North Country Gardening

We are in that time of year when there are events and activities almost every weekend. Our season is so short, it’s hard to get everything in. Take advantage of as much of the offerings that you can. Many of our community organizations go to great lengths to make enriching and educational experiences available to you and your families. It’s hard to choose, so plan ahead to put together a summer schedule that best fits your needs and interests. As always, if the Master Gardeners can put on a program for you, let me know. We love to spread the gardening bug!

Be Nice to Spiders...Or Else

By Paul Hetzler, St. Lawrence County Extension

Spiders can be dangerous, but mostly in ways you would never imagine. A couple of years ago a guy in SeaHle burned his house down trying to kill spiders with a blowtorch. In 2015 at a Michigan gas station, a man tried to kill a spider with a lighter and burned up one of the pump islands. The car manufacturer Mazda had to recall 42,000 of its vehicles in 2014 because spiders could get into a small fuel tank vent line and clog it, creating a strong vacuum in the gas tanks and causing them to crumple inward. It’s no wonder we are afraid of spiders, right?

Fear of spiders is so common and widespread, it may well be encoded in our DNA. Obviously it would have behooved early humans to learn to be wary of spiders, as a few species are poisonous. Mind you, it’s a tiny minority, but spiders can be hard to tell apart. If something with too many legs and way too many eyes scurries up our leg, most of us will swat first and ask questions later.

It’s a rare person whose first reaction would be “Great!—hand it over so I can key it out” when their partner says there’s a big spider in the bed. You know that person is a hardcore nerd. And that they probably have a relationship issue to work out if they don’t want to sleep alone that night.

Worldwide, about 35,000 species of spiders have been identified and named, although there are undoubtedly many more kinds out there running around without a fancy Latin label stuck to them. Roughly 3,000 species call North America home, and of them, only about a dozen are poisonous. New York is host to only one species of toxic spider, while Texas has collected eleven, almost the whole set. But then, they do everything in a big way down there. Continued on page 4...
Finally!

The planting season is here! But watch out; the last killing frost in 2015 in our area was on May 23, far later than I would usually expect. Anything goes these days so go ahead and put out some plants early but be ready to cover them if a cold snap hits. In many years you may luck out and get a head start on the season by gambling a bit with your planting date. Just don’t gamble more than you’re willing to lose. Cool season crops should have no problem going out any time this month. This group includes lettuce, spinach, parsley, peas, onions, and leeks. All of these can take a light frost and prefer growing under cooler conditions. You can either plant them from seed or set out young transplants.

As you plan your garden layout, consider using wide rows instead of single rows as much as possible. Wide rows are made by planting 3 rows close together to make a block. This reduces the area given to aisles and foot traffic which minimizes the areas you’ll need to weed. Once the plants in those blocks fill out where their leaves are touching, but not crowding, they will shade out most developing weeds. You do need to stay on top of the weeds until your crop fills out but overall you will have less area to weed. Large crops like tomatoes, summer squash and potatoes do best when planted in single rows to give them room to fill out.

Direct Sow or Start Indoors?

Crops that take a long time to mature must be started indoors and set out as transplants in order to ripen before fall in our climate. This group includes warm season tomatoes, peppers and eggplants as well as onions that must be planted as seedlings or sets in order to bulb up in time. Cool season crops and those that come quickly from seed don’t need to be started indoors and do fine when direct sown, so the choice is yours. One year I tried direct sowing some lettuce the same day I planted some indoors to eventually set out as transplants. It wasn’t a scientific experiment but by casual observation I really couldn’t tell the difference between the two when it came time to harvest.

Direct sowing requires more diligent and careful weeding as you wait for your crop to emerge whereas transplants are much easier to weed around. Some gardeners have a hard time thinning out their direct sown plants sufficiently and find it easier to space out transplants at the optimum distance. It’s mostly a matter of preference. One of our Master Gardener volunteers likes to direct sow her broccoli and Brussels sprouts where most gardeners I know set out transplants.

It’s fun to experiment with different methods, timings, spacings, varieties and so on. Try to jot down what you did so you can learn from experience what works best for you and your garden. With the weather extremes we’re experiencing these days, the timing that worked well one year may not work so well the following year. But your notes will help you understand what factors may be influencing your garden over the years.

