



April - May - June 2020

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This Spring, we find ourselves living in turbulent and unsettling times. We are being asked to adapt to one difficult situation after another and so many things seem to be slipping beyond our control. What was normal 6 weeks ago now seems like life on another planet. We're all doing the best we can but it's not easy. But ... one part of our life is still there, waiting for us. As gardeners, we already know we're not really in charge! Mother Nature's whims and moods are a permanent part of Spring in New England. The difficulties she routinely deposits at our feet are there to be overcome because one thing doesn't change: Spring always comes!

Spring may take its time getting here and it may not stay long but sooner or later it will come. The air will turn soft and warm, the grass and trees will green up and all the bulbs you planted last fall will suddenly remember they're supposed to bloom. No matter how busy you suddenly have to be or how many garden chores are waiting... enjoy Spring! It doesn't last long but that makes it all the more special. This year, we all need Spring!

Although the past winter was, by anybody's standards, mild, wind storms did do some harm from time to time. You may be coping with damaged shrubbery or trees and replacement may be the only solution. The nursery is here to help you solve garden problems; personal appointments are temporarily on hold but the telephone is still available. It is certainly disheartening to lose favorite trees, evergreens and shrubs to the force of nature, but it is also an opportunity to change the "look" of a landscape, expand a vista or try something new. Take a minute to sit and reflect on what you really want your garden to be from now on. This could be the perfect opportunity to head off in a new direction!

Acer Gardens Web Site

We keep working on/adding to our web site! It's designed to be highly interactive and to give you more information quickly ... and it looks terrific! Read about our services, stay up to date/sign up for on coming events and future workshops, learn about our plants and products, access our quarterly Newsletter and all the current Information Sheets and join us on Instagram (a great way to see what other gardeners are (growing)). We hope you use it enthusiastically and we'd love to hear feed-back on what you'd like to see there!

2020 Newport Flower Show

The 25th annual Newport Flower Show will be held Friday, June 19 to Sunday, June 21 at Rosecliff in Newport, RI. This year's theme is Voices in the Garden and features gardens as the reflection of the gardener's voice. Show highlights will include designer display gardens, horticultural exhibits, demonstrations and classes in Botanical Arts and Floral Design, and well over 85 vendors. Champagne and Jazz Brunch as well as Afternoon Tea will also be available. The Garden Club of America has elevated the Newport Floral Show to the status of a Major Flower Show, on a par with Philadelphia, Atlanta and Boston. This national and international status allows the show to award the GCA's highest Flower Show awards. Funds raised by the Show are used for the continued restoration and preservation of the Newport Preservation Society's 88 acres of historic landscapes, gardens and trees. For tickets and further information go to: www.newportmansions.org/events/newport-flower-show

Summer Gardens to Visit

Every year The Garden Conservancy runs self-guided tours of hundreds of private gardens from coast to coast. Most of the gardens are only open to the public once a year. Open Days in Connecticut start May 16 and run through September 19 with admission at \$10 for an adult. No reservations are required; Open Days are rain or shine events. The Conservancy also provides Digging Deeper ... site-specific programs with talks from famous gardeners, tours and demonstrations dedicated to celebrating the craft of gardening. Additional fees and advance registration are required. Visit www.gardenconservancy.org to search by garden, city or state. Open Days are also listed for near-by Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts.

Pansies are Back!

Try planting Pansies with other cool-season and frost resistant plants. Consider combining them with Alyssum, Dusty Miller, Viola, Lobelia, Primroses and our pre-planted bulbs. Lettuce and Parsley add a light touch to pansy planters and are easily harvested. Many herbs combine well with pansies and will keep going long after the Pansies have finished. Even a small evergreen will serve as a good background to Pansies and provide a strong line to the container. Cold-hardy annuals... Osteospermum, Super Petunias and Nemesia ... can provide a subtle color echo to Pansies in the violet to purple range. Pansies like cool temperatures but you can help them last a bit longer as the weather warms up. As the plants start to get leggy, cut them back a few inches so they can catch their breath!

Fertilize them only at planting time, using a slow-release granular fertilizer. Make sure these containers get no more than 6 hours of sun a day. Putting them in the shade may actually help them regroup to bloom again in cooler fall weather.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

Spring garden chores (see the information Sheet on the Acer Gardens website) can seem daunting but don't be overwhelmed by the list. Each garden is different and not all chores are necessary.

Clean up and rake off the garden beds; get rid of dead foliage. Remove dead or dying branches on trees and shrubs which were injured by disease, storms or animals.

Cut down grasses and any perennials you left standing in the fall.

Fertilize your garden beds and don't plant anything new until the soil is completely friable ... grab a handful of soil and squeeze it. If water runs out or the soil compacts into a clump, it's too soon to work it.

It's been a wet winter ... don't rush things!

Cut back old growth from yellow and red-stemmed Dogwood bushes.

