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Root Concerns

Notes from the underground

A Garden To Crow About

Text and photos by Schenectady Master Gardener Joan Thompson

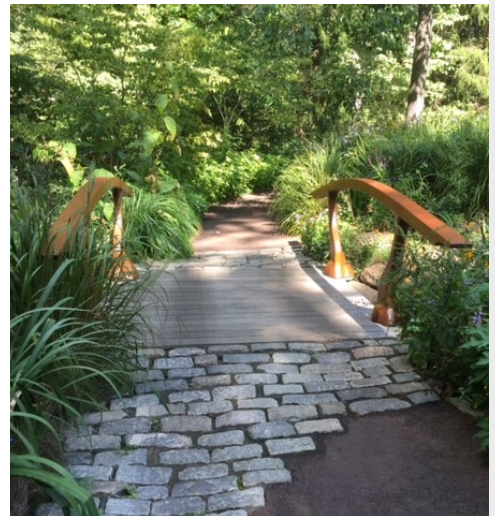


After reading an article about Chanticleer Gardens in Wayne, Pennsylvania, in last spring's edition of *Garden Design* magazine I knew I needed to visit on my next trip to the Philly area, where my daughter attends college. When driving by Chanticleer ("rooster" in French), it looks similar to the other Colonial Revival estates along Philadelphia's mainline, but once inside, visitors are treated to 35 acres cared for by an inspirational group of artisans and gardeners.

The estate was built in 1912 by the head of a pharmaceutical manufacturing company, which later became part of Merck and Co. His son established a foundation to ensure that Chanticleer would be developed as a public garden, and the property opened to visitors in 1933. The garden contains lawns and large trees, the Asian woods, a pond garden, the ruin and gravel garden, tennis court garden and woodland.

The Executive Director and Head Gardener has developed a set of design principles and garden care strategies with an eye toward education. Touring the garden rooms and large flower filled hillsides, it's not difficult to see how this can be achieved by home gardeners on a smaller scale. Garden

rooms are knit together by using similar flowers. Palettes of green plants are used throughout to give the eyes a chance to rest between



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the highly dramatic areas. Curves are a unifying theme throughout, with each pattern created in scale with its surroundings. For example, large sweeping serpentine shaped plantings are used over the hillsides, smaller bamboo curving paths are used in the woodlands and spiral stonework is used in a smaller garden room.

Chanticleer is closed in the winter and many of the gardeners also work as carpenters or blacksmiths. They use this time to make furniture and other elements for the garden. Their craftsmanship can be seen in metal handrails, hand carved wooden bridges and garden furniture. Unlike some gardens, where plants and trees are labeled or signs are placed by them, Chanticleer has themed boxes, home made, of course, that contain plant lists of everything in the garden. These can be carried around for your visit and are also available to purchase. This all creates a sense of a hand-touched intimate garden.



When I arrived at Chanticleer and paid my admission, I was told “be sure to wander off the paths and sit on all the furniture”. I knew right then that this was the kind of garden that I would want to visit over and over. Next time with a picnic lunch!



Yikes! What's Happening Here?

This photo of a Long Island arborist holding the base of a dead tree comes from long ago, but it depicts a recurring problem. All too often, wire, rope or plastic twine is left around the base of a newly-planted tree. Unless the aforementioned insult decomposes, the tree suffers a slow strangulation as it continues to grow. Soil or mulch often covers up the situation, leaving gardeners clueless. Careful planting takes not much more time than doing it carelessly, but it proves invaluable since the tree's life hangs in the balance!

Reflections...

By Sue Pezzolla

It was sometime back in the early 1990's that my husband said to me that he hoped that I knew how fortunate I was to be blending my vocation with my avocation. Over the years he has reminded me of this often and I confess that I have always known my good fortune to have my work be so closely meshed with my passion for gardening. It has made going to work a joy most of the time and it has made the personal rewards and satisfaction very tangible and real. Indeed it has been the personal side of my job that has keep me at work perhaps longer than I should have stayed. Working with Master Gardener volunteers who share my passion for gardening and the joy of helping gardeners be more successful is a simple mission on the surface but a very complex one in reality. While the world around us has been changing rapidly and we are embracing new technologies, we all still plant seeds, nurture plants, dig in the earth, and eat the fruits and vegetables of our labor. We embrace that simplicity as it does not change nor does the hope and optimism that gardeners embrace for there is always "next year" in the garden. It has been such a joy to get to know our volunteers, to train them to be 'Master Gardeners,' to work with them on projects, to learn with them and especially to laugh with them. There are no adequate words to capture the breath of this relationship or the emotions that come from many years of growing a program together. I am also blessed to have had co-workers who taught me how to be an Extension agent in Horticulture by their stellar example and guidance as I learned the job. My deepest

