Brown lawn, gray trees, dirty snow – Mother Nature is in her mid-winter drabness. Almost more than heat and light, I crave color: pink cherry blossoms, orange marigolds and even plain old green grass seem simply delicious right now. Plant breeders and garden centers know this desire, and at last week’s “Bedding Plant Conference,” floriculturist Dr. Neil Mattson showed us what those folks are cooking up for spring.

With standard impatiens threatened by the downy mildew disease, the resistant New Guinea impatiens continues to get more attention. The ‘Florific’ series comes in a wide range of colors and can be grown from seed, which might reduce their selling price. The ‘Divine’ series is also seed propagated, and is offered in twelve colors and five color mixes.

‘Magnum Wild Salmon’ has larger flowers, blooms well in heat and is great in shade. My personal favorite is ‘Strike Orange’ (Photo 1). The foliage has red veins surrounded by a yellow splotch and is bordered with light and dark green, and the plant is topped with big, screaming orange flowers. While there is nothing subtle or classy about this plant, I am drawn to it as a flame-deprived moth to a volcano.

More begonias will also be offered as alternatives for shade. The ‘Bada Bing’ series comes in red, orange, pink and white flowered plants and has green leaves, while the ‘Bada Boom’ series (2) has all the same flower colors but purple/red leaves. Their zesty names seem to imply they’ll knock your garden clogs off. And the once-humble petunia continues to
appear in new colors, with better foliage, a more thrifty habit and a stronger constitution. I like ‘Cha-Ching Cherry’ (3), with red-pink flowers marked with a yellow-white star, and ‘Surprise Blue Sky’ (4) with blossoms that appeared quite blue in the photo but which Dr. Neil described as a light blue-purple. Crazypetunia ‘Twilight Blue’ (5) is a faded pink-purple-white bloomer that looks as if it went through the wash too many times. Another one falling into the fun but of questionable taste category is petunia ‘Glamouflage Grape’ (6). Picture a mass of yellowy white and pale green foliage with loud lilac flowers. If you own the 120 count box of Crayolas and still wear multi-hued 1980's sweaters, you'll take this one home.

Retailers strive to create and respond to consumer trends. Veggies and herbs in pots are still considered “hot,” so you might be offered corn or tomato plants in a container, or even ‘Sugar Heart’ snap peas. Colorful kales, such as the fine leaved ‘Peacock White’ and bold leaved ‘Pigeon White,’ make useful plants for combination planters. ‘Tabby’ wheat grass (7), with fresh green and white foliage, is targeted to the lover of felines. And everything old can be made new again. ‘Princettia Dark Pink’ (8) euphorbia is marketed as a spring plant, but even a passing glance reveals it is a poinsettia.

We could all use a ‘Tropical Breeze’ (9) right about now. The plant version is a lovely raspberry and cream pot dahlia, but I’d take the real thing, too.

For more about Dr. Neil Mattson and his research, visit:
http://hort.cals.cornell.edu/people/neil-mattson

Text by David Chinery and photos by Dr. Neil Mattson, Cornell University
If you are searching for a beautiful summer-blooming tree with exceptional fall foliage and an interesting winter habit then the sourwood tree is the perfect choice for your landscape. Often called sourwood, sorrel or Lily-of-the-Valley Tree, *Oxydendron arboreum* is truly a tree for all seasons.

Sourwood is a small to medium-sized tree ideal of the home landscape, where it will typically reach 25 to 30 feet in height with a 20 foot spread. This tree works well as a specimen, a patio tree, in a naturalized setting or even along a woodland edge. It is pyramidal in habit with long, 3 to 8 inch strappy, bright green, slightly pubescent leaves. The common name “sourwood” is from the sour taste derived from the leaves. It has a slow growth rate and is not plagued by any common insect or disease problems. The branches grow in an eloquent drooping fashion, from which leaves tend to sway.

Sourwood grows best in a slightly acidic, moist, well-drained soil. It is native to the gravelly soils and ridges above stream banks from western Florida, Mississippi, and North Carolina, through Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio into Pennsylvania. It is listed as a zone 5 tree, possibly zone 4, to zone 9.