Don't trim down Buddleias, Caryopteris, and Roses to about 18" until they are showing real growth ... a late ice storm or sudden freeze can do serious damage!

Prune: Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Mountain Laurel and Lilacs right after they bloom.

Clean-up old Hellebore foliage now to help prevent disease.

Move shrubs and/or perennials only when the ground begins to warm.

The Plant of the Month

The Plant of the Month will be available the first of each month, starting in April, at the nursery, near the checkout table. These plants are carefully chosen to feature current bloom times and to serve as an accent in your garden. Try something new!

April: *Dodecatheon meadia* (Shooting Star)

Zone: 4-8 Height: 8-18" Spread: 8-12"

Growing in a wide range of soil and shade/sun conditions, this spring native is at its best in native woodland or wildflower gardens. Naturally dying back in the summer, this flower really does resemble a shooting star and should be placed where its white, pink or purple blooms can be easily seen and enjoyed.

May: *Tiarella cordifolia* (Foam Flower)

Zone: 4-9 Height: 10-12" Spread: 1-2'

Easily grown in part to full shade, *Tiarella* spreads rapidly, producing tiny white flowers for almost 6 weeks. Almost leafless flower stems rise well above the mounding foliage earning the plant its nickname of Foam Flower. Heart-shaped leaves often show burgundy veins. Deer and rabbit tolerant, this plant is perfect for naturalizing in shaded rock gardens, woodland gardens, border fronts or native plantings and makes an attractive ground cover. It will tolerate morning sun. Keep the soil evenly moist as the season advances into summer.

June: *Penstemon digitalis* (Beard Tongue)

Zone: 3-8 Height: 3-5' Spread: 1.5 - 2'

Grown in full sun and well-drained soil, this clump-producing native is particularly pleasing when planted at the edge of open woods. Foxglove-like spires in a wide range of colors bloom in late spring to early summer. The wide range of heights available make them good companions for many perennials. Hummingbirds find this plant hard to resist!

Spring Products

Available Spring products at the nursery will include pelletized lime, pre-emergent fertilizer, lawn and garden fertilizer, Milorganite, organic lawn and garden products including fungicides, grass seed, straw and control products for deer, insects, rabbits, voles, weeds, bugs and disease. April is the ideal time to apply lime, if needed, to the lawn; fertilize and use pre-emergent weed control.

Specialized products include:

Seed Starter Mix: Acer Garden's own pre-mixed, seed-starting soil.

Alpine Mix: An excellent growth medium for alpines and succulents. Use in containers or mix into soil to promote good drainage.

Soil Moist: Reduces watering by absorbing and slowly releasing water into the soil. Useful both in containers and garden beds.

Acer's Super Grow 18-6-18: The nursery's own water soluble plant food with micro-nutrients.

BT Thuricide: A bacteria (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*) used to control all caterpillars.

Milky Spore: A bacteria designed for the natural control of lawn grubs.

Seasonal Reminders

Give your Rhododendrons and Azaleas a generous feeding of Holly Tone.

April and May are ideal times for pruning evergreens. Remove dead, diseased or undesirable wood but remember to pay attention to the basic shape of the evergreen as you prune.

Weed, weed and weed again!

If cutting Tulips for the house, do not use more than a few inches of water in the vase and add 1 tsp. of bleach to the water; change the water regularly. Keep cut Lilacs out of direct sunlight to discourage wilting.

Deer quickly get used to a specific repellent so it's a good idea to rotate the products you use fairly often.

Check the nursery web site to access relevant Information Sheets on attracting hummingbirds and butterflies.

Aftercare for Bulbs

Photograph your bulbs as they begin to bloom and keep them as a permanent record. The photos will be helpful next fall as you plan where to plant new bulbs.

Don't forget to deadhead Daffodils and Tulips as they stop blooming. Cut the flowers off but let the stems and leaves turn brown before you cut them down. Bulb experts advise against braiding the leaves. You want all that nutrition from the leaves to go back into the bulbs. Bulbs still need sun and water to form next year's flowers. Many gardeners give them a light fertilizing with Bulb Tone as they are blooming.

Adding spreading plants to your bulb areas will cover up the fading bulbs and give your garden a second wind. Many Daffodils will happily naturalize and spread over years but, in this climate, most tulips have a limited life span of 3-4 years at most. If you plant your Tulips among perennials slow to break in the Spring, their growing foliage will help to disguise the dying tulip foliage.

Spring Pruning

Remember that most Hydrangeas (not hydrangea arborescens... Annabelle), flower on old wood. Remove any dead or broken branches in spring but do not prune. Fertilizing with a product containing 18-5-9 will encourage flowering. Spent blooms should be removed after flowering. Any light pruning should be done directly after bloom before the bushes set next year's flowers.

Lilac bushes should be pruned each year, after blooming. Remove all spent blossoms. Trim and clear out larger stems from the center to increase air space. You can leave some small suckers/shoots at ground level to develop into larger stems. This will encourage a wider bloom area. Lightly shape the bush until you like the way it looks but don't give it an un-natural "flat top".

