It’s finally spring and those of us who garden are hoping to get a start on the weeds any day now. It takes willpower to wait until the ground has a chance to dry out, but to avoid damaging the soil structure we really need to hold ourselves back. If you are standing at the door with a trowel in your hand, take a deep breath and wait a while longer. ....Jolene

Winter Burn on Evergreens

By Jolene Wallace

I have a dwarf spruce tree near our front porch that gets battered by the south winds every winter. As a result, it gets winter burn on that side.

During the growing season water is taken up by the roots and distributed to the stems and leaves of a plant. Most of this water is lost through transpiration, the process by which water evaporates from the stomata, small openings on the underside of the leaves or needles. As a result, more water is taken up by the roots and the process continues. During the winter, when the soil around the roots is frozen, additional water is not available and the leaves dry out. Sun and winter winds accelerate this drying process and winter burn occurs.

Winter burn appears as brown or rust, or otherwise discolored, dead-looking areas of the evergreen. It may be obvious before winter ends or may not become evident until temperatures warm in the spring.

I urge you not to rush to remove the plant or prune off the damaged areas. If the buds and stem tissues near the damaged sections are still alive evergreens will frequently ‘repair’ the damage by putting out new growth which covers the damaged areas.

While you are waiting to see if your plant will recover, keep it well watered. If you are counting on rain to do this watering for you, make sure the plant is actually getting enough. The location of my dwarf spruce is such that unless the rain is coming from the west, and lasts for several days, it does not get enough to properly hydrate the roots. Take a spade and make sure that the soil at root level (without disturbing the roots) is getting wet. If not, when it’s safe to turn the outside spigots on again, let a hose trickle very slowly for several hours at the base of the plant and check again.
Soil Tests For Gardeners

The key to success in growing any kind of plant is in the soil. Healthy soil makes for healthy plants, plain and simple. Adding organic matter is always a good idea, but today I want to focus on another aspect of soil quality, its nutrient content.

I’m not talking so much about pH here, although that is one factor. This time I’m focusing on actual nutrients and minerals such as potassium, calcium, iron, and the current hot topic for anyone in our region, phosphorus. The only way to know how much of any of these elements is in your soil is to have it tested. That also goes for determining the pH, soluble salt levels, and percent organic matter.

For an accurate reading you really need to send your soil to a lab. Those home soil testing kits are just not reliable enough and the probes sold for testing soil pH are also inaccurate. We can test your soil pH in our office using a Cornell test but for a full nutrient analysis, you need to use a lab.

Why Test?

For most home gardens, a complete nutrient test only needs to be done every few years. It’s interesting to see where your soil levels are and to find out which nutrients are lacking and which you have in excess, if any. I especially like this complete test because it tells you the percent organic matter content of your soil. Don’t be surprised if this number is lower than you expected. Home garden soil is usually only 4-6% organic matter, even after years of improvements. This number varies widely though, so you’ll need a test to find out where you are.

How Take a Sample?

Your test results will only be as accurate as the sample you send in, so take the time to do this properly. Take a small bucket and use a trowel or shovel to dig down 4-6” into your soil and take about a half cup from several spots around your garden area at this depth. Do not include surface soil in your sample. Mix all these scoops together in your bucket and then take 1-2 cups of this mixture for the sample you’ll submit. Let your sample air dry before mailing it to the lab.

If you have several garden plots with different conditions or treatments, test each one separately. Be sure that each sample submitted is made up of several smaller samples taken from the garden plot.

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How Take a Sample?
Start Small!

New gardeners often make the same mistake; I know I sure did. You start the season full of enthusiasm and end up planting far more than you can manage. By the end of the season you’re asking yourself, what is so much fun about gardening anyway? This happens to vegetable gardeners, flower gardeners, new homeowners with a big empty yard to fill.

If you’re just getting started please take my advice and start small. It’s much better to end the season wishing you had planted more than vowing to never plant again! You can always plant more next year but if your enthusiasm is ruined by an out of control garden, you may never try again.

Temptations

Seed catalogs are so enticing. I’ve written lots of articles about how useful they can be when planning but they can also lead you astray. Force yourself to make a list of what you’d like to order then wait a day and take another look at it to see if you can bring yourself to shorten it up.