gratitude to Chuck Schmitt, David Chinery, Chris Logue and Angie Thompkins who have been supportive and caring peers who have never said no to a request for help. In 1978 when I took the Master Gardener training under then CCE Horticulture Educator, Dave Reville, he had no idea of the seeds that he was planting in the minds and hearts of his second crop of volunteers. Hopefully I have carried out the mission.

Editor's Note: We will all greatly miss Sue when she retires from Cornell Cooperative Extension at the end of January 2017, but we know she'll "keep on growing" with many future endeavors! Not only is she tops as a Master Gardener Coordinator but she has been a wonderful teacher, leader, horticulturist and friend.



Winter Woes... What To Do?

By Sue Pezzolla



Damage from ice and snow are facts of life in the Northeast, but the effects don't always have to be disastrous. Even the best planned landscape may experience the ill effects of winter winds, ice storms, and heavy snow. Snow cover is an insulating factor if it is light and fluffy; a few inches of snow insulates the root zone against extreme fluctuations in temperature. However, even light snow can become compacted by traffic, thus mitigating its insulating value. A heavy, wet snow weighs down the branches and causes bending, breaking, or splitting and in extreme cases, uprooting of the entire tree. Fast growing trees such as boxelder, poplar, and silver maple are very prone to storm damage. Tree shape is also a factor with open limbs bearing the weight better than narrow crotches or most evergreens. Multi-stemmed evergreens that branch low to the ground such as pyramidal arborvitae do not handle heavy snow very well and often split under the weight.

Removing the snow on evergreens soon after a heavy snowfall is helpful as is the pruning of damaged areas to clean-up and ward off secondary damage from disease and insects. Small branches can be cut with loppers or pruners at the nearest lateral branch or bud. Large branches can be cut (using great care) with a saw but consider calling in a certified arborist who is trained to evaluate the damage and prune correctly to maintain balance and shape. Recycle pruned material into kindling, firewood, or chip for compost. If the damage is extensive, consider first, is the tree worth keeping? Perhaps this is the time to "cut your losses" and have the tree removed. Is this a stressful location such as a place where the snow comes down off the roof? Would a large shrub suit the location better than a tree?



Ice is another matter. The extreme weight of ice on slender branches can cause the tree to take on a weeping appearance that is best left to Mother Nature to remedy. The effects of man's attempt to tame winter with chemicals (such as various types of salt) often causes damage that does not become apparent until the temperatures warm. Road salt and de-icing agents can build up in the soil causing leaf burn. Leaching the area with water is helpful, but judicious use of the chemical is the best defense. Calcium chloride is less onerous than sodium chloride but more expensive. Using sand or gravel, or a combination of one of these with a chemical can reduce injury. Snow as the "poor man's fertilizer" takes on a new connotation as it melts helping to leach away the salt accumulation. Winter is inevitable, but trees and shrubs do not have to suffer long term ill effects. Prompt action can make all the difference!

Resources:

"Repairing Storm Damage to Shade and Ornamental Trees", Fact sheet, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County.

Hudler, George. "Salt Injury to Roadside Plants," Information Bulletin 169, Cornell University, Plant Sciences/Plant Pathology.

TreeCare, Volume XII, Number 1- January 2001. Peltier, Patrice. "The Impact of Snow on Woody Plants" pp. 8-10

Ten Resolutions for the Vegetable Garden in the New Year

Have I fallen into a rut when it comes to our vegetable garden? I think yes.

Here are ten things I plan to do differently in 2017.

Try some new vegetables

It's easy to get into a rut, planting the same vegetables year after year. This year I'm going to try my hand at kohlrabi, arugula and cauliflower. I may not be pleased with the results, but it's worth a try.