Mature Rhododendrons seldom need pruning but, if you must, prune right after they bloom as they set next year's flowers very quickly. Look for the little green leaf buds on the stem and cut ½" above them. Let the natural shape of the plant dictate your pruning ... it's not supposed to look "organized".

Azaleas and Weigela bloom on wood at least one year old. After bloom, these bushes should be very lightly hand pruned in order to maintain the natural shape of the bush. Carefully remove selected old wood every 3 years, allowing the bush to rejuvenate itself.

Pruning Clematis

Clematis vines are fast growing and hardy but they should be pruned properly in order to give you consistent flowers at the right time and you do need to know which of 3 groups your vine falls into. (If you didn't save the white plastic information tag you may have to write down when your vine flowers this year and use the information as next year's pruning guide.)

Group 1

Varieties flower in the spring on growth from the previous season. They need very little pruning but if you want to "tidy them up" do it very quickly after they have stopped blooming.

Group 2

These vines bloom in early summer, on last year's growth, with a re-bloom in late summer or early fall on new growth. In early spring, cut away any broken branches and trim the tips of the branches. Thin out some stems to leave room for new growth.

Group 3

These vines flower on new growth in both summer and fall. In spring, cut the vine back to 12-18". It's a good idea to leave 2-4 buds on each stem. As the vine grows, train the new growth onto a support.

National Arbor Day: April 24, 2020

What better way to mark an anniversary, celebrate a special occasion or pay honor to a family member than to plant a tree? Sited carefully (and well away from power lines), your new tree will be a living reminder of a special day or person and will increase in beauty as time goes by, benefitting this and future generations. Stop in and choose a tree ... we're here to help and can advise on the most suitable trees for your chosen location and the best way to plant and care for them.

Sharon's Favorite Spring Flowers

Spring arrives unexpectedly in New England and seems determined to swamp us with flowers ... it's almost hard to enjoy them all, they come and go so quickly. We all have our favorites, the plants that say "Yes, it's really Spring at last!" ... here are some Sharon Harris looks forward to seeing every year:

Iris cristata (Dwarf Crested Iris)

This tiny (6") native woodland plant blooms in April, naturalizing to form a groundcover. Deer resistant, it is happy in light shade, produces flowers in pale blue, lilac or lavender and spreads quickly. Once established, it is drought tolerant and is at home in rock gardens and the front of perennial beds. Fertilize with a very light hand.

Amsonia tabernaemontana (Blue Milkweed or Bluestar)

This easy-to-grow plant is at home in native plant gardens or open woodland areas, forming a clump 2-3' tall. Light blue, star-like flowers bloom in May, attracts butterflies and flourishes in full sun or partial shade. The American Horticultural Society selected Amsonia as one of the 75 Great Plants for American Gardens!

Carex pennsylvanica (Pennsylvania Sedge)

This low-growing (8") native Sedge is perfect for woodland gardens and shady areas. Drought and shade tolerant as well as deer-resistant, Sedge has a small flower in late May but its real beauty comes as the grass-like plant greens up in the spring. Planted in shrub borders, Carex will spread and eliminate the need for mulch.

Dividing Perennials

Most perennials need periodic division in order to maintain plant vigor and strong flowering. Some plants should be divided every few years; some can go many years without division. When a perennial clump looks crowded in its space and produces fewer and smaller flowers, it is time to divide. It's a good idea to keep a record of when you divide so that you can gauge a plant's progress. Sadly, some plants naturally have a limited shelf-life and even dividing them will not keep them going.

In general, most perennials should be divided in the spring which allows enough time for the new divisions to bloom and become established before winter. Here in Connecticut we are able to divide easily until mid-May ... this past mild winter will make this year's job much easier! Some perennials produce pop-up seedlings that are perfect for transplanting although bloom color may be slightly different from the parent. Grasses are best divided in early spring, after they have been cut back, because they do their aggressive growing in the hot days of summer. Peonies and Iris should only be divided in the fall.

Many plants (Black-eyed Susan and *Leucanthemum* e.g.) benefit from frequent division and almost seem to need it to thrive. Simply dig up the plant and...with your fingers...gently separate the plant into multiple sections. Plant at once, setting the new plant at the same soil level as before. Tamp the soil down around the plant so that water can pool; protect the new plant from strong sun until it is established.

Some plants should be divided into large segments as early as possible. These include *Lamium*, *Brunnera*, *Dendranthemum*, Asters, *Sedum*, *Hosta*, *Monarda*, *Helenium* and Cone Flowers. Pulling pieces from the outer edges of the clump makes for easy dividing. Place the divisions so that their “best side” is displayed well.

Division of *Hostas*, *Daylilies* and Grasses calls for real strength and is often done after a good, soaking rain. The best tool for this is a sturdy garden shovel. Cut the dug-up plant in half or thirds with a sharp knife or a shovel and plant at once.

