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So many of us came new to gardening over the past year or found ourselves devoting increasing amounts of time to surrounding ourselves with the beauty and peacefulness that a garden can bring to its surrounding landscape. In an uncertain world filled with pandemic fears and concerns, forced to take so many extra precautions and change our normal ways of living and working, we discovered both the sustained health benefits and the steady, on-going pleasure our gardens can bring to us. In fact, challenges, frustrations and annoyances are not new to gardeners ... we accept them and live with them all the time! The joys and surprises of gardening are fully earned. Gardeners learn to adapt to changing circumstances and to re-arrange them to make them work for where and how we live.

We learned that working steadily in a garden is very calming after stressful events. Anxiety lessened and moods improved. We got exercise and produced something beautiful at the same time. We came through it all together. Now, in this quiet time of the year, we need to spend a little time planning our next year's garden ... changing and adapting to meet new situations.

What new directions are calling us? The vital part of the planning experience is how we apply what the problems we have met teach us. If you find that certain types of plants out-perform others in your garden perhaps you should plan to grow more of them. Are you tired of certain plant material? Plan now to rejuvenate your flower beds and add new colors and shapes. This is the time for dreaming of what could be because each new gardening year offers, in one way, an almost clean slate to draw on. Few things are more personal than your own garden and the on-going pleasure it brings. It deserves the extra attention you bring it in the planning season and hopefully will delight you all through the coming season.

Looking through the garden photos you took last season can help you decide which areas of your garden need improving or re-arranging. Garden books are a great source of inspiration and this is the perfect time to read or re-read some of your favorites. 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. Sometimes just looking at your garden in a new way will lead you to the answers you need. Your local library carries some interesting garden DVDs and they are worth watching.

Acer Gardens is really excited about our new perennial, annual and shrub offerings for Spring 2021. Weather permitting, we hope to be open the last week in March (please check the web site or call (860) 526-9056 for the actual date as we get into March) 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 garden year! Our current Information Sheets are available on our web site.

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 seem to 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 bring 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 ... and even blue jays are useful in that role.

Flower Shows

The organizers have announced that the 40th annual Connecticut Flower and Garden Show has been canceled due to the uncertainty around the coronavirus pandemic. The show was scheduled to take place at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford from February 25-28, 2021. Acer Gardens certainly hopes that we will all be back at the CT Flower Show in 2022!

The Philadelphia Flower Show, the nation's largest and longest-running horticultural events, will move outdoors for the first time in 2021 and has been re-scheduled for a 9-day, nature-themed event June 5-13, to be held in FDR Park. Admission will be limited, with guests required to buy tickets in advance for specific times. The 2021 Show theme will be "Habitat: Nature's Masterpiece", focusing on pollinators, natural landscapes and the parts plants play in healthy ecosystems. The PHS web site will feature the show.

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! Go to www.ilovegardens.com and see the listings for every state. Some famous viewable gardens include CT'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), the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (www.bbg.org), Chanticleer Gardens (www.chanticleergarden.org) and San Francisco's Filoli (www.filoli.org).

Web Site

We keep working on and improving our web site! It's designed to be as interactive as possible 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, shop our Online Store, 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). In response to your suggestions, we will also be posting more "How To" videos! We're always interested in hearing what our customers would like to see on the web site and what would be most helpful to you. Just remember: we don't have full-time office coverage because we like to spend the season down in the Nursery with you so you may have to leave us a message!

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. 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. All these factors affect your over-all garden plan.

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.

Workshops

Covid-19 kept us from scheduling Workshops and we understand how much they were missed! We missed them too! Hopefully, we will be able to schedule new Workshops in the summer and fall as soon as restrictions are lifted and we can keep staff and customers safe. In the meantime, we are always interested in hearing your suggestions on possible future workshops and gatherings! Please Email us your ideas.

Forcing Flowering 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. Many gardeners find that forcing cuttings from flowering bushes is easier than forcing those spring-blooming trees.

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 every few days. Once the blooms appear, display the branches in a warm area.

