.

Putting food by is nearly a lost art and science, and canning, in particular, can be an intimidating prospect. Certain foods, when not canned safely, can develop deadly toxins so be sure to learn the ropes before you try this. Personally, I like to can tomatoes and dilly beans. Because there is a growing interest in food preservation Cornell Cooperative Extension offices are responding with classes to teach the necessary skills. In September and October, CCE in Essex County is offering courses in “Salsa, Tomato Sauce and Dehydration”, “Pressure Canning Vegetables”, and “Apple Jelly and Pie Filling”. Contact 962-4810 x401 to register.

Putting Up the Harvest

By Laurie Davis

For the basil, I simply puree the fresh leaves with a generous drizzle of olive oil in my food processor then pack it into zippered plastic bags for freezing. We love pesto in January, but I never have all the ingredients ready when the basil’s perfect for picking. Fortunately, freezing the basil in olive oil will preserve it just fine. After thawing you can process the rest of the ingredients into the puree to make the pesto.

Root cellaring is another option for some crops and can often be done in a cool basement. Carrots, potatoes, onions, shallots, garlic, winter squash and pumpkins are all great storage crops but require slightly different conditions to stay fresh. Talk with the farmers at your local farmstand or farmers market to see how they store these vegetables. Their years of experience will help guide you to the optimal way to enjoy crisp, sweet carrots and firm, flavorful potatoes well into the early spring.

Adirondack Harvest is a regional organization dedicated to connecting our local farmers with consumers and can help you in your quest for local foods. Visit www.adirondackharvest.com for more information.

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Thankfully, not everything requires canning. Freezing is an excellent option for many vegetables. So far this year I’ve frozen asparagus, green beans, broccoli and basil. The trick for freezing many vegetables is a brief dip in boiling water before packing them for freezing. This Blanching process serves multiple purposes, including stopping enzyme actions within the vegetables. Enzymes can destroy the color and flavor of your vegetables in just a few weeks in the freezer — so be sure to follow blanching instructions precisely. The boiling water also helps remove dirt and kill bacteria. Then make sure to remove as much air as possible from your bags as excessive air allows for freezer burn. I use several excellent guides in my kitchen but my favorite is “Putting Food By” by Greene, Hertzberg and Vaughan.

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North Country Gardening
The Woods in Your Backyard: Learning to Create and Enhance Natural Areas around Your Home

*The Woods in Your Backyard: Learning to Create and Enhance Natural Areas around Your Home*, NRAES-184, promotes the stewardship of small parcels of land for the personal enjoyment of the owners and improved environmental quality for society. This book is geared towards owners of 1-10 acres of land that is forested or has un-mowed natural areas and to owners interested in turning mowed lawn area into a forest. The book is available from Plant and Life Sciences Publishing (PALS), formerly NRAES.

You can purchase *The Woods in Your Backyard* with a credit card on our secure Web site, [palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu](http://palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu). The cost is $24.00 plus $6.00 for shipping and handling. New York residents add 8% sales tax ($2.40) or provide a tax-exempt certificate. Quantity discounts are available. For more information or other payment options, call PALS (formerly NRAES) at 607-255-7654, email [palspublishing@cornell.edu](mailto:palspublishing@cornell.edu), or visit our Web site. Please do not include your credit card information in an email.

For more information, visit [palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu](http://palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu). Scroll down the home page for a link to the books description and ordering information.

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**Looking for Locally Grown Food?**

Pick up a copy of our free Guide to Local Food 2012
Featuring maps and food products grown in
Clinton, Essex & Franklin Counties.

Available at any CCE office
Feel free to take extras to give to friends

You can also view the Food Guide and maps at the Adirondack Harvest website: [http://www.adirondackharvest.com/guides.html](http://www.adirondackharvest.com/guides.html)

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**Campbell’s Greenhouse**

Buy Direct From The Grower

Located At:
35 Ryan Road
Saranac, NY 12981

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 339
Dannemora, NY 12929

Ken Campbell owner (518) 293-7972

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**Tidbits**

Located At:
35 Ryan Road
Saranac, NY 12981

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 339
Dannemora, NY 12929
Events and Happenings

The 2012 Adirondack Coast Wine, Cider and Food Festival will be held at the Crete Center in Plattsburgh, NY on October 6, 2012.

Join them for a day filled with food, wine and festivities. Beginning at 2p.m. there will be wine tastings available from local wineries, gourmet samples from local vendors and live music. You can also join the raffle to be Lucy in this year’s Great Grape Stomp

- Online ticket sales at www.acwcf.eventbrite.com. For more information visit the official festival website at www.acwcf.com or their facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/2012AdirondackCoastWineCiderFoodFestival

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North Country Gardening

PUTTING YOUR GARDEN TO BED

Saturday, September 22
12:30 to 2:00
at the Dodge Library
9 Fiske Rd, West Chazy
Free and open to the public

Jolene Wallace will discuss steps to take this fall to get your gardens ready for winter. Bring your questions!

Call our office at 561-7450 or email Jolene at jmw442@cornell.edu to reserve your space.

Come see our Master Gardener Volunteers at farmers markets in Plattsburgh, Lake Placid and Saranac Lake. Bring your gardening questions!

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September 2012

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