Fertilizing and Mulching Basics

All plants need nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, nutrients essential to helping plants make healthy leaves, develop strong roots and digest their food. Although these elements are usually present in the soil, the wise gardener knows that soil changes over time and the nutrients must be replenished. The home gardener must choose between granular or water soluble fertilizer. Granular fertilizer delivers food slowly but lasts a long time. Water soluble fertilizers are faster acting but must be applied more frequently.

Most bushes and trees like an application of granular fertilizer in early spring. Annuals like additional boosts of water soluble fertilizer throughout the growing season. Wait until the ground has really warmed up before you fertilize perennials, annuals and vegetables. Roses are always hungry and will benefit from the application of light soluble fertilizer every week during their blooming season. Don't apply fertilizer on wet or windy days ... it will only be wasted.

Decorative mulches are an essential part of low-maintenance landscapes, offering many benefits to your plants and soil. They reduce the amount of water lost through evaporation, keep the soil cooler during the heat of the summer, suppress weed growth and help control erosion. Decomposing over time, mulches add nutrients and organic matter to the soil. There are a few general rules:

Do not place mulch directly against plant stems or tree bases.

Apply mulch layers no more than 1-3” thick.

Thoroughly water newly installed wood or bark mulches.

Don't automatically renew mulch every year --- assess your needs realistically.

Planting Gardens with Bird Appeal

If you want native birds flying around your garden, plant native flowers, bushes and trees! Birds would rather stick with their tried-and-true favorites: plants that feature seeds, berries and insects. Native plants offer all these as well as a wide choice of building material for birds ... twigs, dead leaves and bark strips as well as fallen needles from evergreens.

Planting Daisies (and their relatives) is an easy way to start a bird garden as their seeds are irresistible to many of our local birds. This plant family includes Sunflowers, Asters, Black-Eyed Susans and Coneflowers. Adding bushes with berries to the general mix in your garden will attract a wide range of birds but they will strip ripe berries fast and you may have trouble if you want to cut some branches for flower arrangements! Mature *Viburnums* fruit heavily and will keep the birds busy for weeks in late summer.

Cardinals will devour the large red berries found on a Kousa Dogwood tree. Any Blueberry bush must be covered with netting or the birds will do all your harvesting for you!

Adding some trees (even young saplings) will provide sheltering branches to the bird population: oaks and maples offer insects for the birds as well as welcome shade. Cypress bushes provide welcome shelter and over-wintering birds will be grateful for the protection and hiding places found in its deep branches. Feeding birds in the summer is a personal choice ... having water available for them will be very welcome.

The Shady Side

New England certainly produces many an opportunity for a shade garden ... you just have to adapt it to your overall garden plan. But all shade is not created equal; learn what you are dealing with before you rush into digging!

1. Make a simple chart/drawing: how much sun/shade do various garden areas receive and when.
2. Improve the soil with organic matter. Try not to disturb tree roots. Apply mulch in the fall.
3. Make foliage your mainstay and then add texture for punch and contrast.
4. Add height and structure to beds by anchoring them with shade-loving shrubs.
5. Don't overwater or over-fertilize ... shade slows plant growth so they'll use less water and energy.
6. Remember that green comes in many shades and most of them combine well!

Many early-blooming native perennials do well in partial (not dense) shade. They will form colonies and naturalize at the edge of woodlands but are typically ephemerals and will have vanished by the hot summer months. These will all bloom in April or May. Low maintenance, they require little on-going care other than regular watering during their first season. Don't fertilize or winter-protect. Consider using:

Sanguinaria Canadensis (Bloodroot)	Zone 3-8	Partial shade
Dicentra cucullaria (Dutchman's Breeches)	Zone 3-7	Partial shade
Erythromium americanum (Toad Lily)	Zone 3-8	Full shade
Tiarella cordifolia (Foam Flower)	Zone 4-9	Full shade
Arisaema triphyllum (Jack-in-the-Pulpit)	Zone 4-9	Full shade

Timing Flowering Shrubs

It is possible to have a variety of bushes flowering from April into October, providing a background for your perennial beds, screening for the vegetable garden and privacy for sitting areas, decks and terraces. Using bushes is an easy way to reduce garden maintenance as many take care of themselves with a minimum of tweaking. They work well in a variety of settings, especially as a transition plant between the garden and woodlands or as a specimen plant. Gardeners are also using new, compact forms of bushes within flower beds or at the back of a bed. Many of them have foliage down to the ground and provide texture even when they are not in bloom. Some can also be grown in large containers although watering will have to be carefully monitored. Here's a broad list of some possible choices; individual cultivars may have slightly different bloom times.

Bush	Bloom Time
Corylopsis spicata	March
Forsythia	April
Azalea	April
Rhododendron	May
Lilac	May
Daphne	May
Deutzia	May
Weigela	May- Sept.
Viburnum	May- Oct.
Spirea	June
Clethra	July - August
Abelia	July- Sept.
Buddleia	July- Sept.
Hydrangea	July- Sept.
Callicarpa	August

Growing Great Spring Plants

Dianthus (Pinks)

An incredibly versatile plant, found in many heirloom gardens, Dianthus have single or double blooms and come in a wide range of pink with cream, white or red accents. Plants can range between 6-20” and prefer sun but will tolerate partial shade. They tend to form compact clumps (which makes them suitable for mass plantings) and their fine-textured foliage adds interest to the border. Deadheading faded blooms will encourage more flowers. Established plants can be divided or you can take cuttings in the summer. Butterflies are attracted to Dianthus. They are drought tolerant and deer-resistant and they combine well with other scented plants such as Roses and Lavender.

Dicentra (Bleeding Hearts)

This old-fashioned, ephemeral plant still spells “Spring” to many gardeners. 24-36” tall, it grows in part to full shade matures into a clump 30” wide and is deer-resistant. Very long-lived, Bleeding Heart hardly ever needs dividing as it goes dormant in the hot summer. (It’s a good idea to mark its location in the garden!) Yellowing foliage can be hidden with Hostas or Ferns. It’s one of the first plants hummingbirds head for as they return.

Pulmonaria

Pulmonaria is always one of the first perennials to bloom. A natural for shady woodland gardens, their flowers glow against the foliage. New forms have been introduced in the last few years featuring white, pink and even blue flowers. Bees and hummingbirds love the blossoms. A low-growing plant, Pulmonaria is basically a woodland plant and prefers a moist location. Some de-leafing is usually necessary as the season advances. The plant combines well with Astilbe, Ferns and Hostas.

Fast-Filling and Long-Blooming Perennials

There are different reasons for changing the look of a perennial bed. Sometimes gardeners lose interest in a particular color or want a different emphasis. Physical limitations may dictate the amount of time available for gardening. Life brings changes and people may be away a good part of the summer or be occupied with visitors, children or grandchildren. A harsh winter may cause plant losses. Or, it may just be time to spruce up a particular area and bring in a more modern, easy-going look. Whatever the reason, a gardener often wants rapid results and is not always willing to wait for plants to fill in over a period of years.

Large blocks of color add impact to a garden and the best and easiest way to achieve that goal is to use perennials that are in bloom for extended periods of time and do not require too much maintenance. Although experienced gardeners know that few plants look their best the first year they are planted, turning to fast fillers allows the gardener to replace existing areas with long-blooming perennials that routinely form big, dependable clumps quickly. Meeting their light and moisture requirements will help speed them along! Almost all are sun lovers and like evenly moist soil. Deadheading faithfully will help to extend bloom times. Some individual cultivars may actually need a little cutting back as the season progresses. Many native plants are also ideal fast-fillers.

Perennial	Common Name	Bloom Time
Achillea	Yarrow	June through August
Agastache	Hyssop	July to first frost
Aruncus	Goat's Beard	April to May
Aster	Aster	July to August
Boltonia	Star Flower	August to October
Centranthus	Jupiter's Beard	All summer
Coreopsis	Tickseed	June to frost
Echinacea	Coneflower	June to August
Gaillardia	Blanket Flower	June through August
Gaura	Wand Flower	June to September
Geranium	Cranesbill	May to August
Helianthus	Sunflower	Fall
Heliopsis	False Sunflower	Mid-summer to early fall
Hemerocallis	Daylily	June to September
Kalimeris	Japanese Aster	June through September
Malva sylvestris	Rose Mallow	June to October
Monarda	Bee Balm	June to August
Nepeta	Catmint	June to September
Perovskia	Russian Sage	July to September
Persicaria	Knotweed	June to October
Phlox paniculata	Garden Phlox	July to September
Potentilla	Cinquefoil	June to August
Rudbeckia	Black-Eyed Susan	July to September
Scabiosa	Pincushion Flower	May to September
Sidalcea	Miniature Hollyhock	July to September
Stachys	Lambs' Ears	Early to Mid-spring

The Advantage of a Layered Garden

The concept of “layering” in a garden is not new (remember that old rule: “tall plants in the back, short ones in the front”) but, increasingly, garden designers are using layering to organize both large sweeps of flowers as well as create a garden that is attractive to wildlife and, at the same time, emphasizes specimen plants or bushes. Multiple layers don’t necessarily mean a “formal” look ... you can create layers by using drifts of plants in an informal arrangement and vary the look by pulling the back layer forward in places. Plants can be set underneath each other (especially effective if you don’t like the look of plain dirt or mulch or want to cover “bare legs”). Vines and climbers add vertical interest and often give almost continuous bloom. You can layer a perennial bed or part of a garden and site it near a sitting area or create a private area for rest and relaxation. Using plants in this manner means you don’t have to see everything at once but can “discover” the garden as you spend time in it. Most of all, a layered garden is attractive ... either as a sitting area or a larger garden area ... for you and your visitors.

Large shrubs, or even small trees, will form the back layer and attract birds at the same time so they can find hiding places. Be careful not to create too much shade as that could limit your plant choices. Then add smaller bushes and tall perennials to form a middle layer and bring in the butterflies.

Finally, put in a variety of small perennials, bulbs, and annuals for your eye to focus on against the backdrop. This layer is the easiest to change as the season advances and you need to refresh the garden. Contrasting foliage will provide a backdrop and, chosen carefully, will serve to showcase the blooming flowers. Many native perennials are ideal for using in a layered garden ... they are ideal for tucking in and their more informal growth habit fills in empty spaces quickly.

Often-Asked Questions

My Daylilies have formed big clumps! Can I divide them in the Spring?

Absolutely! Dividing daylilies in the Spring gives them time to establish themselves before blooming season. The easiest way to divide Daylilies is to wait for a soaking rain, dig up the clump, lay the clump on its side and pry or cut off good-sized pieces with a garden fork or large knife. Be careful! Daylily roots really cling together! Plant the new divisions at the same depth as the parent. Forgiving plants, Daylilies will bloom with just morning sun but they’ll take all they can get! The better the soil the better the bloom so add compost when you plant. Regular waterings will help their growth, especially during the first season.

I’d like to design some shade containers without using Impatiens. Is that possible?

Shady containers are all about foliage and texture and balancing them to achieve the look you want. Using a colored container will often allow you to accent your design by adding a small plant in the same color. Choose a showcase plant to anchor your design, one with outstanding foliage, shape or texture and then choose companion plants which accentuate rather than compete with it. Plants with colorful leaves (think Rex Begonia) will help you finish off your design and pull everything together.

Is there a difference between Honeybees and Bumblebees?

Smaller than Bumblebees, Honeybees are attracted to sweet/minty scents. They choose plants on which they can perch with blooms that are fully open in the daytime and prefer flat, shallow blossoms. They actually retain a memory of plants they have visited in their travels! Try Iris, Mountain Laurel, Violets, Cosmos, Hollyhock, Phlox, Nepeta, Salvia, Lavender and Roses.

Bumblebees are long-tongued and have heavier and bigger bodies than Honeybees. Sun worshippers, they are, oddly enough, twice as fast at flying as Honeybees. Bumblebees carry a great deal of pollen per trip because they are so much larger and have more fur. By mid-fall, they are so fat they can hardly move! Consider using: Columbine, Snapdragons, Monarda, Monkshood, Candytuft, Agastache, Aster and Buddleia.

I'd like to establish ground covers around some of my bushes... but not Pachysandra. Any thoughts?

Carefully chosen, many groundcovers eliminate the need for mulch. Planted around shrubs they retain moisture, control weeds and help define the shape of a garden bed. Once established, they pretty much take care of themselves and spread nicely. Some will take more shade than others. Even dwarf ferns can be planted close together to become a ground cover. Consider using:

Ajuga (Carpet Bugle)	Lamium maculatum (Dead Nettle)
Asarum (Wild Ginger)	Lilium muscari (Lilyturf)
Brunnera carophylla (Siberian Bugloss)	Phlox subulate (Moss Phlox)
Carex (Dwarf Sedges)	Cornus canadensis (Bunchberry)
Epimedium (Barrenwort)	

Is there a secret to growing cucumbers? I'd eat them for breakfast so I want a good crop!

Fortunately for you, cucumbers are one of the easiest crops to grow ... and they grow almost anywhere. Choose a sunny spot in well-drained soil (add compost before you plant) and give them lots of room. (Going vertical with cucumbers is increasingly popular!) Don't plant until both the weather and soil are consistently warm ... if you're not sure, wait a few days. Cucumbers have spreading root systems and need about 1" of water a week. Once the fruit matures, harvest every other day, using sharp scissors or a knife. An unexpected heat wave will increase your yield fairly dramatically so have those recipes ready!

When can my houseplants go outside?

As the weather begins to warm, many gardeners itch to get their houseplants outside for the summer. A good rule of thumb is to wait until nighttime temperatures are consistently above 50 degrees. Many houseplants are native to tropical or sub-tropical climates which don't fluctuate much and will need time to adapt to a new environment.

Before your plant goes outside check to see if it needs re-potting into the next larger pot size. This is also usually a good time to give your plants need a light pruning or reshaping. Add a little fresh potting mix to each plant as some of its soil will have decomposed over the winter. When large plants go outside for the summer they may need additional staking to better cope with wind. When the plants go outside, place them in a partially shaded spot for at least 10 days. Once they have adjusted to more light, the plants can be moved to a sunny location in the garden or on the patio. You may need to water the plants daily and change your fertilizing schedule. It's a good idea to inspect the houseplants periodically in case bugs or insects are causing problems.