Acer Gardens' Theme of the Year

There are so many plants available! The gardening world has cycles plants become "hot" and are taken up, used and featured a great deal year after year only to almost vanish and become suddenly hard-to-find. This can be a great pity because those plants often filled a real need. Fortunately, there are almost always really outstanding substitutes waiting to find their forever garden home. So, the Nursery theme for the year: Under-Used Plants. We'll be talking about many plants which are worthy of renewed attention. Stay tuned!

Seasonal Reminders

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

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.

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 an effective gardening hat. Remember last July and August?

Towards the end of March, cut ornamental grasses down to the ground. Use strong garden twine to tie the grass together about 12" off the ground. Cut below the twine and the grass will be already bundled for removal.

Care of Popular House Plants

Remember to turn your houseplants regularly to keep them from growing and leaning towards the light source. Do not water your plants on a strict schedule but only as the plant needs it. Overwatering kills more plants than underwatering!

Many herbs make wonderful houseplants and will thrive indoors. Although it is indeed a Mediterranean plant, rosemary needs to be misted regularly or it will not do well in the house. Sage, thyme, bay leaves and parsley will all flourish ... the more you cut them to use in your cooking, the happier the plants will be. Give them as much sun and light as you can and don't over water. Feed them well during their growing season, keep the foliage dusted and clean, hydrate the air and repot as needed.

Hanging Spider Plant babies can be easily rooted. Cut off the baby and float it on top of a small glass of water. Keep the water topped up and you will have roots very quickly. Plant in a good soil mixture and keep watered.

Succulents are favorite houseplants because they are easy-to-please and survive dry indoor winter conditions with relative ease but many are native to cool, arid locations so too much sun and heat can cause problems. The fleshy leaves and thick stems allow the plants to hoard water but it is the strong, distinctive leaf shapes that attract the gardener's eye. Give them the brightest light possible and add sand to the potting soil for good drainage. They do need to be watered, just not as often as tropical houseplants. Every 1-2 weeks for watering is about right, depending on the size of the pot, the light around it and the temperature of the room. Let the soil dry out almost completely and then ... water sparingly! In this case, less is more!

Ferns have been popular indoor plants since Victorian times because they require little care, thrive in low-light conditions and add visual interest to a room. Foliage ranges from the delicate to the dramatic with many stops in between. Ferns have a few requirements but they are easily met, especially in New England:

Indirect lighting ... an east window is preferred.

Room temperature of 65-75 degrees F during the day, 10 degrees cooler at night.

Consistent watering with the soil evenly moist, not wet.

High humidity ... pebble-lined trays with water work well. Mist foliage often.

Fertilize lightly, once a month, from April through September.

Repot every few years, in the spring, with soil that is 50% peat moss.

Peperomia (Baby rubber plant) is a tropical, trailing plant sports highly ornamental foliage with a wide range of leaf color and insignificant flowers. It requires very little maintenance and appears to thrive on benign neglect; slow-growing, it will reach only 6" tall but will send out trailers to 3' unless periodically pinched back. They enjoy a somewhat root-bound existence and are happy with the soil drying out between waterings.

Tradescantia zebrina (Inchplant or Spiderwort), like its perennial relatives, flowers freely in bright, indirect sun. Growing 6-9" tall, it prefers moist soil and should be misted frequently and fed monthly with a half-strength fertilizer. Pinch back the tendrils often to encourage branching and increase fullness. Not particularly long-lived, Inchplants are incredibly easy to root: take a cutting with one leaf on it, and insert into potting soil (no rooting medium needed). Keep the soil moist and you'll see new growth in a few weeks!

Keeping Winter Blooms Going

As you enjoy the bulbs you have forced, remember that paper whites will not bloom again and should be discarded.

When the amaryllis bloom is finished, cut off the stem but keep caring for the plant. Give it a bright, sunny location in the house and fertilize regularly. In summer, when all danger of frost has passed, put the amaryllis out in a protected part of the garden where it will receive about 5 hours of sunlight and some afternoon shade. Fertilize lightly until August and leave the plant alone until Labor Day. Then, cut off the leaves, and place the pot in a **dark** cellar, withholding all water, and store in the dark for at least 2-3 months. They need to rest about 8-12 weeks and are happy being pot-bound. Gradually bring them upstairs, water, and place in the light. Before you know it you will see new leaves and a developing bud.

