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Optimism in the future is at the heart of all gardening ... that, and large parts of wishful thinking! For instance: this coming year, all our plants will thrive, nothing will attack the vegetables (which will give exceptionally high yields), rain will be adequate and appear as needed, bugs and insects will concentrate on other states and leave Connecticut alone, deer will give up vegetarianism and exist only on corn chips, hamburgers and pizzas, and all chipmunks, rabbits, moles and voles will re-locate to North Dakota for the foreseeable future! Everything we plant will prosper, require no maintenance, give on-time and prolonged bloom and dead-head itself. The gardener will do a little light weeding once a month and admire the butterflies and hummingbirds as they skim past his/her deck chair! Garden exercise will consist only of bending down to top up the iced tea or lemonade glass!

But, gardeners are also realists. Don't over-think last year's garden problems. Each gardening year offers an almost clean slate to draw on. As many garden writers have observed: "gardening represents the triumph of optimism over experience!" but it also calls for remembering what you really want your gardening experience to be. Few things are more personal than your own garden and the on-going pleasure it can bring you, season after season.

For many gardeners, this quiet time of the year is ideal for reflection and planning for the season ahead. Planning ahead brings more than just a sense of order to your thinking ... it actually makes it easier to garden if you have a good idea where you're going! Winter shows you the bones of your garden and suggests what new plant material would help you enjoy your garden more.

Looking through your photos can help you decide which areas of your garden need improving or re-arranging. Garden books are a great source of inspiration. Seeing how other people have solved problems can often help us find solutions to our own garden dilemmas and, indeed, help us to recognize problem areas.

This is a good time to organize your garden records and to write down thoughts and impressions of your garden, either in a journal or on your computer. It will help you plan for the future and will be a good record of what did well and what didn't. Knowing when you planted a perennial, bush or tree helps you establish a pruning and fertilizing schedule. You will find a Template on the Acer Garden web site (www.acergardens.com). Just print it out on 3-holed paper, as needed, and fill in the suggested information, using the little white labels that come in the nursery pots as well as your own books. Filed alphabetically in a loose-leaf folder, the templates will provide you with a permanent record of what you grow and what each plant needs to thrive. You could also divide your garden notes by section or flower bed. This is a handy way to keep good records and will help you maintain an inventory of which plants/bushes are growing where. Of course, you can also easily keep your records on the computer.

Plan your garden's over-all look for this coming season including container placement, cutting gardens, hanging baskets, perennial beds and ground covers. Location is everything! You may want to screen unsightly views with evergreens or flowering shrubs. Make sure your terrace or deck includes some fragrant plant material and that your color scheme echoes the interior of your house. You can also gain a little extra room by elevating the look of your garden by raising containers off the ground, using shrubs and vines to add height, and utilizing structures such as pergolas and trellises. All gardens change as they mature and careful editing and/or additions will help you enjoy what you have created even more. In fact, the surrounding background landscape also changes over time and may alter the way you look at and use your garden. Life-style changes may bring a different perspective to your gardening outlook. All these factors affect your over-all garden plan.

Acer Gardens is really excited about our new perennial, annual and shrub offerings for Spring 2018. Weather permitting, we hope to be open the last week of March (please call 860 526-9056 for the actual date as we get into March or check the web site) and look forward to working with you throughout the season. Plan to come in, look at all the new plants, and talk over your garden plans for the coming year!

New Web Site

We're very enthusiastic about the look of our new web site! It's designed to be more interactive and to give you more information quickly ... and it looks terrific! Read about our services, stay up to date 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). Welcome!

Bird Feeding

February is National Bird Feeding Month. Our over-wintering local birds are primarily seed eaters and feeders should be sited in the sun with wind protection available and shrubbery nearby for warmth and protection in the night. Many bird seed mixtures are available but safflower seeds are particularly popular because most squirrels don't like them. Hanging oranges from low tree limbs will attract some birds such as Baltimore orioles, woodpeckers and finches. Many birds also enjoy eating slices of apple or pear... some are said to be fond of peanuts, nuts, pumpkin seeds, popcorn and Cheerios! Consider planting some "magnet" shrubs (in the spring) specifically to attract birds to your garden. Enkianthus, Myrica (Bayberry) and Ilex (Winterberry) will all attract birds and give you the bonus of brilliant fall color. Don't be disturbed if doves arrive ... they are a great dropped-seed clean-up crew!