If you’re a perennial flower gardener, nursery catalogs can be even more alluring. But the prices are higher so the subtotal of your order ought to sober you up before you place it. To stretch your garden budget you can start with just a few plants then fill in with annual seeds as you add a couple more plants each year.

Weeds

Another aspect to starting small is the layout of your garden. Keep in mind that bare ground equals weeds. Soil that is exposed to sun is a weed magnet. Rather than plant your vegetables in single rows with an aisle between consider grouping them into wide beds consisting of several smaller rows. This will give you fewer aisles to mulch and weed and will concentrate your efforts. You still need to give each plant room to fully grow but with some planning you can arrange them so their leaves just touch when grown. In this way the leaves form a canopy casting shade over the soil below which discourages weeds from sprouting.

Ask any grower, farmer or gardener what their worst pest is and they’ll almost all agree on weeds. My first garden looked so nice the first couple of weeks after I planted it but the weeds quickly took hold and towered over my beloved little plants. It got so I averted by gaze away from my garden as I approached the garage. My garden made me feel guilty not glad.

The smaller your garden plot, the fewer places there are for weeds to take over. If you can bear to scale down your dreams for the coming season and really be able to care for your garden, you’ll find the whole experience to be a pleasure rather than a chore.
Spinach with Black-Eyed Peas and Tomatoes

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups brown rice
- 3 cups water
- 1 pound fresh spinach or collard greens
- 3-4 cloves garlic finely chopped
- 1 medium onion chopped fine
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 14 1/2-ounce can crushed tomatoes
- 1 14-ounce can black-eyed peas
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- Hot pepper sauce to taste
- Black pepper
- Thyme
- Paprika
- Garlic powder

Directions:

Bring water to a boil, add rice, cover and reduce heat. Steam rice for about 40 minutes, until all water is absorbed.

While rice is cooking:
1. Wash spinach, remove stems, and slice leaves into strips. Cut across strips to cut leaves into bite-size pieces.
2. Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat, add garlic and onions and cook for 3-4 minutes.
3. Stir in spinach to coat with oil and cook for about 5 minutes, stirring regularly. (Add water if spinach starts to stick to pot.)
4. Stir in tomatoes, cover and cook for another 10 minutes.
5. Add the black-eyed peas, maple syrup, vinegar, and spices (black pepper, thyme, paprika, garlic powder, etc. -- no salt is needed!)
6. Stir well, cover, and cook until spinach is tender.
7. Serve the greens and beans on a bed of rice.

Yields about 8 servings

Source: Adapted from Onondaga County CCE

Nutrition Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size</th>
<th>1/8 recipe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Servings Per Recipe</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount Per Serving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Calories | 288           | Calories from Fat | 62%
| % Daily Value |   |   |
| Total Fat | 7g | 11% |
| Saturated Fat | 1g | 4% |
| Trans Fat | 0g |   |
| Cholesterol | 0mg | 0% |
| Sodium | 103mg | 4% |
| Total Carbohydrate | 49g | 16% |
| Dietary Fiber | 7g | 28% |
| Sugars | 4g |   |
| Protein | 10g |   |
| Vitamin A | 89% |   |
| Vitamin C | 25% |   |
| Calcium | 6% |   |
| Iron | 9% |   |

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Calories: 2000  2,500
Total Fat: Less than  65g  80g
Saturated Fat: Less than  20g  25g
Cholesterol: Less than  300mg  300mg
Sodium: Less than  2,400mg  2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate:  95g  117g
Dietary Fiber:  21g  37g

21.5% calories from fat

Recipe analyzed using spinach and without addition of hot pepper sauce, pepper, thyme, paprika or garlic powder.
The Plattsburgh Community Garden

The Plattsburgh Community Garden is accepting applications for 2015 plot rentals. The garden group operates a 60-plot garden in Melissa L. Penfield Park and a 14-plot garden at the Plattsburgh Housing Authority on South Catherine Street. The fee is $25 per plot, which includes access to water, compost and tools in a caring community dedicated to organic gardening.