In July the sourwood tree overflows with small white urn-shaped fragrant flowers much like those found on the lily-of-the-valley. Typically a heavy bloomer, the small, 1/4 inch flowers are held in terminal nodding clusters. Following bloom a small fruit is produced that dries into a persistent 5-valved dehiscent capsule. Growing twigs are bright red and green with a glabrous feel. The mature bark is deeply furrowed and breaks into rectangular ridges, described by some as alligator-like in appearance. The autumn foliage is a rich maroon to scarlet and sometimes plum color which persists late into the season.

This tree is not a tree for the urban setting as it is not tolerant of pollution. Cultivars are becoming more widely available in the trade. ‘Chaemeleon’ or ‘Chameleon’ is prized for its colorful fall foliage display as it can show shades of red, purple, and yellow in sequence or at the same time. Its habit is more upright than the species. ‘Chaemeleon’ was selected at the Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha’s Vineyard off the cost of Massachusetts. Another cultivar noted for its excellent show of fall foliage is called ‘Mt. Charm.’ It has a symmetrical growth habit and colors up earlier than the species. ‘Mt. Charm’ is a selection out of West Virginia.

In spite of the common name, the graceful beauty of the sourwood tree is sure to sweeten up any landscape.

**Text by Chuck Schmitt**
The other morning the newspaper column *Animal Island* asked: “Are herbicides causing a decline in the toad population?” The question was raised by a gardener who noted that their backyard toad population was shrinking and asked if herbicides could be the culprit.

The answer?
Possibly! According to Marc Morrone of Newsday McClatchy Newspapers, toads are amphibians with soft bellies with permeable skins which don’t protect them from chemical products or toxins. He goes on to say “So, if a toad crawls onto your lawn early in the morning and encounters herbicide or insecticide granules, those chemicals will hurt it.”

Unlike the soft skin toads, other backyard critters like snakes and lizards have thick scales which protect them from the chemicals.

But are they in danger? Let’s find out.

Because I’m curious (some people say nosy) I sprang to the keyboard and googled NYS DEC - Toads.

And yes, they have a program….and they could use your help. Here’s the nitty-gritty:

**NYS DEC's Frog and Toad Monitoring Program**

“Frog and toad populations around the world are declining due to habitat loss, climate change, fungal disease and pollution. Through the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program (NAAMP), you can help monitor populations of frogs and toads to aid in their long-term conservation.

In New York State, there are 14 different species of frogs and toads, several of which are under special conservation status. The [Hudson River Estuary Biodiversity Monitoring Program](https://www.dec.ny.gov) provides coordination with NAAMP for recruiting and training citizen scientists (you!) in collecting frog and toad population data within New York State.

The information you collect helps develop an index of frog and toad distribution and abundance. Furthermore, it helps monitor the health and status of frogs and toads in New York State.

**Become a Volunteer**

Sign up for one of several training sessions offered, which are usually held in February and March each year, to learn how to identify each of the 14 individual frogs and toads in New York State by the sounds or calls they make.

Once you are trained, you will conduct surveys several times throughout the spring and summer months, listening for frogs and toads and recording your observations.

Currently, we are recruiting volunteers in the Hudson Valley Region (Orange, Putnam, Westchester, Ulster, Dutchess, Greene, Albany, Columbia and Rensselaer Counties).

For more information visit the DEC website or call 845-256-3829.”
Fresh, chocolate-covered, or upside down, pineapple in any of its forms makes me happy. Today this delicious treat is only a supermarket trip away, but of course it wasn’t always that easy. Introduced from South American to Europe by the Spaniards in 1513, pineapple was a true rarity since sailing ships had to carry them north from tropical locales several months away. But desire breeds invention, and English estate gardeners gradually figured out how to grow pineapples in their rainy climate centuries before central heating. How they did this makes for an impressive example of horticultural technology.

The details of this tale I’ve cribbed from a fascinating book entitled “The Lost Gardens of Heligan” by Tim Smit. An extensive, self-sufficient estate in Cornwall, Heligan for centuries hummed with the activities of a team of highly skilled gardeners, then fell into ruin starting in the early twentieth century, only to be restored again in the 1980’s. The Tremayne family, owners for succeeding generations, were enthusiastic plantspeople, so it is no surprise that they should have built a special “pineapple pit” and assembled a talented staff of growers. Having a home-grown pineapple on your table for Christmas was the ultimate status symbol. So important was this prestige that by 1730 most of the larger gardens in England were growing their own pineapples.

The term “pit” doesn’t do justice to the engineering and thought that went into the structure that made a northern pineapple possible. Facing the sun with a roof of glass sloping at a slight downward angle, the pit stood fifty feet long, six feet wide and about eight feet deep. It resembled what we today would call a cold frame, only constructed on a gigantic scale. Manure pits, four feet deep and wide, ran on both long sides of the pit and provided the essential heating. Each manure pit had a drainage system of terracotta pipes to collect excess water and “manure liquor.” This pungent concoction ran into a “liquor pit” and was used as a fertilizer. Heat from the two manure pits traveled through the hollow walls of the central pineapple pit and kept the plants inside nice and toasty. The plants were kept in pots, which were plunged in a bed of tan bark, the oak bark material leftover from leather tanning. The glass windows could be partially shaded by roll-up “Hessian screening,” which was similar to our Venetian shades. The pit was divided into four chambers, so varying varieties of pineapples could be grown, or crops grown in stages.

Growing pineapples wasn’t a “set-it-and-forget-it” proposition by any means. Managing the temperature was tricky, since fermenting manure could reach over 120F, and some unfortunate gentry saw their pineapple pits burst into flames. At Heligan a “squat bothy” (small bedroom) was built nearby so a junior gardener could keep watch 24-7. Results could be impressive: Thomas Knight, pineapple pit designer and President of the Royal Horticulture Society, could grow a pineapple in just ten months, a sweet success.

For more information on Heligan’s pineapple pit, visit: http://heligan.com/news-events/news-article/the-story-of-the-10000-pineapple

Text by David Chinery
Green Shots: The Gardening World in Pictures

This month’s photos were taken by Master Gardener Beverly Reinhardt during an early January visit to The Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. The Alamo is surrounded by beautiful gardens, as seen here. According to the website Alamo.org, “As the city grew all around the Alamo, land was acquired for a memorial park to create a sense of reverence around the iconic Alamo Shrine. Today, these lush, green areas form an urban oasis that is itself a destination. Tropical and native plants fill the space, with their shade cooling the area in the hottest summer.”
What to do in April?

- When ground has thawed, dig, divide and replant perennials such as beebalm, asters, and hosta.
- Sow cool weather crops in the garden as soon as the soil can be worked: lettuce, spinach, arugula, onions.
- It’s never too early to start weeding.
- Properly prune winter damaged tree branches.
- Prune woody perennials, like lavender and sage.
- Celebrate Arbor Day – April 25 – by planting a tree.
- Plant some pansies for early color.
- Turn your compost pile.
- Sharpen your tools and your lawnmower blade.
- Prune flowering shrubs when they have finished blooming.
- As soon as soil has thawed and is dry enough to work, dig in compost. However, if the soil is sticky when you squeeze it, it is too wet to work! Have patience and wait!
- Organize your recycling. Check with your community or waste service to get detailed information about what you can recycle.
- Rake up any remaining leaves from the lawn, hedges and garden beds.
- Cut ornamental grasses to the ground.

Inspect summer bulbs which are awaiting in storage (such as dahlias, cannas and begonias) to make sure they are not drying out. Discard any that show signs of rot.

- Avoid injury to lawns: keep foot traffic to a minimum if the lawn is wet.

“Blossom of the almond trees,
April’s gift to April’s bees,
Birthday ornament of spring.”

Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904)
English poet and journalist
The Woodlawn Preserve is considered a globally-rare ecosystem, and is now recognized as a regional priority conservation project in the DEC New York State Open Space Conservation Plan. The headwaters of the Lishakill Creek flow through the region, eventually finding their way into the Mohawk River.

Sometimes known as the ‘Western Pine Bush’, it is the beginning section of the Albany-Schenectady Pine Barrens, situated immediately northwest of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. The approximately 135 acres includes several remnant features of the Pine Bush, including sand plains and dune formations, some pitch pine scrub oak barrens, and historic Karner Blue butterfly habitat, which while currently unoccupied, may be restored as a future reintroduction site. As it has not been subject to the periodic burns as the Albany Pine Bush has, there is tremendous amount of both native and non-native plant diversity.