Large-leaved Perennials

Is there a place in your garden for something unusual and dramatic, something that will bring the "wow" factor into play when you show visitors around? It could be a place you see, at a distance, from your sitting area or it could be near the sitting area. It could be in front of bushes which show "knobby knees" or it could be that place where nothing seems to thrive. A large-leaved perennial might be the perfect answer ... they need a little time to get started but many of them also produce dramatic flowers. They all want reliable moisture in the soil and afternoon shade and need room to grow. Think about using these:

Acanthus hungaricus (Bear's Breeches) 3' – 4' tall

Produces large, deeply lobed dark green shiny leaves with tall stems of rosy purple flowers in June and July. Takes full sun to part shade. Very long-lived, they require only average watering.

Aralia cordata (Japanese Spikenard) 3-6'

The 2020 Plant of the Year showcases bright golden-yellow leaves with purple-black berries in the fall. Small white flowers appear July-September.

Aruncus dioicus (Goat's Beard) 4-6'

Tall, native perennial with showy plumes of greenish-white flowers rising above the leaves in summer. Resembles Astilbe; requires moist soil.

Bergenia cordifolia (Elephant Ears) 12" – 15"

Evergreen, this slow-growing plant has cabbage-like leaves with a leathery appearance and pink-red flowers.

Brunnera (Siberian Bugloss) 18"

Dramatic heart-shaped leaves last until frost. Clear blue forget-me-not flowers appear in early Spring.

Kirengeshoma palmate (Yellow Wax Bells) 3'-4'

Features large palm-shaped leaves. Showy yellow pendant flowers bloom in late summer. Happy in moist soil and very low maintenance.

Ligularia (Leopard plant) 4' – 5'

4' – 6' spires of golden flowers appear in early summer, rising above leathery leaves. They are a favorite of hummingbirds. Will tolerate full shade and moist soil.

Rodgersia pinnata (Rodgersia) 3' – 4'

Deeply divided leaves set off tall clusters of creamy pink flowers in the summer. This plant will thrive with extra moisture in the soil.

Garden Containers

It's time to think about containers again! This year, the nursery is featuring several new lines of unusual containers. Acer Gardens will have many pre-planted containers for you to choose from but, of course, you can bring your own empty container to the nursery and staff will be happy to help you design something just right for your garden. Maybe it's time to try a container featuring just one color but using varying shades of that color. Looking at a color wheel will give you some idea of complimentary as well as dramatic colors which might fit into your over-all garden plan. Containers can be used to lead the eye along a path, to frame a view or to cover-up a temporary "hole". They can cover that one spot all gardens have where nothing seems to thrive or they allow you to experiment with a new color or texture. The possibilities are almost endless! You can change the look of your containers at will by changing the plantings. Troughs and containers have the advantage of portability and can be moved around the garden as the season advances or as "holes" develop.

Many gardeners find that elevating a container by placing it on a pedestal gives the container greater impact in the garden and really shows off trailing flowers. Placing more containers around the elevated one can create a further dramatic effect and make a real statement. Be sure the pedestal is securely anchored so that it won't blow over and that the container itself is heavy and won't wiggle.

Accurate watering is key to growing good containers as is a good ratio of plant to pot. Think about where your containers will be placed as you choose your plants. Containers for decks and terraces will be in view 24/7 so they can be made to reflect how you choose to entertain or become extensions of the larger garden. A container sited for the "wow" factor can be filled to over-flowing with wild colors and luxurious blossom and you should feel free to depart from your normal style. After all, if it doesn't work it's easy to change! Be sure that all your container plants share the same sun, soil and water requirements and set up a realistic fertilizing schedule. Many gardeners photograph their containers as the season advances and keep them to use as guides for next year.

The Vegetable Garden

This year, Acer Gardens has further expanded its vegetable and herb selections. An amazing number of vegetables are now available in dwarf or patio forms. Nursery staff will be happy to help you choose what you need to make your vegetable growing a pleasure.

Plotting your garden on graph paper will help you establish boundaries and maximize your available space. Remember to rotate your crop's positions from year to year. If you are using rows be sure to leave access routes for weeding and fertilizing.

Many vegetables can be planted as soon as you can work the soil. The unusual warmth of this winter will probably push planting schedules for some vegetables several weeks forward. Leaf lettuces are harvested young and re-planting every 2 – 3 weeks will keep you harvesting into fall. The nursery now carries pre-blended lettuce varieties. Arugula, cilantro and spinach will also continue producing on a similar schedule but do not re-plant in the heat of the summer. Radishes, a fast and easy grower, can be planted in short rows at 2 – 3 week intervals. Spring is the optimum time to direct sow or plant peas, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, cabbage, leeks, carrots, parsley, Swiss chard, kale and micro-greens. Try the rainbow beets ... an intriguing mix of colors!