Experienced and beginning gardeners are welcome. Families, clubs and organizations can join.

To learn more about the gardens, find out about our annual meeting and plot lottery April 25, and to download an application, visit www.plattsburghcommunitygarden.org or Google “Plattsburgh Community Garden.” Like us on Facebook.

Come garden with us in 2015.

The Ants Come Marching

This is the time of year when ants are finding their way into our homes. I know this because I am finding some in one of our bathrooms. Not a lot, just enough for me to take measures to keep this from becoming a big problem.

You might think that spraying ants with an insecticide would be the logical solution to this problem but it may just make the situation worse. When you spray an insecticide you kill the ants that you see but the ones you don’t see may not be affected. In order to increase the chances of killing all the ants you will want to use an ant bait. Ant baits are placed strategically in the area where the ants are and instead of killing the ants immediately, the ants take bait back to the nest where all the ants feed on it. This may take a few days and you have to ignore the ones crawling about but I have good luck with this. Of course, you need to read the label instructions and be sure to keep baits away from children and pets!

CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AND THE
MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS PRESENT

SPRING GARDEN DAY

APRIL 18, 2015

8:30-2:30 at CV-Tec

Special Guest Speaker
Christian Oest from Cook and Gardener
will present new and underutilized flowers, shrubs, and trees
for our North Country landscapes

Your registration fee of $40 (if postmarked by March 25, $45 if postmarked after)
provides you with morning refreshments, three classes of your choice,
a tasty lunch, guest speaker Christian Oest, door prize drawings,
and a binder with handouts from all nine.

Berry Nice!
Planting Fun in the Garden
Invasive Pests and Plants
Succession and Companion Planting
Raised Beds and Containers
Creating Garden Art
Plight of the Monarch
Composting at Home
What’s Bugging You?

For more information, or for a registration form,
Call or come by our office at 561-7450
6064 State Route 22, Suite 5 in Plattsburgh

Gently used garden books and magazines will be available for sale at the event

Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans,
and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.
Please let us know of any special needs that we should be aware of.

North Country Gardening
Hurry Up Already With Global Warming

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

I had such high hopes for global warming, but when the first week in March was just as cold as February, I felt disappointed. Betrayed, even. I thought the planet was heating up. All my plans for a northern NY citrus and banana orchard, out the window.

Turns out it’s easy to mix up climate and weather, two very different things. There’s a saying in the Adirondacks (and elsewhere, I’m sure) that if you don’t like the weather, wait five minutes. That’s weather: what we experience in a given day, week, season or year.

Climate, on the other hand, refers to long-term trends in weather patterns over decades and centuries. When you have a hundred years of weather records in hand (which we do, and then some) you can begin to look for patterns in climate.

Imagine riding a bicycle from Long Lake, elevation 1,900 feet, to the Hudson River at Albany, just about at sea level. Even if you’re not in shape it’s no sweat because the trip is all downhill, right? You should be able to coast the whole way. Actually you do want to be in good condition for that trek. While the general trend is downhill, there are many steep uphill climbs in there, too.

Or consider average life expectancy in the US. We know it has steadily risen for the past couple centuries, and is now roughly 79 years. Yet we all know people who, sadly, have died at a much younger age. While unfortunate, this doesn’t reflect the long-term trend.

Long-term climate trends going back thousands of years can be gleaned from air trapped in ice cores and

Continued on page 9...
April is notorious to North Country gardeners for its roller-coaster weather. It’s not unusual for us to experience a short spell of glorious spring weather, only to be followed by a cold snap and even snow. It can be a frustrating time for gardeners eager to get the growing season started, only to see their early attempts fail. Try to be realistic and pay attention to which plants can take a bit of cold and which can’t. Pansies, petunias, parsley, spinach and peas are some that can easily take a light frost. Marigolds, zinnias, begonias, basil, tomatoes, squash and beans are some that cannot. In general, seeds need warmer temperatures to germinate, but once sprouted they can tolerate cooler temperatures.

Pansies, petunias, begonias and geraniums take many weeks to bloom so all of these should be set out as transplants into your garden or containers, rather than trying to start them from seed. You may or may not find it worth the effort to start lettuce and spinach indoors. Often you can’t really see the difference between transplants and direct sown (planted by seed directly into the grown) after a few weeks of growth.