Gardens and Flower Shows

With the excitement of the holidays over, many gardeners look out at winter and long to see gardens and things in bloom. Fortunately, your computer can take you visiting all over the country! Visiting famous gardens by computer is an easy way to get new ideas and to see how other gardeners have organized their specialties. Even if you can't grow everything the gardens feature because of climate restrictions you are bound to get a fresh perspective. Tropicals can be grown in containers or as houseplants; landscapes can be miniaturized and adapted to smaller areas. Go to www.ilovegardens.com and see the listings for every state. Some famous viewable gardens include Connecticut's New Canaan Nature Center (www.newcanaannature.org), Massachusetts's Arnold Arboretum at (www.Harvard.edu), Rhode Island's Blithewold Garden (www.Blithewold.org), Pennsylvania's Longwood Gardens (www.longwoodgardens.org), New York's Botanical Garden (www.nybg.org), Wave Hill (www.Wavehill.org), and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (www.bbg.org).

Look ahead and think about planning a day trip to the CT Flower Show in Hartford. The 37th annual CT Garden Show will take place in 2018 from Thursday, February 22 through Sunday, February 25. This year's theme is "Breath of Spring." There will be over 300 booths (and for the first time, one of them will belong to Acer Gardens!), 25 landscaped gardens, a design and horticulture competition and continuous seminars and demonstrations led by horticulturists and garden experts. They are all free with your ticket! The Acer Gardens booth will showcase the diversity of early Spring, featuring potted mini shrubs, Alpines and perennials, tender indoor succulents and small hand tools such as Felco pruners and trowels. Acer's fertilizers and Alpine soil mix will also be available. Five \$50.00 gift cards will be raffled off.

Coming to visit the Acer Gardens booth? Take the opportunity to bring a ½ cup of soil to the UConn Co-op booth for free soil testing. Go to www.ctflowershow.com for further information, hours and ticket availability. What a great way to get ready for spring!

The 2018 Philadelphia International Flower Show (www.theflowershow.com) will be held March 3-11, 2018. This year, the focus is on "The Wonders of Water", featuring the different ways water is used both for gardening and amusement. Designers will create a rain forest, indoor waterfall, illuminated fountains and garden ponds. Conservation and sustainability will also be stressed. The 10-acre Convention Center will be turned into a living canvas of exquisite landscapes, gardens and floral arrangements and will feature ways to give a contemporary look to flowers and plants. The PHS is the world's oldest and largest indoor flower show and attracts more than 260,000 visitors annually.

Workshops

Acer Gardens' Winter Arrangement workshops were an outstanding success, capturing the holiday spirit and ensuring a re-run in 2018. Enthusiastic participants created beautiful arrangements as they sipped cider and cookies, made new friends and built holiday memories.

The nursery will be expanding its workshop offerings in 2018. Watch the web site and your email for further announcements. The Walking Garden Tours in Sharon's Garden proved to be so popular they will certainly be offered again.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

This is the time of year many gardeners don't really have an urgent list! Now is the time for dreaming and planning and hoping ... for thinking about all the things your garden could be in the future. Just be a little realistic! There are only so many hours in the day and the CT gardening season is only so long.

Take the time to really look through all the garden catalogs that will pour in! What a perfect time to consider changes to your own garden: new additions to flower beds, new colors and new foliage choices. Plan your garden's over-all look for this coming season including container placement, cutting gardens, hanging baskets, perennial beds and ground covers. Location is everything! You may want to screen unsightly views with evergreens or flowering shrubs. Make sure your terrace or deck includes some fragrant plant material and ensure that you can move easily around your garden. You'll want to show it off!

You may actually find that your garden is exactly right for your way of life. Certain plants become "hot" in gardening circles but that doesn't mean they're right for you and that you should change your garden just to accommodate them. Be selective. If you're attracted to a plant but it doesn't really "fit" perhaps it would work as a container plant. Your garden is a reflection of your style, not someone else's. It's meant for your enjoyment.

Seasonal Reminders

If you are using deer repellents remember that deer quickly get used to certain scents and are lazy about changing established routes so it's a good idea to change repellents often. Re-apply repellents after heavy rain or snow.

In the middle of February, re-apply Wilt-Stop to your evergreens and rhododendrons. Try to spray during a dry period when the temperature is above 32 degrees.

Clean, oil and sharpen all your garden tools and shovels now. You'll be too busy in the spring! Some gardeners paint a splash of red on handles so that they can find their tools easily if they are dropped in the grass or at the edge of a bed. Treat yourself to a new pair of gardening gloves and a brightly colored trug.

Getting Ready for Spring

In late March:

Clean-up and rake the garden beds. Dead leaves blow around all winter and lodge in bushes and plants. You need to remove these before mice and voles decide to move in! Take this opportunity to cut down and clear off dead Daylily and Hosta foliage and tidy up anything you overlooked in the fall. As tempting as it is to get

out in the garden and get going, let the weather be your guide. Our last two springs have been cold and wet and some damage can be done by removing protective coverings too quickly.

Remove winter mulch from flower beds gradually. Any bulbs coming up now will not be bothered by a late frost.

Cut down any perennials you left standing in the fall. (Cut back Gaura, Lavender, Perovskia and Montauk Daisies later in the season when you start to see bud-break.) Watch for frost-heaved plants and push them gently but firmly back into the ground.

As perennials begin to emerge, assess their location. Sun and shade patterns change over time and it may be necessary to move some plants to a better spot. Remove any winter-damaged foliage from your perennials in early Spring and check to be sure that some plants (like Brunnera) have not formed a mat that some bulbs cannot break through.

As the soil becomes friable, keep dividing, planting and transplanting. Here in CT, we can divide or move perennials until the middle of May (Rudbeckia, Black-Eyed Susan and Leucanthemum seem to need division to thrive.) Peonies and Iris should be divided only in the fall.

When you acquire a new plant, get it into the ground as quickly as possible and remember to determine the plant's "best side." Positioning is everything! Experienced gardeners realize that allowing a plant to show its own "natural" shape will give you the best look and the best results.

Weed! It's amazing, but weeds can and do grow in and survive Connecticut winters all the time.

The Spring Garden Chores Information Sheet is available on the web site (www.AcerGardens.com).

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 the daffodils but let the stems and leaves turn brown before you cut them down completely.) Photographing your garden as the season progresses is the best record of all your hard work.

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

Hellebores

Did you plant Hellebores last year? If you did, you will shortly be enjoying the very first of the early spring flowers, some of them often peeping through the last of the snow. Blooming at a time when flowers are few and far between, Hellebores should be planted where you see them from the house. Sometimes called Lenten Rose, Hellebores are long-blooming, low-maintenance, deer and vole resistant and tolerant of dry shade although they will thank you for providing evenly moist soil. Shelter them from cold winds and grow them around deciduous shrubs and trees which will provide some welcome shade in the summer months.

The range of colors available in Hellebores is outstanding and it's hard to choose! They rarely need division and are happiest left to establish clumps. Give them a light application of a balanced fertilizer in early spring and water well during extended dry periods. Once established, they are drought-tolerant.

Because they bloom so early, Hellebores combine well with other light shade loving plants such as Ferns, Tiarella, Pulmonaria and the earliest Daffodils. Many gardeners site them on gentle slopes, the better to enjoy the inside of the flowers. After flowering, remove the faded flower stems to encourage next year's growth. You'll be glad you did!