Poinsettias prefer a day temperature of 67 degrees and like a humid environment. The bright, indirect light of an east window suits them but avoid drafts. Put the plants outside for the summer, trim back and repot in late summer and, well before frost, bring them back into the house as the daylight begins to shorten.

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, wildflowers and vegetables. 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.

Winter is the perfect time to choose ways to make your gardening easier on yourself and on your own landscape. Increase the number of pollinator visitors with simple additions:

Garden with sun-loving plants, wherever you can. 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 our 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. Many pollinators find single flowers easier to access than doubles.

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

Be careful what you use to control disease and insects; today, there are many safe options.

Plant Alyssum around roses to attract aphid-eating insects.

Help your vegetable garden attract pollinators and beneficial insects by planting Basil, Cilantro, Oregano, Marigolds and Alyssum to bring the “good guys” to your garden.

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, lingering late into the fall to catch the last of the sunshine. 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, Baptisia, Agastache, and Buddleia.

Hoverflies: Although they are true flies, Hoverflies look like small bees or wasps. (They are often described as “nature’s helicopters” because they literally hover over flowers, dart away and then come back to hover again.) Hoverflies are highly effective in eating aphids; they are attracted to small flowers, especially Marigolds, Cuphea and Alyssum.

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 Vine and Bee Balm to bring them flying in.

Outstanding New Nursery Selections Available for the 2021 Season

Acer Gardens is excited about the many new plant introductions/cultivars we will be offering for this coming season. With over 1,800 plants currently available at the nursery, some outstanding new selections really deserve attention:

2021 Perennial Plant of the Year

Calamintha nepeta subspecies *nepeta*

Not to be confused with true *Nepeta*, this cousin belongs in every sunny perennial garden in zone 4-7. Small pale blue flowers bloom in spikes from summer to frost and lend a strong presence to the garden when massed. 12-15" tall and happy with dry, poor soil, the plant's vigorous roots smother weeds. Fragrant foliage is an added plus.

Perennials

Part of the fun of growing perennials is tucking-in new and improved versions of old favorites or adding a little spice with new colors. Think about adding some of these:

Aster novae-angliae 'Grape Crush'	30"	Produces a large, very round mound of deep purple flowers, densely packed, from early to mid-fall. Attracts butterflies and bees and is salt-tolerant.
Baptisia 'American Goldfinch'	3'+	A big, bold, native cultivar shows off golden yellow flower spikes in early summer. Thrives with almost no maintenance and is very long-lived.
Calamintha 'Montrose White'	12-18"	An excellent edging plant, and in bloom from June to October, <i>Calamintha nepeta</i> tolerates some drought and Light shade in the afternoon. Fragrant, does well in containers and rock gardens.
Lavender 'Sensational'	24"	Features very large, densely flowered, fragrant purple spikes from mid-summer to fall. Green and silvery foliage make this ideal companion border plant.

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:

Cuphea 'Hummingbird's Lunch'	12"	Blooming non-stop, this compact plant is covered in bright 2-tone cherry-red flowers. Drought tolerant, attracts bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.
Geranium 'Tall, Dark & Handsome Blood Orange'	3'	Large deep orange flowers cover the entire stem of this narrow plant. Semi-trailing, unusual foliage.

Lysimachia ‘Midnight Sun’	4”	Vigorous ground-cover or container plant features lightly- scented showy yellow flowers. Prefers moist soil; attracts bees. Distinctive foliage.
Rudbeckia “Cheyenne Gold”	3’+	Adds bold, stunning yellow-gold flowers to the garden. Tall flowers stand up to rain. Excellent cut flowers with long vase life. Attracts bees and butterflies.

Roses

Acer Gardens offers many roses, both Own Root and Budded plants. More and more roses have been bred to give season-long enjoyment with a minimum of effort. Many repeat readily, blooming on both new and old wood. Consider using:

‘Fruity Petals’	6’+	This new disease-resistant coral climber has been introduced by the breeder of the Knockout rose. Blooms are uniquely colored and heavy throughout the season.
‘Zephrine Drouhin’	15-20’	First introduced in 1868, this classic climber still delivers double, ruffled magenta blooms with a strong raspberry fragrance. Cold hardy and disease resistant.
‘Sunset Horizon’	3-4’	This floribunda rose produces blooms that start bright yellow, fading to deep pink red. Large flowers bloom constantly. Disease resistant.
‘Pretty Polly Lavender’	2’	Pastel lavender polyantha rose with a compact habit. Double, sweetly fragrant blooms; bushy growth habit.