Try some new varieties

I've been growing 'Fortex' pole beans for as long as I can remember. It's time to try some other varieties even though I very much like the 'Fortex'. How about 'Marvel of Venice' (flat pod) or 'Gita' (yard long)?

Use row covers more often

Row covers are, frankly, a pain to deploy and they're forever ripping if not handled gently. But they really help certain vegetables by shielding them from chewing insects and protecting them from early spring breezes.

In the spring, warm the soil with plastic

Placing clear plastic on your planting beds really accelerates the warming of the soil. I need to more of my planting beds in the spring.

Measure the soil temperature before planting and transplanting

I own a soil thermometer. How about using it? Rushing to put vegetables in the ground can be terribly self-defeating if the soil hasn't reached the proper temperature.

Properly space plants

I have a big garden. Then why am I perpetually crowding plants? I need to bring along a ruler when transplanting and get the spacing correct. And when thinning I also need to bring discipline to the chore.

Keep a log

Every year this resolution falls by the wayside. I really need to discipline myself and keep a record of major events.

Mulch, mulch, mulch!

I mulch early in the season, but by mid-summer I begin to slack off. Mulch is a gardener's best friend. And in late summer the soil can get too warm, so adding additional layers of mulch will help keep the soil temperatures in check.

Make more compost

Putting together a mulch pile really isn't that big a task – maybe a couple of hours. And it's really satisfying to build a hot compost heap.

Plant a cover crop

In the fall it's not that big a deal to spread some winter rye and then dig it in the spring. Adding organic matter to your soil should be priority number one, and the use of compost, mulch and cover crops all contribute to better soil and healthier crops.



Lend an Apple-picking Hand

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2017. While few records survive, we do know that a young man named Nick Farber was the first “county agent” here. In searching for information on this predecessor of mine, I discovered a snippet in *The Rotarian* magazine from January 1921. It is an interesting tale of the times and perhaps a lesson for today.

In the fall of 1920, Hudson Valley orchards produced a bumper crop of apples, but few men came to pick them – many had been lost to the tragedy of World War One. The price of the few apples that made it to market soared. Here I’ll let the magazine pick up the story. “When it became apparent that the crop this year would be even larger and the sources of aid for farmers equally meagre, the Rotary Club, thru its Public Affairs Committee, resolved to offer its services, in striving to solve the problem.”

“It was proposed that the Troy Rotarians give one of their Saturday afternoons in the harvesting season to the task of picking fruit in the orchard district. Those with cars at their disposal were asked to meet at the Y.M.C.A. at one o’clock. Others were directed to be there at the same time. The local Boy Scout executive promised to match each Rotarian with a Scout. Every Rotarian was told to bring with him an ample basket lunch. Arrangements at the other end were made by Nick Farber, secretary of the Rensselaer County Farm Bureau.”

“On the appointed day the Trojans gathered in ample numbers and the driver of each car was given the name of a farmer to whom his “team” had been assigned. One by one the motors speeded away to the Schodack section of the county, twenty miles south. By 2:30 p.m. a score of farmers thereabouts had greeted groups of amateur apple-pickers dressed in their old clothes and prepared to work in earnest.”

“The harvesting was continued for three hours and a half, during which period the Rotarians and the Boy Scout assistants picked more than 150 barrels of apples. Then the tired city folk and their farmer employers motored to the Mitzekill (sic) Reformed Church where the Ladies’ Aid Society had hot coffee awaiting them. The lunch baskets were opened and their contents proved to be ample for all. During the meal Rotary songs were sung and informal speeches made. The keynote of these was the unique opportunity the event had offered to bring the rural and urban citizenship of the county nearer together. On the suggestion of one of the party the hat was passed and a substantial sum was realized for the Church which so generously had provided a place for supper. The Rotary party started for home shortly after eight, voting the affair one of the best ever conducted by the club.”

“The city and the country need to come closer together. Can’t Rotary bring about a better understanding?” A century later, maybe we should all be doing a little apple-picking.



The church as it looks today. From: Wikimedia.org

Text by David Chinery

The Poinsettia

A friend gave me a beautiful poinsettia for Christmas. He mentioned he had seen some white liquid on the plant and he wondered if the plant was sick or infected. I assured him that this was normal; it is latex. Latex is a sap. There are two kinds of sap: crude sap which is the water and nutrients absorbed by the roots and moving primarily up the plant and elaborated sap which consists of water and plant products. The most common plant product is, of course, sugar, but in addition plants may make oils, gums, resins and various other complex chemicals to be added to the elaborated sap.

The poinsettia is native to Mexico. The first American ambassador to Mexico, Joel R. Poinsett, saw the plant and realized that this plant was most attractive right at Christmas time. Today,

America has an official poinsettia day - December 12th, the day that Joel Poinsett died in 1851.

What Joel Poinsett started has resulted in the poinsettia being the best-selling potted plant in the U.S. and Canada.

The attractive part of a poinsettia is its collar of bracts. A bract is a modified leaf. Most bracts are

small and they are associated with a flower cluster or just beneath the flower itself. At the center of the poinsettia bracts there is a cluster of inconspicuous flowers. A poinsettia will keep its beautiful bracts for two to three months.

If you want to keep the poinsettia for Christmas 2017, this is what you should do: cut the stems back to six inches in late February or early March. In July, pinch back lateral shoots. The lateral shoots should not be more than four inches. And this is most important, poinsettias need uninterrupted darkness for twelve to fifteen hours every day from mid-September until early December.



A Taste of the Tropics

by David Chinery

<http://fruitfortheoffice.blogspot.com>

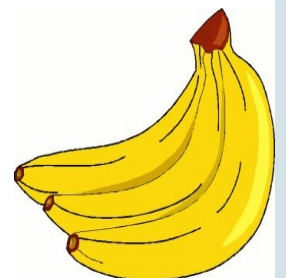


Daily rituals help us make sense of the world, and if they are healthy habits, all the better. So it goes with my morning ritual of eating a banana. I'm so consistent in this that I can tell you with great confidence the number of bananas I consume in one year – exactly 365. This puts me above the intake of the average American, who consumes 27 pounds per annum, and I'm proud to say I'm doing more than my part in the yearly worldwide consumption of over 100 billion bananas. So it was with great interest I lately learned that bananas are now being grown in Iceland.

Iceland? A Master Gardener who visited that snowy island gave me the news. Initially surprising, it soon seemed rather clever. Iceland is rich in geothermal resources, including warm springs, smoking fumaroles and enough naturally hot water to heat homes. Mother Earth is so hot-blooded there that volcanos have swallowed villages in recent memory. Plus, consider the expense of bringing bananas all the way from the tropics to Iceland. The most popular banana variety, 'Yellow Cavendish,' is now threatened by a pathogen called Panama Disease, so growing it in a new environment might circumvent this fungal challenge. That some enterprising horticulturist had harnessed geothermal for a high-dollar greenhouse crop seemed to make sense. Suddenly this crazy idea turned into one of those "why didn't I think of that" moments.

That's where the story turns into something akin to both fake news and a history lesson. I've done a lot of reading (albeit on the internet) and this is how I believe the tale plays out. The Icelandic Horticultural Society, founded in 1885, began to exploit geothermal energy in the 1930's. In many places where warmth was found, greenhouses were constructed, and a wide variety of crops grown. Bananas were first successfully produced in 1941, and a commercial banana business did bear fruit. With high import duties, growers made a profit well into the 1950's, but it wasn't all a cake-walk. Even with supplemental lighting brightening Iceland's dark winters, the bananas grew slowly – at a snail's pace compared to plants in balmier climes. Then, when the government removed the duty on fruit in 1960, the Icelandic bananas couldn't compete economically with a flood of imports, and the fledgling business died on the vine. Crops which mature more quickly, such as tomatoes, cucumbers and cut flowers, took over. This reality contradicts a recent story from the *Christian Science Monitor*, which reported that piles of excess bananas were burned due to overproduction and collapsing prices - a total myth. In truth, commercial greenhouse growers break into a rousing chorus of "Yes, We Have No Bananas" in the Icelandic tongue when asked about it today.

Fragments of the original banana tribe have survived, however, at the Icelandic Agricultural University, where about 7,500 square feet of greenhouse space shelters a grove which feeds students, faculty and staff (see the photo above). These plants, grown for educational purposes, prove that weird horticultural experiments are sometimes totally bananas.