Exciting New Nursery Selections for 2018

Acer Gardens is excited about the many new plant introductions available for the 2018 growing season. Unsure about where a new plant might fit into your existing garden? Put it in a container and move it around at will. You will be able to see easily where the new plant would fit with what you already grow and where it will show to the garden's best advantage.

Perennials

Part of the fun of growing perennials is tucking-in new versions of old favorites or adding a little spice with new colors. Think about adding some of these (all hardy in zones 3-9):

Allium 'Millennium'	15-20"	Named the 2018 Perennial Plant of the Year! Masses of large 2" round bright rosy-purple flower clusters bloom on strong stems from mid to late summer.
Astilbe x arendsii 'Color Flash'	18-20"	Features changing foliage with brilliant green fern-like early spring foliage maturing to a blend of burgundy, purple and darker green during the summer. Narrow plumes of light pink bloom in early summer. Foliage turns russet and orange in the fall.

Astilbe x arendsii 'Color Flash Lime'	18-24"	Chartreuse spring foliage matures to lime green with burgundy edges. Narrow upright plumes of pink bloom in early summer. Requires shade.
Hemerocallis 'Bakabana'	22"	This Super Bloomer could produce 600 blooms after 3 years in the garden! Bright yellow 4" ruffled edge flowers appear in early-mid summer. Excellent rebloomer.
Hemerocallis 'Barbara Mitchell'	24"	Large 6" ruffled peach-pink flowers bloom in mid-summer. Excellent rebloomer.
Hemerocallis 'Big Time Happy'	16"	Features early, ever-blooming soft lemon yellow 4" flowers with ruffled petals. Excellent rebloomer.
Hemerocallis 'Apricot Sparkles'	15"	Everblooming dwarf with sparkling diamond-dusted, ruffle-edged apricot flowers. This heavy bloomer starts early and goes until frost.
Hemerocallis 'Passionate Returns'	17"	Darrel Apps best re-bloomer to date features 4" rosy-red, ruffled flowers and branched scapes. Reblooms all summer, into fall.
Hosta 'Humpback Whale'	36"	Massive, dome-shaped mound of blue-green, heart-shaped leaves with near-white flowers in early summer.
Itoh Peony x 'Bartzella'	34"	This cross of a garden peony with a tree peony produced the hardiness of the garden peony with the intense color and flower size of the tree peony. Floriferous, fragrant, large 6" lemon-yellow semi-double flowers.

Annuals

Annuals continue to provide a wide range of choice. This year, new color combinations are dazzling and sure to catch your eye. Whether used to brighten containers or flower beds, there are annual choices for everyone. This summer, think about adding:

Begonia 'Canary Wings'	12-18"	Mounded, trailing foliage matures from golden chartreuse to a bright green. Pendant reddish-pink flowers. Requires part shade to shade.
Bidens Beezar 'Funny Honey'	8-12"	An upright, mounding plant with orange-yellow flowers in continuous bloom. Deadheads itself. Attracts butterflies.
Calibrachoa 'Can Can Bumble Bee'	10-15"	Pink flowers with yellow star-patterned throats. Very vigorous; continuous bloom. Deadheads itself attracts bees.

Coleus 'Great Falls Angel'	6-10"	A mounding and trailing plant with small heart-shaped leaves. Tolerates heat, humidity and shade. Attracts hummingbirds.
Oregano 'Kirigami'	8-10"	Dense, mounding non-edible plant for the patio. Purple-green bracts, rose flowers and light green foliage. Heat tolerant; fragrance attracts pollinators.
<u>Herbs</u>		
Basil 'Ajaka'	18-24"	Highly aromatic with spicy flavor. Weather and disease resistant. Unobtrusive flowers. Attracts bees, butterflies and birds.

Often-Asked Questions

I love the flash of red that cardinals bring to the winter landscape. How can I attract more of them to my feeders?

Cardinals don't migrate so they need good food resources for the winter months. They actually prefer stationary or platform feeders to the hanging feeders. Often the first and the last birds to appear at the feeder during the day, they are particularly fond of safflower or sunflower seeds. They are primarily ground feeders so be sure to clear snow off their seed source.