Late May is a good time to plant cucumbers, tomatoes, corn, peppers, melons, pumpkins, and squash. Plant basil near the tomatoes to discourage the insects that feed on them. Alyssum, Nasturtiums and Marigolds planted in the vegetable garden will fend off many aphids, thrips and beetles and will protect your squash and pumpkin crops. Fennel 'Florence' and onions can be planted now ... both hold well in the vegetable garden. Now is the time to plant single bulb shallots. 'Conservor' is an outstanding choice, with a high, round shape suitable for long storage. Plant in early to mid spring and harvest in summer when the tops fall and begin to brown. Dry in an airy place until ready to use.

Did you know that you can help self-pollinating plants? Tomatoes, peppers, beans and eggplants (as well as some cultivars of other vegetables such as zucchini) have flowers that combine both male and female parts in one blossom. Jostled by the wind or visited by insects, the flowers usually pollinate themselves but you can help by giving a flowering branch a little shake as you walk by.

Our wide-ranging herb selection keeps expanding and now includes Stevia (the sugar substitute), Lemon Grass, a wide range of Thymes and Lemon Verbena (the leaves are wonderful in water or iced tea). Thai Basil will be available again (try it with fish as well as using the leaves in oriental dishes.) Other basil will include Lime Basil, 'Genovese Red Freddy', and 'Sweet Genovese' (the Genovese basil makes superb pesto and is downy mildew resistant.) Oregano 'Hot and Spicy' will add a mild chile pepper flavor to Mexican dishes. Most herbs will do well in patio and deck containers but Thai Basil should be grown in a separate pot as it needs to dry out between waterings.

Herbs can be more than kitchen companions to the vegetables you grow. Think about inter-planting herbs and vegetables in the garden. (Harvesting dinner will be easy!) Try basil and tomatoes, chives and carrots, rosemary and beans. Marjoram, oregano, sage and tarragon enhance many vegetables. Grow dill separately as it can become invasive and needs a lot of spreading room and successive plantings.

Acer Gardens now offers many seed varieties of popular gourmet vegetables and annuals (some of which have almost vanished.) It's best to pick these up early to make sure your choice is still available as the season moves forward and you get ready for successive plantings.

Acer Gardens' Information sheet on **Growing Vegetables** is available on the web site and at the nursery.

Patio Vegetables and Herbs

Even if you don't have a "real" vegetable garden, you can certainly grow herbs and many vegetables. The nursery has a large selection of herbs and vegetables which will all do well planted together in containers! Dwarf vegetables are always a good choice as are vegetables that take up little space (lettuce, radishes and scallions) or crops that bear over a long time (tomatoes and peppers). "Bush" and "Compact" sizes will do well grown in containers or tucked into the front of flower beds. Try planting a Summer Salad container with a tomato, a cucumber, parsley and chives. Lettuce and containers are born companions. Plant seeds every 3-4 weeks for successive harvests. Some new cucumbers and squash plants are designed to be grown vertically and take up very little room.

Choosing vegetables with the same water and sun requirements will be a plus. Almost all vegetables do best when grown in full sunlight, at least 6 hours per day. Leaf vegetables (lettuce, greens, spinach and parsley) will tolerate a little shade, especially as the season lengthens.

Pick a container larger than you think you will need. Be sure the container has good drainage (holes in the bottom) because containers need more watering than vegetable beds as they dry out quickly from sun and wind. Some plants may require daily watering. Don't let the soil dry out between waterings as this could cause the plants to drop their flowers and fruits. Potting mixes (peat-based) are a good soil choice; use a slow release or organic fertilizer at planting time.

Growing Great Eggplants

For many years, gardeners thought of eggplants as "those big pretty purple things" but their color, shape and size can vary widely. Some of the eggplant patio cultivars are beautifully variegated and make terrific additions to flower beds as well as outstanding container plants.

Because they absolutely require warm soil, eggplants are usually purchased as 6-8 week old transplants. Beds already enriched with composted manure are the ideal growing place and they will be happiest in a very sunny spot. It's a good idea to stake the plants right away to provide the support they will need as they grow. Eggplants respond best to consistent watering (a soaker hose is ideal) so that the soil is moist but never soggy. Mulching will help conserve water and reduce weeds. Apply a balanced fertilizer twice a season. The best pollinators for eggplants are bumblebees so it's a good idea to grow bumblebee-friendly plants in their vicinity.

You can expect to harvest around 60 days after planting. When the skin of the fruit is shiny and a uniform color and the skin does not rebound from a gentle push with your finger ... it's ready! Cut the fruit with a sharp knife or scissors close to the stem, leaving about an inch. Harvest twice a week and store them in the refrigerator. If you use a stainless steel knife to cut your eggplant it will not discolor.

Garden Help Lines

As the season kicks off, questions can arise and Uconn's Cooperative Extension System is available to answer questions on many garden topics including plant insects and diseases. They can be reached at 1-877-486-6271 or (www.ladybug.uconn.edu/index.html)

The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station will answer inquiries on lawn problems (860-683-4977), soil testing (203-974-8521) and plant disease issues (203-974-8601).

Acer Gardens
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Editor

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