For many more details on growing 58 kinds of vegetables, check out Cornell’s Vegetable Growing Guides at: http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening/scene0391.html. Each profile contains a detailed description and growing instructions, site and soil requirements, varieties, and solutions for managing pests and diseases.
By Jordy Kivette, Nutrition Educator

Rhubarb is quite common in the North Country. I have memories of gnawing on the tart stalks as a young child and have always loved strawberry rhubarb pie. Many people have patches growing on their property and it is available at farmer’s markets and farm stands in the spring.

Rhubarb is also known as Pie Plant, which is probably no surprise considering rhubarb pie is the most Common use of it. The leaves of the rhubarb plant are actually toxic due to the high amount of oxalic acid in them, however the stalks are perfectly safe to eat, both raw and cooked.

1 cup of raw rhubarb:
- Has about 25 calories and 2 grams of fiber.
- Is a good source of vitamin C, potassium and manganese.
- Is an excellent source of vitamin K.

As you can see rhubarb is actually pretty healthy. Most of our rhubarb applications, pies, cobblers, and ice cream sauce are not very healthy (obviously). Any of these things are fine in moderation, but you would want to limit how often you eat them.

If you have a bumper crop of rhubarb or pick up a few bunches from your local producer, consider preserving it to spread the spring bounty. If you are canning it, be sure to use an up to date recipe, proper canning equipment and follow all canning safety steps. Freezing rhubarb is very easy and a good option if you have freezer space. Rhubarb can be frozen raw, without blanching; just cut the rhubarb into 1” or smaller chunks, pack in freezer safe containers or bags, getting out as much air as possible. Consider freezing in quantities appropriate for future use, so you don’t have a gallon-sized chunk of frozen rhubarb for a single strawberry rhubarb pie you’d like to make. You can also freeze cooked and sweetened rhubarb if you would like.

Get creative, try using less sugar in your rhubarb desserts or pair rhubarb with sweeter fruit to minimize added sugar. Rhubarb could also be used in savory recipes. A rhubarb chutney would pair nicely with meat, like pork, and rhubarb salsa is tasty. As always feel free to contact me with any ideas you have or if you would like more information or recipes on whatever foods you are growing or buying locally.

Enjoy the recipe on page 5
Sources don’t agree exactly, but apparently we have close to thirty different species of spiders in the Empire State, with eleven of those considered “common.” You’d think that in higher latitudes we might be exempt from poisonous spiders; after all, most of them live in hot places. But as it happens the lone species of concern in New York State, the northern black widow (Latrodectus variolus), is just as happy in the Adirondack and northern tier regions as it is in Long Island.

An interesting sidebar about black widows—so called because they are known to eat the male after mating—is that such behavior is not as common as was once thought. This “sexual cannibalism” (an actual scientific term) was first seen in the lab where males couldn’t get away. Seems that in the wild they adhere to a “best defense is a running head start” school of thought, and most of them survive.

A red and black color scheme on a car is cool. On a spider it’s scary. Lucky for us, to identify the northern black widow we don’t have to flip her upside down to look for the characteristic red hourglass shape on her abdomen. The way I figure it, most bites probably result from people trying to find out if that shiny black spider is poisonous or not. Anyway, the northern species has plenty of bright red geometric patches on her backside in addition to the mark on her belly.

Although black widows have the most toxic venom, the brown recluse spider (Loxosceles reclusa) is more dangerous. Brown recluse bites, while rare, often require medical intervention because they cause significant tissue death (necrosis) with potential infection and scarring. In about one percent of cases, their bites lead to death if the venom becomes systemic. Most of these situations involve the elderly or small children.

Here in New York we have no resident brown recluse spiders, which are found from coast to coast but are concentrated in the Midwest. Their range extends from the Gulf States as far north as Virginia (apparently they have good border controls). Every year, though, a few end up here when they stow away in luggage or gear of returning vacationers. Brown recluses are tan and shiny, not hairy. They have a darker violin-shaped mark on their backs, with the neck of the violin pointing backwards toward the abdomen.