Keeping the long green line growing!

2017! It's going to be unbelievable! A year for celebrating!

2017! Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County's Master Gardener program turns 40! So let's begin the festivities by welcoming our 13 newest members, the graduating Class of 2016: Michele Bager, Mary Butler, Dale Coster, Marge Davey, Roxanne DeJohn, Inge Eley, Jean Howard, Deb Lane, Kim Mann, Mimsy Pye, Becky Raymond, Paul Rucker and Mary Young.



Since the program began, 259 folks from Rensselaer County have completed the rigorous 14 weeks of training and testing. The roots of the program go back to 1972 when Washington State University Cooperative Extension developed the program to meet the public demand for urban horticulture and gardening advice. Since then, the program has spread through the 50 states and eight Canadian provinces. By 2009, there were nearly 95,000 active Master Gardeners who contributed over 5 million hours of community service. And, just for the record, last year the 67 Master Gardeners in Rensselaer County gave 5,430 hours to support the programs educational goals.

March 11, 2016 it's the 18th Spring Garden Day. Once again Tamarac High just outside Troy will be the site of this educational extravaganza that's become a harbinger of the coming spring. Over the past 18 years we've presented over 272 classes on every subject from garden design, to how to deal with deer, herb gardens, lawn care, butterfly gardens and a rainbow of topics gardeners want to/need to/or would like to know about. The instructors are authors, subject experts from academia and fellow gardeners who are willing to share the lessons they learned playing in the dirt.

This year's keynote speaker is Amy Ziffer. Her topic? "The Shady Lady's Guide to Shade Gardening". The program is packed with 12 other offerings ranging from beekeeping to organic vegetable gardening, a maintenance schedule for the perennial garden and the problems caused by invasive species.

But there's more to Spring Garden Day than classes! There are plant sales, book sales, the Pick-A-Prize Auction, door prizes and our famous Soup Kitchen featuring a wide variety of freshly made soups and desserts. And the cost for the day? \$30 per person and that includes lunch. We would love to see you there. Registration is required: call us at (518) 272-4210 or visit <http://ccerensselaer.org/horticulture>

June 29, 2016 the 18th Rensselaer County Garden Tour. This delightful evening tour gives you, the gardener, the opportunity to peek over your neighbor's fences and find out what's going on in their gardens while picking up hints and "how-tos" to try at home. Maybe it's the way to recreate the entrance to a Japanese tea house; or discover a redefinition of a rock garden or wander through a veggie garden so lush and luscious that the produce should be painted by The Olde Masters. Each year we find a number of interesting, intriguing, unique gardens in a neighborhood and invite the curious to take a look. This year we'll be touring in the Frear Park area. We've discovered some unique gardens around this neighborhood so come take a look. It's a self-guided tour and is \$10 per person. Over the years participants have found this a lovely, informative way to spend a summer evening. For more information, call 272-4210.

And that's just the start! The Master Gardeners will continue helping our neighbors gardens grow with an ongoing series of educational offerings both at the State Street office in Troy and the Demonstration Garden at the Robert C. Parker School in (Wynantskill) as well as at The Flower and Garden Show at HVCC in March.

What to do in JANUARY & FEBRUARY?

* With the holiday hustle and bustle over, it is a good time to stay inside with the seed catalogs that are starting to arrive. Read them with caution. The more grandiose the description, the more you should be wary. Know what hardiness zone we are in and look for a statement with that information in the description. Any catalog lacking this information or any catalog that doesn't give the botanical (scientific) name must be read with care. Generally speaking, we are in USDA Hardiness Zone 5, but you can check your own backyard by visiting

<http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>



* Sterilize questionable potting media by heating it in the oven at 180 degrees for 25 minutes before using for seed starting. Sterilize used pots and flats by soaking in one part bleach to nine parts water for ten minutes before using for seed starting. Make sure that grow lights, heating mats, and other electrical seed starting equipment is safe to use and ready to operate.

* Look over your records of gardening from the past year. Those of you who kept calendars and journals will find this a nice easy task. The rest of us will benefit from a memory and flipping through the old calendar to jar our memories. Remind yourself of the mistakes first and then decide on alternatives, whether using different plants or different materials. Look closely at the successes and figure out what the causes were. Fine tune your seed and plant orders accordingly, and adjust your methods to correct errors and increase production.

* Liven up the indoors with new house plants. Give houseplants a few minutes attention. Inspect for insects, disease, drought and cold damage. They are at their lowest level of support right now, since very short days give very little sustenance. Don't try feeding and extra watering to help an ailing plant, since this usually causes more harm than good if done much before the end of February. Do check houseplants for signs of mealybugs, spider mites and other insect pests. Keep them as comfortable and healthy as you can, and they will reward you with a burst of growth in another six weeks or so.

* Make a list of the perennial plants which need moving or dividing in the spring. Include a list of where you will move them or to whom you can give them.

* In February, there will be some beautiful weather. Go outdoors and get some fresh air and take a good look around. Trees can be inventoried and inspected with no leaves cluttering the view. This is a good time to look for disease such as black knot on cherry and plum trees. You can pinpoint the branches that need to be pruned.

* The days are getting appreciably longer. Share your favorite gardening book with a friend. Enjoy some leisurely reading of garden books or watch some garden videos, because very soon, it will be spring and we will be busy, busy, busy!

“A disappointed politician is very apt to take refuge in a garden.”

Alexander Hamilton

(Founding Father, American Statesman 1757-1804)



Gardening Questions?

Call The Master Gardeners!



In Albany County: Call 765-3514 weekdays from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM and ask to speak to a Master Gardener. You can also email your questions by visiting their website at www.ccealbany.com

In Schenectady County: Call 372-1622 Monday and Thursdays from 9:00 AM to Noon, follow the prompt to speak to a Master Gardener and press #1. You can also email your questions by visiting their website at <http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/schenectady/>

In Rensselaer County: Call 272-4210 from 9:00 AM to Noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays and ask to speak to a Master Gardener. You can also email your questions to Dhc3@cornell.edu

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Spring Garden Day

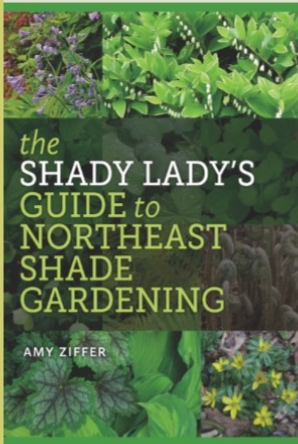
Saturday, March 11th, 2017
9:45 am to 3:30 pm
Tamarac/Brunswick High School
Troy, New York

Special Keynote Speaker

Shade Revealed

How to
Garden
Successfully
in Low Light
(Really!)

By Amy Ziffer



Amy Ziffer has been assisting clients in western Connecticut with their gardening needs since 1998. Her nickname is "The Shady Lady" because her business name is A Shady Lady Garden Design (but, she tells us, she is only nominally shady). Her work actually has a much broader scope than shade gardening. Amy has designed or cared for gardens in both shade and sun, from foundation plantings to flower borders to vegetable gardens, and even the occasional pond. The one thing they all have in common is their location in the Northeast (USDA Zone 5).

Amy grew up gardening and trained as a Master Gardener in Los Angeles, California. She spent a year in the U.K. visiting a wide variety of gardens and has been a photographer for over two decades, maintaining a large and constantly growing collection of plant and garden images. Amy worked as a staff editor at *Fine Gardening* magazine and has made contributions to Reader's Digest books as well as eclectic assortment of publications including *Yankee*, *Valley*, *Indoors & Out*, *Crisis*, *Camera & Darkroom*, and *Delta Sky*. In 2014 her first gardening book, *The Shady Lady's Guide to Northeast Shade Gardening*, was published by the University Press of New England (see the image above). More about Amy Ziffer can be found at www.amyziffer.com



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-Choose classes from 10
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-Delicious lunch provided
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-Shop for bargains at the
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-Pick-A-Prize Auction, with
something for everyone

-Fabulous door prizes!

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Spring Garden Day

For a Spring Garden Day brochure, with a complete listing of classes and a registration form, visit our website at:

<http://ccerensselaer.org/horticulture>

Or email us at dhc3@cornell.edu

Or call us at (518) 272-4210

See you there!