Schenectady County Master Gardener Janet Chen has been instrumental in working with volunteers, the local neighborhood association and DEC representatives to develop and maintain trails and promote the ecological aspects of the Preserve. She serves as Chair of The Friends of the Woodlawn Preserve, a 501(c) (3) support and advocacy group for the Woodlawn Preserve.

Over the past two years The Friends of the Woodlawn Preserve have purchased barriers to prevent ATV and dirt bike activity, erected kiosks at the two trail entrances (one on Gifford Road, the other behind the Woodlawn School on Wells Avenue), marked the trails, and with the help of Schenectady County Master Gardener and graphic designer, Arden Lawand, brochures with trail maps are now available at both kiosks.
Other projects include stocking Delta Pond with the help of the DEC, and providing a handicapped access point at the pond.

A grant from Lowes, along with private donations and a gift from the Hudson-Mohawk chapter of the Sierra Club, has provided funds for much of these projects.

In the fall of 2013 work began on a Butterfly Garden Project that will be located near the Wells Road entrance to the Preserve behind the Woodlawn School. A 20’ x 20’ enclosed garden area is planned and will include native host and nectar plants, shrubs and trees specifically designed to attract butterflies. With the help of the Schenectady County Cornell Cooperative Extension we will be starting some native plants from seed for this garden, and have the interest of several teachers from two City schools to include the Preserve and the garden project in their curriculum.

Trails are open to the public for hiking from dawn to dusk. Parking is available at the Gifford Road entrance, and is subject to availability at the Wells Avenue/Woodlawn School entrance.

Photos: Janet Chen, Dave Berard and Steve Young.
Logo, map and garden design graphic, Arden Lawand.
“Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience. Knowing grass, I can appreciate persistence.”

Hal Borland, 
Newspaper columnist, author and 
Connecticut naturalist

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.
Save the date

Saturday, May 17, 2014
9am – 1pm
Cornell Cooperative Extension
24 Martin Road
Voorheesville, NY

Garden Education Day

An opportunity to buy plants, learn new things about gardening, and visit the demonstration gardens!
So You Want To Start a Vegetable Garden?
Saturday, April 12, 9 AM—12 PM

Participants will develop skills to map and plan a vegetable garden. Activities include starting vegetable seeds and propagating herbs. Learn about organic fertilizers, irrigation and mulches. Bring measurements of your intended garden space and a sample of soil (1 cup of dry soil). Each participant will receive a flat (roughly 50) of vegetable and herb transplants to be picked up May 3 during our Earth Day Celebration. Cost $40.00 per person.

Class size is limited. Please register with payment by April 4, 2014.

visit our website:

Individuals with special needs requiring accommodations should contact our office prior to the event at 518-371-1622.

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Reduce Your Waste, Improve Your Garden
Thursday, May 15, 6—7:30 PM

Composting and Vermicomposting is a great way to reduce kitchen waste and produce nutrient-rich fertilizer for your garden or house plants. The workshop will cover all you need to know to start composting and vermicomposting at home. Cost $20.00 for program and book “Let It Rot”

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April Break Week Programs for Children Ages 5-10

Start your Own Veggie Garden
Tuesday, April 15, 9:30—11:30 AM

Join us for a morning in the greenhouse and learn all about the fascinating world of plants. Students will start their own vegetable seeds to take home. Garden exploration, art activities and healthy snack included. Cost: $15.00 per child.

Natural Egg Dyeing
Thursday, April 17, 9:30—11:30 AM

Join us for this fun, hands-on class and learn about plants that contain colorful dyes. Educators and students will work together and make dyes from plants such as cabbage, onions, cranberries and more. Students will then decorate their own eggs to take home. A healthy snack will be provided. Cost $15.00 per child.

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All classes will be held at the Sustainable Living Center is located next to the tennis courts in Central Park Schenectady
The address is:
180 Ptl. Arthur Chaires Lane

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Visit our website: [Cornell Cooperative Extension](https://www.cce.cornell.edu/schenectady) provides equal program and employment opportunities.
2014 Earth Day Celebration
Saturday, May 3, 10 AM — 2 PM
Sustainable Living Center at the Greenhouses in Central Park
180 Ptl. Arthur Chaires Lane, Schenectady

Garden Workshops
Compost Demonstrations

Community Partners
ECOS: The Environmental Clearing House
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
Schenectady Co. Water Quality Coordinating Committee
Schenectady County Sheriff’s Department
Friends of the Woodlawn Preserve
Schenectady County Environment Advisory Committee
Schenectady Recycles
Southern Adirondack Beekeepers Association
Electric City Food Co-op
Electric City Bike Rescue

Rain or Shine!
Dried herb jars and dried tea for sale to benefit

Garden-themed Tag Sale with proceeds directly benefiting the

Plant Sale: Vegetable plants & Herb plants; Benefits the

Soil Testing $2.00 Bring a cup of dry soil

Cornell Cooperative Extension in Schenectady County provides equal program and employment opportunities.
Individuals with special needs requiring accommodation should contact the
Capital Region Recycling Partnership
Guilderland Central School District
Cornell Cooperative Extension Albany County
Albany County Soil & Water Conservation District
Celebrate...

GO GREEN DAY!

Gogreendayny.org  A Reduce, Reuse, Recycle & Refuse event for all

For more information contact Karen Finnessy at 518-765-2692

Join us for Family-Friendly GO GREEN DAY!
Information, ideas, and hands-on activities about recycling, reusing, reducing and more!

DATE:
Saturday, April 26, 2014  Rain or Shine!

TIME:
8:00 am – to 2:00 pm

LOCATION:
Farnsworth Middle School
6072 State Farm Road Guilderland

Capital Region Recycling Partnership
Door Prize
Four 4-week CSA memberships to Field Goods will be given away.

Informational Presentations
This is a tentative schedule, please check our website closer to April 26th for a finalized listing www.Gogreendayny.org
- Planting Outside the Box @ 9:00am
- What is a CSA? @ 9:30am
- Travelling Taste Buds @ 10:00am
- Gardening in a Warming Climate @ 10:30am
- The Buzz About Bees @ 11:00am
- Why Compost? @ 11:30am
- Radon Testing for the Homeowner @ 12:00pm
- Sustainable Solutions for Healthy Homes @ 12:30

Recycling Extravaganza Collections:
- Metal, Plastics, Paper, Electronics, Plastic Bags, Bottles & Cans, Rags, Bicycles (Usable & Broken)
- Usable Clothing, Books, Toiletry Items, Decorative Household Items,
- Usable Dishware/Linen/Pots & Pans, Beauty Product Containers & Bottles, Toothpaste Tubes

Middle School Garage Sale
To benefit the GCSD Butterfly House

Cornell Cooperative Extension Albany County
Free Radon Test Kits, Canning Exhibit, Honey Bee Exhibit
Master Gardeners will test your soil ($1) and answer gardening questions,

Albany County Soil & Water Conservation District
Rain Barrel Display & Ordering Opportunity

Activities for the Kids
- Energy Bicycle, Recycling Game, Enviroscape
- Green Shopping Challenge, Rock Painting
- 4H animals

Dali Mamma Café & Travelling Tastebuds
A program developed to bring healthy, FUN snacks to children by incorporating art, music, geography and history with their food.

Vendors & Exhibitors
- Solar Energy, Eco-Home Services, Craft Items,
- Maple Syrup/Local Farms, Pest Control,
- Food Composting, Health & Beauty, Local Groceries, Home Improvement and More!

Event Sponsors:

A. Phillips Hardware  Price Chopper
Empire Zero  Manfred Real Estate  NYSEERDA  UltrePET LLC  US GreenFiber LLC
Honest Weight Food Coop  Infamous Graphics  Natural Awakenings Magazine
Our Towne Bethlehem  Royal Flush Portables
Rensselaer County Master Gardeners present the

2014 Garden Tour

Save The Date!

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

Thursday, June 19
4 to 8 PM

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

Maps sales site “TO BE ANNOUNCED”

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 dhc5@cornell.edu.
CCE provides equal program and employment opportunities.