What's the best way to get snow off my bushes and ornamental trees?

Although it is always tempting to try to remove snow covering from evergreens and bushes you may actually do more harm than good by swinging those brooms and rakes! Plants are amazingly resilient and, as the snow melts, most plants will snap back fairly quickly. Give them a little time to readjust and, if you do see damage later in the season, carefully cut out the problem limbs.

When should ornamental grasses be cut down?

Mid to late March is the ideal time to cut ornamental grasses almost to the ground. Use strong garden twine to tie the grass together about 8-12" off the ground. Cut below the twine and the grass will be already bundled for removal.

I don't have room for mass plantings but I'd like to bring more organization to my garden. How?

One time-honored way is through the use of repetition so that your eye will see the whole rather than the pieces. Repeat key plants and shapes throughout the garden, planting 3 together. Repeat a common color in plant material. Working with the natural shape of your landscape, and incorporating your existing trees, you can use paths to move from place to place. Keep "accents" confined to planters until you can judge if you like the "look" you have created. There's a lot to be said for getting a large pad of graph paper and drawing on it the outline of your house, deck, patio and over-all property. Add existing flower beds and then, with a different color pencil, start playing with outlines and shapes. It's fun and, very often, only small changes will make you happy.

Last spring's late cold snap took me by surprise. How can I defend my plants?

Most bushes and plants, hardy in this zone, actually make their own version of anti-freeze and are able to survive our erratic winters quite well. However, a late-season cold snap which hits just as the plant is beginning to adjust to warmer temperatures can cause new shoot die back or winter kill. Plant location and exposure to frost pockets are also factors in avoiding problems. Watch weather reports and be prepared to cover new growth with a bedsheet when frost warnings are issued. Established plants/bushes/trees hit by a late frost one year will usually bounce back the following year.

Spring will be here soon. Where can I go to see lots of daffodils?

Rhode Island's Blithewold Mansion in Bristol, RI. Over 50,000 daffodils produce a sweeping yellow blaze of color, spilling in waves everywhere you look. April will also bring daffodils to the Laurel Ridge Foundation in Litchfield, CT (www.litchfieldhills.com) with thousands of the bulbs blooming over 10 acres of woodland field. The natural landscape overlooks a small lake and is a photographer's delight. The Meriden Daffodil Festival celebrates spring at Hubbard Park on the 21st and 22nd of April. Over 600,000 fragrant daffodils (61 varieties) spill over 1,800 acres.

Forcing Branches

Look ahead to Spring! Branches of Forsythia, Witch Hazel and Pussy Willow can be cut and forced in February. Crab Apple and flowering Cherry, cut in March, will usually bloom in 3 weeks.

Count back 6 weeks from the time a flowering shrub would be in bloom in order to establish the earliest time you can force a plant. Cut the branches and bring them into a cool spot and plunge the stems into warm water. (Many people put the bottoms of the stems on a cutting board and smash the cut end with a hammer first.) After a few days, move the vase to regular house temperatures and keep it filled with water. Change the water as often as needed.

Planning for Pollinators, Butterflies and Birds

Pollinators have been called "nature's crop dusters" ... without them we would be missing many of our favorite flowers and wildflowers. There are a number of ways to attract pollinators and keep them working for you but they are happiest in natural settings that resemble the floral landscapes which attract them in the first place. We tend to think of pollinators as being only bees but butterflies, moths and birds are all doing the same job.

The Bumblebee population is declining. Many gardeners are going out of their way to attract Mason bees because they are incredible cross-pollinators, gathering pollen and nectar on the same visit. (Do not confuse them with Carpenter bees ... Mason bees are a different species and are gentle and friendly.) Arriving early in the season, they are invaluable for pollinating fruit trees. They are not interested in eating your house! Very sociable, Mason bees are happiest living in special houses, readily available at garden supply stores/catalogs.

A few simple additions to your gardening could increase the number of pollinator visitors:

Garden in the sun. Even late into the fall, you will find bees hanging onto flowers and sunning themselves.

Cultivate native plants. Natives are four times more attractive to native bees than anything else.

Plant in clumps. Clusters of one pollinator-friendly plant will draw more visitors.

Aim for extended bloom. Have at least 3 species blooming in each season.

Select flowers in bright colors. Vary the shapes of the flowers to accommodate different pollinators.

Choose common plants and heirloom varieties which are proven sources of nectar and pollen.

Do not use pesticides.

Help your vegetable garden attract pollinators by planting basil, cilantro and oregano.

Honeybees: Attracted to sweet/minty scents, plants on which they can perch and blooms fully open in the daytime. They prefer flat, shallow blossoms and actually retain a memory of plants they have visited! Try Iris, Mountain Laurel, Violets, Cosmos, Hollyhock, Phlox, Nepeta, Salvia, Lavender and Roses.

Bumblebees: Long-tongued and heavier than Honeybees, Bumblebees are sun worshippers. Twice as fast as Honeybees, Bumblebees carry a great deal of pollen per trip because they are so much larger and are not making much honey. Consider using: Columbine, Snapdragons, Monarda, Monkshood, Candytuft, Agastache, and Buddleia.

Butterflies: Although oddly enough butterflies taste with their feet and don't get much pollen on their bodies, they are still highly efficient pollinators. They like brightly colored red, orange, purple and yellow highly-scented flowers which grow in clusters and are fully open during the day. Growing Asters, Sedum, Sweet William, Marigolds, Coneflowers, Zinnias and Buddleia will be sure to attract them.

Moths: They don't get much attention, but moths are the night-shift pollinators in the garden. Appearing in the late afternoon, moths are attracted to all the nocturnal, heavily-scented flowers. Many of those flowers open in late afternoon and bloom into the night; most of the flowers have long-throats and the pale flowers stay visible for a long time. Attract moths with Nicotiana, Gaura, Stock, Honeysuckle, Moonflower, Evening Primrose and Night-blooming Jasmine.

Birds: Flowers attracting birds need to be shaped to accommodate those whirring wings and their stems must be strong enough for perching. Hummingbirds, key to native wildflower pollination, are attracted by red flowers but other birds head for the nectar available in many summer flowers. Birds have no real sense of smell but bright colors, especially red, attract them all summer long. Plant Columbine, Agastache, Salvia, Penstemon, Trumpet creepers and Bee Balm to bring them flying in.

Native Plants to Make Your Life Easier

Many native plants, or wildflowers, will do well in a cultivated garden as long as their soil, sun and moisture requirements are met. Choosing plants that have long since habituated themselves to your local conditions gives you a head-start. (Mixing sun plants with woodland plants will not help you succeed so plan accordingly!) Natives tend to be quick-growing and long-lived, disease resistant and pest free and easily withstand dramatic climate changes such as drought and blizzard. Once established, they need very little fertilizing and watering. Any tendency to invasiveness can be easily controlled by pulling up self-seedlings.

In the wider conservation picture, natives' growth habits and root structures keep soil in place and store water. The plants are pre-programmed to produce fruit, nectar, seeds and nuts at various times of the year in sync with the local fauna. Making space for native plants in your garden almost guarantees a procession

of birds, butterflies, insects and mammals seeking food and shelter. Visually, growing natives connects the boundaries of your garden to the wider natural landscape.

The New England Wildflower Society has some recommendations for natives guaranteed to thrive in this climate. Choose from:

Asclepias incarnata	Common Milkweed	Sun/partial shade
Aruncus dioicus	Goatsbeard	Sun/partial shade
Aster novae-angliae	New England Aster	Sun
Boltonia asteroides	Boltonia	Sun
Cimicifuga racemosa	Black Snakeroot	Sun/partial shade
Echinacea purpurea	Purple Coneflower	Sun
Eupatorium maculatum	Joe-Pye Weed	Sun
Hibiscus moscheutos	Marsh Mallow	Sun
Lobelia cardinalis	Cardinal Flower	Sun/partial shade
Monarda didyma	Bee Balm	Sun/partial shade
Oenothera fruticosa	Sundrops	Sun
Phlox maculata	Wild Sweet William	Sun/partial shade
Tiarella cordifolia	Foamflower	Shade
Tradescantia	Spiderwort	Sun
Vernonia noveboracensis	Tall Ironweed	Sun
Veronicastrum virginicum	Culver's Root	Sun

Cool-Season Vegetables

Every year, more and more gardeners discover the pleasure of growing some of the vegetables they eat. A successful vegetable garden needs 8 hours of full sun daily and some protection from excessive winds.

Raised beds and containers make good alternatives to full-size gardens although containers will require more watering. Adding organic matter to the soil (compost or manure) will give your vegetables a boost and help drainage. Vegetables can also be tucked into gardens easily. Lettuces are ideal for containers or even the front of garden beds. Tomatoes decorate many a patio or terrace, mixed in with herbs; cucumbers can be grown on a trellis or pergola. New dwarf varieties and bush forms of plants allow space-saving techniques. Adding natural insect repellents to herb and vegetable gardens (basil, nasturtiums and marigolds) will help you grow vegetables successfully. Pre-grown vegetables are best suited for container growing and will give you a head start.

Probably the most important concept for a vegetable gardener to live by is: "Rotate the Crops!" Failure to do this can result in declining harvests and plants that do not thrive and grow to expectation. Plotting your garden on graph paper will help you establish boundaries and maximize your available space. If you are using rows be sure to leave access routes for weeding and fertilizing. Square foot gardens (4' x 4') have proven very helpful for smaller vegetable gardens. Divide the area into 16 squares and space plants accordingly. Use stakes or a trellis to send vines upright and save space ... many new cultivars of Cucumber and Zucchini are designed for upright growth. Growing on stakes also frustrates many common predators!

Many vegetables can be planted as soon as you can work the soil. Known as "cool season vegetables", they are tolerant of root disturbance and benefit from getting a jump on the season. They include Swiss Chard, Spinach, Kale, Leeks, Onions, Cilantro, Peas, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Carrots, Beets, Celery and Radishes. Leaf lettuces, such as Black Seeded Simpson, Arugula, and Mache are harvested young and re-planting every 2 – 3 weeks will keep you harvesting until the heat of the summer.

As a general guide:

Sow or plant in cool weather: Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Lettuce, Onions, Parsley, Parsnips, Peas, Radishes, Spinach, Swiss chard, Turnips.

Sow or plant in warm weather: Beans, Carrots, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Melons, Peppers, Squashes, Tomatoes.

Sow or Plant to Give 1 crop per season: Corn, Eggplant, Leeks, Melons, Peppers, Potatoes, Squashes, Tomatoes.

Re-sow for additional crops: Beans, Beets, Carrots, Lettuce, Parsnips, Radishes, Spinach, Turnips.

As the season progresses and the temperatures rise, be sure to include a few flowers and herbs to help attract the pollinators so necessary to a successful vegetable garden. Attracting honeybees, bumblebees, butterflies and moths is made easier if you include some plants of Basil, Bee Balm, Black-Eyed Susan, Cosmos, Oregano and Zinnia.

Our Information sheet on **Growing Vegetables** is available on the web site (www.acergardens.com).

Planning a Beginners Vegetable Garden

Diagram and lay-out your vegetable garden on graph paper. A raised bed would make care of the garden easier. Be sure to rotate crop placement annually and remember to allow enough room between rows for easy access and weeding. Rows running north to south will take full advantage of the sun. An easy garden, designed to feed four people, could include Zucchini, Tomatoes, Peppers, Cabbage, Bush beans, Lettuce, Beets, Carrots, Swiss chard and Radishes. Adding Marigolds to the perimeter of your garden will help discourage rabbits and other pests.

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).

General Reminders

Tuesday at Acer Gardens are 60+ Discount Days ... 10% off all purchases.

Wednesday offers a 10% Nursery **Discount** to all customers.

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor

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