Shrubs

With a little advance planning, it is possible to have flowering shrubs in bloom continuously from late April through fall. Used as background or specimen, flowering shrubs bring a color accent hard to beat!

Buddleia “Pink Cascade”	5’+	Huge apple blossom pink blooms will bring swarms of bees and butterflies. Plant in full sun and give it lots of room.
Caryopteris ‘Grand Bleu’	2-3’	This compact shrub showcases fragrant silver- green foliage. Dark blue flowers bloom from July- September. Trim back in the spring for maximum bloom.
Vitex agnus-castus ‘Pink Pinnacle’	6-8’	This dwarf Chaste Tree bush produces waves of dense pink spikes in the late garden. Vigorous, disease and pest resistant, attractive to all pollinators.
Leucothoe ‘Curly Red’	4-5’	Provides year-round interest for the shade garden. Twisted, leathery leaves range orange red in spring to purple for the winter.

Cephalotaxus ‘Golden Dragon’

2-3’

This spreading plum yew has golden yellow needles with a low vase shape habit. Shade tolerant. Deer resistant, low maintenance.

Often-Asked Questions

I’d like to spend a little time this winter organizing my garden records. Any suggestions? What information should I really keep?

First, decide what you want to keep track of! Some gardeners just save the white plastic labels or empty seed packets. You could set up a simple chart, divided into annual, perennial, shrub, tree and bulb sections, and note what you planted when. (This will help you establish a pruning/fertilizing schedule.) You could also divide your garden notes by section or flower bed to help you maintain an inventory of which plants/bushes are growing where.

Consider setting up a chart to monitor the sequence of bloom from your bushes and flowering trees and to make note of what you see from the house; photograph your bulbs as they begin to bloom and keep them as a permanent record. In the fall, you’ll know where to plant new bulbs.

What’s the best way to clean-up plastic pots? I’d like to get a jump-start on spring!

Good for you! You need to get rid of those salt deposits and other leftovers on the pots. Soak the pots in a solution of 1 part household bleach to 9 parts water for at least 10 minutes. (You might even take a scouring pad to them.) Then move the pots into a dish detergent and water solution. Rinse the pots thoroughly and then soak them in a bucket of clean water before letting them dry.

Is there an easy pruning/trimming schedule for flowering bushes?

To keep it under control, Forsythia should be pruned right after blooming. If you wait too long, you will be cutting off next year’s flowers. If you are growing a forsythia hedge be sure to leave the bushes a little wider at the bottom than at the top so as to maximize the sun received by the plants.

Remember that most Hydrangeas (not *Hydrangea arborescens* ... Annabelle and Samantha), Lilacs and Azaleas flower on old wood and should not be trimmed until after bloom. If this winter continues to follow the freeze/thaw pattern it has currently established, it could affect your basic pruning and trimming schedule. Be patient and take your time.

Buddleia, or Butterfly Bush, should not be cut back to 12”-18” until mid- April, even though they will be showing signs of new growth... they are susceptible to late freezes. Do not prune other flowering shrubs until just after they have bloomed.

Last summer was so hot and dry. How can I make my garden more drought-tolerant?

The long-range forecast for this area is for drier summers. Choosing and placing appropriate plants in your garden will help you cope with longer dry spells... but everything starts with good soil. Use native plants where you can; they’ve already adapted to the climate. In general, established perennial flowers require less water than annuals. Many gardeners keep an eye on weather reports and water deeply just before the temperatures soar.

Daytime watering evaporates in the heat so always water well before noon. Most perennials thrive on 1" of water a week so a good rain gauge is a gardener's best friend. Water deeply and less often... you want a self-sufficient flower border. If you water everyday your plants will expect it and will not send their roots deep into the ground. Some gardeners divide their gardens into grids and deep-water a grid a day. Move container plants to more shaded areas for the duration of a drought; in all probability, they will still require watering once a day but they won't have to work quite as hard to keep growing!