There are aggressive spiders—the invasive hobo spider in the Pacific Northwest, for example—but it should be noted that all of our poisonous ones are docile. Black widows prefer to run away, and the brown recluse (and other recluse spiders) are named that for a reason. It’s those unfortunate situations when they hide in a bath towel or clothing and become pinned against human skin that lead to bites.

Continued on page 9...
Many thanks to our business sponsors:

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Flowering Meadow Nursery  
Garrant’s Vegetables  
Giroux Poultry  
Northern Orchards

North Country Gardening

Rhubarb Salsa

I have used a similar recipe for rhubarb salsa before and it was great. The tanginess of raw rhubarb works here. It’s delicious with tortilla chips or to top your main dish! ......Jordy

Rhubarb Salsa

2 cups sliced or chopped rhubarb (red or green)  
1 small red onion (about 1 ½ cup, chopped)  
1 green bell pepper  
2 yellow, orange or red bell peppers (all three bell peppers combined should be about 3 cups chopped)  
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro (stems and leaves)  
1 tablespoon brown sugar  
Juice of two limes  
1 teaspoon of salt (start with 1 t, but add more if needed)  
1 teaspoon cumin seeds

To make: Mix everything together in a large bowl and let sit for at least an hour. Store it in the fridge in an airtight container. The longer it sits the better it tastes!

Source: American Farmland Trust @ www.farmland.org
Warming Up the Organs to Make Music

By Paul Hetzler, St. Lawrence County Extension Educator

Every spring, Mother Nature takes the choir out of the freezer. And sometimes, this year for example, she pops them back in for a while. The choir to which I refer is that all-male horde of early-spring frogs: spring peepers, wood frogs, and chorus frogs. Even while an ice rind still clings to the pond edges, untold numbers of these guys rouse themselves from torpor to sing for female attention.

While in our species it is mostly an inflated ego which causes males to become unusually loud attention-mongers when seeking mates, it is an inflated vocal sac which allows male frogs to be so noisy. This air-filled structure balloons out tight, acting as a resonance chamber to amplify sound. I don’t know how it is with all frog species, but the inflated vocal sac of a peeper is almost as big as it is. This contrasts with the human male, whose ego can sometimes swell to many times his body size.

Spring peepers (Pseudacris crucifer) are the most vocal of the trio, and their song is the most widely recognized. I’d describe their call as a sweet, shrill—let’s see—peep, shall we say. Singly or in small groups it is melodic, and a large population of them can be deafening (some people with atypical hearing ranges describe it as painful).

The rough “X” (or cross; hence the species name) on their backs help identify this tan, inch-long amphibian with toe pads similar to those of a tree frog. Peepers can in fact climb trees, but for whatever reason they seldom do. Maybe there is no need to climb because they can practically fly. Peepers can jump 40 to 50 times their body length.

If it quacks like a duck, it’s not always a duck. Wood frogs (Lithobates sylvaticus) are plenty vocal, though their calls don’t carry as far as other frogs’ do. Their call is a short quack, not so much like they are imitating a duck call, but more like they are inspired by it. I have sometimes thought it sounds like barking, but that may be a minority opinion.

As their name indicates, wood frogs spend considerable time in the forest, wintering over in the leaf litter, and breeding in shallow ephemeral pools in the woods. Measuring around 2 ½ inches long, they are brown to copper-colored, with a raccoon-like dark mask across their eyes.

Every time I approach a group of wood frogs in early spring I am tempted to set up a curtain or something so they can have privacy. Let’s just say they are rather animated and communal in their business dealings, in addition to being very public. Wood frogs create large collective egg masses, apparently not a common practice in the frog world.

If the frost is more than a few inches deep, both spring peepers and wood frogs freeze solid during

North Country Gardening
Organ Music continued....

winter. Obviously they have some kind of super-powers, namely that they pump cellular water outside of the cell walls. They also produce antifreeze to help prevent tissue damage at below-freezing temps.

It turns out that among other chemicals, they create ethylene glycol, the same thing you put in your car radiator. If more than a quart of this compound is released into the environment, it’s considered a “reportable quantity,” and therefore a hazardous spill that must be disclosed to regulators. I don’t know how many winterized peepers or wood frogs it would take to constitute a quart of ethylene glycol, but good luck getting them to register with the EPA, right?

The choir wouldn’t be complete without the aptly named chorus frog. Our boreal, or upland, chorus frog (Pseudacris kalmi) is one- to 1 ½- inches long, greenish-gray to brown, with three dark stripes down its back. More or less the backup singers for spring peepers, their call is a melodious, trilling “crreeek” that lasts a second or two. Listen for this understated song amidst the nonstop cacophony of peepers.

If you’ve ever run your fingernail along the teeth of a cheap, hard-plastic comb, you’ve approximated their call. Go easy on the comb, though, or you may have female chorus frogs following you around.

When dormant animals are roused from torpor several times before spring actually arrives, it is hard on them. Finding appropriate shelter, in the case of chorus frogs, and preparing to become frog-sicles in the case of peepers and wood frogs, takes energy. Since there is little to eat yet, they are still relying on energy reserves from the previous year. Going back under the spell of the Ice Queen once is probably not an issue, but if it were to happen repeatedly it could cause undue stress. I say we try and distract Ma Nature long enough for someone to sneak in and unplug her freezer.
Children and adults alike have always been excited about the chemical reaction that occurs between baking soda and vinegar. The ever popular science fair volcano has been around for many years and does not seem to be losing any interest. This activity uses the same staple items but in a new way.
Watch how the carbon dioxide gases created by mixing these two ingredients together causes a funky reaction with the rice in this experiment.

What you’ll need:
- Clear container (I used a tall glass)
- Water
- Baking soda
- Vinegar
- Rice
- Spoon
- Food coloring (optional)

What you’ll do:
- Pour one cup of water into your clear container
- Add 1 teaspoon of baking soda to the water and stir
- Sprinkle some rice into the mix. Observe what happens to the rice.
- Add ½ cup of vinegar to the water. Observe what happens next.
- Optional: add a few drops of food coloring and watch it slowly begin to mix into the solution.

Science behind the experiment
- The rice will sink to the bottom when added to the baking soda and water mixture because it is denser than the water. If the rice does not sink it might be less dense and you should try another type of rice, broken pieces of vermicelli, or raisins.
- After the vinegar is added the rice will start to react with the baking soda in the water and create bubbles of carbon dioxide.
- As the bubbles of carbon dioxide begin to adhere to the rice, the rice is carried up to the surface. Once it reaches the surface and the gas is released it will then fall back down again.

Further exploration
As the chemical reaction slows, you can add a more baking soda and watch what happens. Add more vinegar. Can you make the rice continue to dance?
If you use a larger container you will need to adjust the proportions.

For this activity and others like it go to:

North Country Gardening
Spiders Continued....

So how come spiders are so often blamed for bites when most of them are not even capable of puncturing human skin? First of all, I have yet to come across a “spider bite” where the victim actually saw the culprit. If someone wakes up with a bite it must have been a spider; couldn’t be anything else.

To be fair, though, we do have a type of native spider that can and will bite. Yellow sac spiders (Cheiracanthium spp.), common across North America, are ghostly pale, yellow to greenish (sometimes pink or tan), medium-size critters that make little silk homes in nooks and crannies—curled-up leaves, rock crevices, and sometimes in the corner of an interior room. Or gas tank vent lines.

Yellow sac spiders have a mildly toxic venom that may cause a rash, or in rare cases limited tissue necrosis. About twenty-five years ago something bit the side of my neck, and an alarming gray necrotic lesion slightly larger than a quarter developed. It healed after about six weeks with no scar. At the time I was afraid it could have been a brown recluse, but was assured that as I was living in the Adirondacks it was probably a yellow sac bite.

Notice how I accused a spider right away without a shred of evidence. I blame my DNA.

MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS WILL HOLD THEIR ANNUAL PERENNIAL PLANT SALE SATURDAY, JUNE 4 9:00AM AT THE EXTENSION OFFICE

Details on page 11

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

Are you curious about all that’s going in our 4-H program? Check out the Clover Express at the link below! Call our office if you’d like to find out more about how you can get involved.

http://www.ccecc4hce.blogspot.com/
Vermont Nursery Tour

Cornell University Cooperative Extension – Clinton County is offering a Vermont Nursery Tour on June 14, 2016. We will be going to Cady’s Falls Nursery in Morrisville, Vt., and Horsford Garden and Nursery in Charlotte, Vt. Neither nursery has public restrooms or sells food and drink but we will be making ‘pit stops’ along the way, including Oxbow Park, to use facilities and give you the chance to purchase lunch if you choose not to bring your own. The cost is $40.00 per person, which is non-refundable unless the Extension office has need to cancel the trip. This is a “rain or shine” excursion.

We are using Premier Coach for this tour. The bus is a 55 - passenger tour bus with a bathroom for urgent needs and limited storage space. CCE will give you a plastic or paper grocery bag for your purchases. We cannot allow people to bring back trees or shrubs because of the space limitations. You are welcome to bring a lunch.

Cady’s Falls Nursery specializes in hard-to-find and hard-to-propagate plants. **Cady’s Falls Nursery only accepts cash and will take checks from out of state – no credit cards**, so plan accordingly. They do not ship or deliver plants. Please see their webpage for additional information - www.cadysfallsnursery.com.

The Horsford Gardens and Nursery is located in Charlotte, Vt. The nursery is 42 acres and grows up to 100,000 types of perennials. Horsford accepts Visa, MasterCard, Vermont checks and cash. **They do not take out-of-state checks**. Please see their website for additional information – www.horsfordnursery.com.

Name ____________________________________________________________

Tele. __________________________________________________________

Email __________________________________________________________________________________________

Payment $40.00  Cash ___ Check Number ______  NOTE: You are not registered until we receive payment.

I read the above and understand that I will be limited to what I can bring back, bathrooms will be limited, there is no food or drink at the nurseries, and this is a rain or shine excursion. I can bring my own lunch.

Signed ______________________________

Pay in person or mail payment to CCE Clinton Co. 6064 State Rte 22, Suite 5, Plattsburgh, NY 12901

North Country Gardening
Mark Your Calendars

Saturday, June 4
The Master Gardener Volunteers will hold their yearly perennial plant sale at our office location, 6064 State Route 22, in Plattsburgh. The sale begins at 9:00 AM and will continue until all plants are sold. As always, these plants are from our own gardens and will be sold for $5 each or 5 for $20.

Tuesday, June 14—Vermont Nursery Tour
The Master Gardener Volunteers are sponsoring a bus trip to Cady's Falls Nursery in Morrisville, Vt and Horsford Garden and Nursery in Charlotte, Vt. We will travel via Premier Coach and do have a maximum number of people we can accommodate. See previous page for details and registration information.

Saturday, July 9—Secret Garden Tour
The Secret Gardens Tour, sponsored by The Kent-Delord House Museum Garden Club, will be held at various community locations on:
Saturday, July 9th, 12 noon - 4pm, rain or shine
Tickets: $10 in advance, $15 day of tour
Information: 518-566-9540 (ask for Carol), 518-563-2662 (Paula)
This self-guided tour of several gardens in the community is an annual event sponsored by the Kent-Delord House Museum (KDHM) Garden Club, with all the proceeds used for maintaining and improving the Museum's gardens.

Advance tickets are available at Cook & Gardener, 139 Tom Miller Road in Plattsburgh, as well as at the KDHM, 17 Cumberland Avenue, near the Plattsburgh City Hall and the Macdonough Monument.
Maps, brochures and day-of-tour tickets are available at the Museum, Saturday, July 9th, from noon until 1:30pm. Complimentary refreshments will be offered at one of the homes on the tour.

Saturday and Sunday, May 7th and 8th
Opening weekend at Babbie Rural & Farm Learning Museum. This ‘step back into time’ is an enjoyable and educational way to have family fun. Located at 250 River Road in Peru.
Call 643-8052 for hours and information.

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

Our office, located at 6064 State Route 22, Suite 5, is open from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday. 561-7450. We will be closed Monday, May 30 in remembrance of Memorial Day.
North Country Gardening

May 2016

Cornell Cooperative Extension Clinton County
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Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Phone: 518-561-7450
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http://blogs.cornell.edu/cceclintoncounty/

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