I always encourage gardeners to keep notes on when they planted which variety each year. This is the very best way to learn which varieties, planting methods, spacing, and quantity work best for you. But when it comes to figuring out the best time to plant outside, your notes may do little more than provide some entertainment! We have had so many ups and downs these past years, the only pattern I can discern is that there isn’t one! Each year it’s a gamble as to how early you can set out your plants or seeds.

In general, I’d say gardeners in the Champlain Valley are pretty safe planting cool season plants the first week of May, and waiting until after May 20 to June 1 to plant the warm season plants. It’s fun to push the season a bit and set out or sow some of your crops a little earlier than that, but save some seeds for replanting just in case your first attempts fail.

New Plants

If you ordered plants through the mail it’s tricky to decide when to plant them outdoors. You don’t want to hold them indoors any longer than necessary but you also don’t want to plant them outdoors too soon! I usually recommend that you tell the supplier to wait until May 1 to ship trees, perennial flowers and berry plants. Since they arrive dormant you can usually plant them in early May which gives them a few days in the ground to acclimate and develop some roots before pushing out tender leaves.

But most years we get calls from people in April whose plants arrived early. Oh where is my crystal ball when I need it? If only I knew for sure what the weather was going to do. Anything can happen so you need to be prepared to protect your new plants. Always open the box on arrival and check the condition of the plants. If they are still completely dormant with no sign of leaves you can loosen any plastic wrapping to let them breathe a little and store them in your refrigerator for a week or so until a better planting time. Check them every few days for rot or sprouting. If they’ve begun to leaf out or are already in pots, unpack them and treat them like houseplants but keep them in a cool location. You can set bare root trees and shrubs upright in buckets in your garage but don’t leave them standing in water. You need to keep the roots damp so cover them with moist, shredded newspaper but don’t submerge them in water for more than a few hours.

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

pollen trapped in lake sediment cores. Of course you have to take scientists’ word on that sort of thing, and rumor has it some of them favor progressive politics. It’s unlikely that thermometers have a secret political agenda, though, and reliable temperature records date back to about 1850. The consensus of these impartial instruments is that the average temperature of our planet has definitely risen over the last century.

The term 'global' can make climate change seem distant. Climate researcher Dr. Curt Stager of Paul Smith’s College points out a number of effects close to home. For example, local records document that our region is about two degrees warmer than it was just fifty years ago.

Lake Champlain ice data, which reach back more than 200 years, indicate in the 19th century there were only three years in which the lake didn’t freeze over. But in the 20th century the lake failed to freeze in twenty-eight winters, mostly since 1950.

This warming has wrought other changes. We now get three more inches of precipitation per year than in 1970, resulting in water level rises in lakes and ponds whose outflows are not artificially controlled. Lake Champlain has risen a whole foot in the past forty-five years.

Many people are asking where all the heat is this winter, a fair question. The coldest air in the northern hemisphere is usually found—no surprise—near the North Pole. Dubbed a “polar vortex” in the 1950s, a large Frisbee of frigid air normally hovers over the arctic quite reliably. On occasion this bitter-cold beanie gets whacked by the jet stream and slips down the face of the planet, bringing the arctic to us.

While we’re colder than usual, many places have been hotter. According to the Climate Change Institute at the University of Maine, most of Alaska was between fifteen and thirty-six degrees above normal in late February. Ditto for a big splash of northeastern Russia, and another chunk in the Russian northwest. All of the Arctic has been at least five, and as much as fifteen, degrees above normal. Planet-wide, it still averages out to a warming trend. Unfortunately the math hasn’t been in our favor lately.

It’s not that our winter has been cold—it’s just that somebody else had ours, and we experienced theirs. Anyone want to help me invest in a pineapple plantation in Anchorage?

Have a garden or agriculture related business? This space is available for your business card! Contact us at 561-7450
Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

by Jolene Wallace (Reprinted from 2011)

This quote is credited to Margaret Wolfe Hunderford who, in 1878, included it in her book titled Molly Bawn. However, in other forms it appeared as early as the 3rd century BC. In 1588 Shakespeare’s version was included in Love’s Labours Lost, and my personal favorite appeared in Poor Richard’s Almanac in 1741 when Benjamin Franklin wrote “Beauty, like supreme dominion, is best supported by opinion.”

However you word it, the sentiment is never truer than when referring to a garden. I suspect that each one of us would describe our ideal garden differently. Maybe vegetable plants are the only thing you like in a garden, since the hours, efforts, and expenses you invest are paid back to you in vine ripened vegetables that can’t be beat. Or perhaps your ideal garden is made up entirely of flowering perennials, or annuals, or herbs, or natural grasses, or a combination of all these plants. Your ideal may be pots overflowing on your patio or a hanging pot near the front door.

What we think of as our ideal garden has a lot to do with why we choose to garden at all. There has to be more to it than the desire to get dirt under your fingernails. Surely, scraping soil off the bottoms of your shoes isn’t the big draw. Maybe it’s knocking insect pests into soapy water or crawling around trying to pull weeds without disturbing the roots of what you are trying to nurture into fruition, and later working to get the dirt stains out of your pants. So the question I pose to you today is “Why do you garden?”

The quick answer would be that you like it, but why? Maybe you like being outdoors, even if it’s windy, hot, cool, or damp. Or the sense of accomplishment when your vegetables produce food for your family or your flowers look so beautiful in bloom. For some, it’s that spark of excitement when a sprout breaks ground, and the continuing joy in watching your garden grow. Others like the challenge and you have to admit, there are plenty of challenges.

I like to garden for all these reasons but mostly because it affords me the opportunity to be with myself and with nature. I like the quiet, the colors, the sights, sounds, and textures that transport me to a peaceful state of mindfulness that is absent when I am busy with routine tasks. I like the feel of the sun on my face, and the smell of damp soil. I like the sound of leaves rippling in the breeze and the sight of water being absorbed by the ground.

On weekends I enjoy pulling weeds early in the morning before breakfast when it feels like time is standing still. I like feeling that I have accomplished something special when I’m tired at the end of the day. And I like getting up the next morning, looking out the window or walking out the door and seeing the progress I’ve made in my garden. I even like seeing how much farther I still have to go. I like nurturing a garden, but mostly I like that the garden nurtures me.

North Country Gardening
Watch Your Tracks

Throughout the winter I watched for animal tracks in the fresh snow. Usually I saw rabbit tracks, and the occasional dog or cat but every once and a while I found one that I couldn’t identify and couldn’t find in my Scats and Tracks of the Northeast guide. Yes, there is such a thing, and yes, I do have one. This stuff fascinates me! Anyway, I decided that I couldn’t identify what I was seeing because snow melts and freezes just enough sometimes to make the track not quite what it was when it was first laid. Now that mud season is upon us we should have an easier time of it. Can you identify the following tracks?

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  
6.  
7.  
8.  
9.  
10.  
11.  
12.

Answers on page 5

Special Events

We are now accepting registrations for Spring Garden Day, to be held on Saturday, April 18th at CV-Tec. In addition to an exciting variety of classes to choose from, morning refreshments and a tasty lunch, our Special Guest will be Christian Oest from Cook and Gardener who will fill us in on some of the new and underutilized perennials, shrubs, and trees for our gardens. See page 6 for information.

Native Plants, Birds, and Bees

Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 2 when we will be hosting Pat Macomber, for an informative workshop on using native plants in our landscaping to provide natural beauty and easy maintenance, while providing a habitat for native birds, bees, and pollinators. We can make a difference in protecting our ecosystem by adding some natives to our yards. Pat, who has years of experience with natives, will give us tips and examples from 10:00 AM to Noon. This is a FREE class, but pre-registration is required, as space is limited. Call us at 561-7450 to register. Class will be held at our office, 6064 State Route 22, Suite 5 in Plattsburgh.
North Country Gardening

April 2015

Cornell Cooperative Extension Clinton County
6064 Route 22 Suite 5
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

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Fax: 518-561-0183
http://blogs.cornell.edu/cceclintoncounty/

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