Acer Gardens Information Sheet on drought tolerant plants is available on the web site.

I'm interested in adding some native plants but how do I accommodate their growing needs?

Using natives is the plant version of "shopping local"! Natives need what other plants need ... the right plant put in the right place. The three factors to consider are light, soil type/moisture and space. Full sun is anything more than 6 hours of sun daily; anything less than 6 hours is some version of shade. Soil drainage can be determined by digging an 8" deep hole, filling it with water, letting it drain and then filling it again. If it drains in less than 12 hours your site is well-drained. Finally, don't put fast spreading plants next to slow-growers! Plan for the size of mature plants, get them off to a good start the first year and divide when appropriate. Many will blend in nicely with established plants and all have already adapted to this climate.

I seem to have acquired a bad habit of grabbing new plants just because they're new! How do I choose more carefully?

It's hard to resist new plants and an impulse buy is not necessarily a bad thing! It still has to fit into your garden somewhere and an internal check list will help you in your choices. Ask yourself:

- Does it have a long interest and presence in the garden?
- Does it offer something really unusual ... flower or foliage or size or fragrance?
- Does it need a lot of maintenance or special attention?
- Is it non-invasive or drought-tolerant or disease-resistant or improved in some way?
- Is it environmentally friendly?

If you absolutely have to have it but aren't sure where to put it, pop it into a container and move it around the garden until it finds its forever home.

Getting Ready for Spring

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.

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 when you start to see bud-break.) Watch for frost-heaved plants and push them gently but firmly back into the ground.

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 .)

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, and disease. Flower and vegetable seeds will be prominently featured. Late April/early May is the ideal time to apply lime, if needed, to the lawn; fertilize and use pre-emergent weed control.

Growing Alpines

With the Spring season weather increasingly cool in the last few years, growing Alpine plants is an increasingly popular hobby here in Connecticut. It is almost impossible here in Connecticut not to look around and see existing rocks in your garden which could become the foundation of your Alpine plantings ... other gardeners will gladly contribute some of their rocks! You don't need much space to tuck in a lot of plants as most true Alpines are not quick spreaders.

Alpine troughs/containers are low-maintenance, hardy, work in a variety of settings and can be tucked into your garden landscape almost at will. One great advantage of the hypertufa troughs and containers is that they are easy to move around the garden and place to advantage. Acer Gardens has a large selection of Alpine troughs and other containers.

Using Alpines replicates a mountain landscape. The plants grow naturally in nutrient-poor soils, prefer open areas and are drought-tolerant and slow-growing. They do not want a lot of fertilizer and are cold-resistant; most are deer-resistant. As you plan your Alpine trough, keep in mind that although many Alpine plants make their biggest showing in the Spring there are so many cultivars to choose from that a little careful planning will keep your trough blooming all summer long. Acer grows over 200 varieties of Alpine/rock garden flowers ... many of them require very little watering.

Planning for Cool-Season Vegetables

Every year, more and more gardeners discover the pleasure of growing some of the vegetables they eat; last summer brought many new vegetable gardeners great pleasure. 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.

Container vegetable gardens are increasingly popular. Not everyone wants a full vegetable garden and containers are very adaptable. As the sun begins to lose power towards the end of the growing season, containers can be moved around the garden to take advantage of more daylight hours. Many vegetable plants can even be planted in with perennials and their leaves can add an interesting mix of foliage to an existing perennial bed!

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.

Diagram and lay-out your vegetable garden on graph paper ... this will help you establish boundaries and maximize your available space. A raised bed would make care of the garden easier. 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.

Rows running north to south will take full advantage of the available 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 and Nasturtiums to the perimeter of your garden will help discourage rabbits and other pests.

A number of vegetables can be planted as soon as you can work the soil. Known as "cool season vegetables", they include Swiss Chard, Spinach, Kale, Leeks, Onions, Cilantro, Peas, Cabbage, Broccoli and Cauliflower. 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 arrives.

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

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).

Remember: Weather permitting, we hope to be open the last week in March and look forward to seeing all our friends again!

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor