Solitary pollinators are in your yard. They don’t live in hives with thousands of workers. They work alone in a non-aggressive manner. Often unnoticed, they get the job done not only pollinating but, in some cases, helping control pests in the garden. This solitary pollinator, feeding on a summer sweet bush (*Clethra*) is a mason wasp, *Monobia quadridens* (Photo 1). It has an otherworldly appearance in comparison with the everyday honeybee. It is beautiful to watch its gliding flight from flower to flower. The unusual appearance may suggest aggression and send the gardener looking for the spray can of hornet killer. Unfortunately, we are more likely to accidently kill this unique creature with mulch rather than a pesticide. This type of pollinator needs some bare ground to make its home and raise the next generation.

At a public garden where I worked there was a gravelly pathway to the rose garden. The pathway was home to a similar type insect, the cicada killer wasp (*Sphecius speciosus*). Cicadas found it aggressive, however, the cicada killer wasps had little interest in gardeners. They made tunnels in the gravelly path where they brought captured cicadas to feed their young. Garden management decided to upgrade the gravel path to a flagstone walkway. That was the end of the cicada killer wasps. They had lived there for several years. Similar results occur when we cover every inch of bare soil with many inches of mulch. 

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Mulch. Adult cicada killers feed on nectar and tree sap but collect cicadas to feed their young. Photo 2 shows a cicada killer wasp preparing to pick up and fly its catch back to the home tunnel.

The great black wasp, *Sphex pensylvanicus*, is another solitary pollinator rarely seen in the garden. The summer of 2018 was a good season for seeing these unusual creatures. They are fascinating to watch as they slowly move around the flower garden looking for the next source of nectar. They pay no attention to you and hopefully you are not reaching for a tennis racket to do them harm.

Entomologists state that great black wasps are not aggressive because they have no colony to protect. They indicate that you may have great black wasps in your yard because of an influx of grasshoppers and katydids. Another source, fearful of this insect, suggests eliminating all bare soil in the home environment. This would be an attempt to destroy suitable habitat for reproduction. Unless your yard is overrun with this solitary bee there is no reason to destroy its’ place in the environment.

Photo 3 shows a great black wasp feeding on nectar from summersweet flowers. Like other members of the digger wasp family, they raise their young in underground burrows. They hunt crickets or katydids to place in the burrow to feed their larva emerging from eggs laid there.

Mulch with moderation and you may see some of these unusual solitary pollinators in your garden from mid to late summer. Some bare ground around pathways may be all they need.

_A New Cornell Resource:_

“*A Pesticide Decision-Making Guide To Protect Pollinators in Landscape, Ornamental and Turf Management*”

**VISIT:**

[https://pollinator.cals.cornell.edu/resources/grower-resources/](https://pollinator.cals.cornell.edu/resources/grower-resources/)
There is interesting news in the world of white grubs, those larvae of scarab beetles which like to eat plant roots. Hereabouts, we see grubs of Japanese beetles, European chafers, Oriental beetles and their kin feasting on the roots of lawn grasses. While a few grubs per square foot don’t significantly damage a healthy lawn, high numbers can kill the grass and also attract birds, skunks, raccoons and other critters who dig up these tasty snacks. For decades, folks with lawns nice enough to care about have used insecticides to protect their turf, with alternatives, such as beneficial nematodes, being tricky and costly. Recently, a new “good guy” bacteria called *Bacillus thuringiensis* variety *galleriae*, which I’ll call Btg, has come on the lawn care scene to offer a new way to give grubs the rub.

Unlike the extra-terrestrial “E.T.,” the alien botanist, gardeners know that Bt originates as a naturally occurring, insect-killing bacteria here on earth. Bt comes in many forms and kills many types of insect pests, and can therefore be deployed to protect a broad range of plant species. It is the most widely used type of what we call microbial pesticides. Some Bts control moth larvae which attack cabbage, broccoli and other brassica-type vegetable plants, whereas others are specific for the larvae of flies and mosquitoes, and others for beetles. The target insect species are determined by whether the particular Bt produces a protein that can bind to a larval gut receptor, thereby causing the insect to starve to death. Not a happy end, but effective.

Microbial insecticides such as Bt are applied as sprays, dusts or granules just as conventional pesticides are, and can generally be used by “organic” growers as well as anyone else. Bt works more slowly than many chemical pesticides. For example, when a caterpillar ingests Bt, it will continue feeding until the Bt toxin is activated in its gut and remains alive on the plant for a few days. Because Bt does not readily reproduce and persist in the environment, it must be applied at regular intervals.

So how good is Btg, the version useful for grubs in lawns? Tests at The Ohio State University have indicated that it has controlled 70%, and sometimes more, of the grubs in their trials. Most of the data I have seen are for Japanese beetles, but a product called Grubgone, which contains the active ingredient Btg, claims control of European chafer and Oriental beetle grubs as well on its label. The best time to apply Btg is mid-August, when adult female beetles are busy laying eggs in the soil and young grubs are hatching. Since Btg is specific to scarab beetles, it should pose no problem to pollinators like honeybees and butterflies. I hope to put out a small trial here in Rensselaer County this August and learn what I can. Since this is a new product, I’m sure we’ll be able to fine-tune its usefulness as time goes by. Btg, welcome home!
This is just a glimpse of some of the projected trends for 2019.

The "Garden Trends Report for 2019" shares its predictions for 2019. Moon phase gardening will see a revival. The age old tradition states that the phase of the moon affects plant growth, so gardeners may again be turning to the moon to determine the best time to plant, prune and harvest. Plant perennials, flowering bulbs, and vegetables during a waning moon, which is the day after a full moon. During a waxing moon, which is the day after a new moon, gardens should be planted for annuals, and cover crops planted as advised by the almanac or the internet.

According to the "Geek Report", techno-trends will emerge this year. How do robotic lawn mowers and weedwackers powered by solar energy sound? Drones will also play a roll by helping arborists in pruning trees. What about the advent of robotic bees? Robotic metallic bees will supplement our natural pollinators. It is reported that Walmart has already filed for six drone patents that will pollinate plants and crops, aid in pest identification, and spray pesticides in identified areas.

According to "Garden Research," look for increased advertising and sales of houseplants, as they have found that one third of all houseplants were purchased by Millennials in the past year. It was noted that most Millennials spend 22 hours per day inside. They represent a whole new generation of folks that are collecting houseplants, nurturing them and sharing pictures of their treasures on-line with like fellows. They are partial to exotic style indoor plants that make a statement. Look forward to more gardening apps as the Gen-Zero generation prefers them as opposed to "how-to" books. They will also be the next generation of environmentalists promoting eco-friendly insect remedies, and supporting the use of native plants and natural insect biocontrol. These earth guardians have been involved in collegiate plant initiatives and the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge. It is also expected that the $1.9 million partnership with Microsoft and Future Farmers of America will reach over 650,000 new environmentalist, ages 12 to 21 years old this year.

"Country Living" projects the continuation of gardening for climate change with emphasis on planting the right plant for the right condition. Rain barrels and other collection devices will be urged to collect existing water and then allow for gentle, prudent soil disbursement to deflect unnecessary waste of our precious water supply. These efforts will be continued through planting of drought tolerant plants.

Expect to see the old become new again with the use of recycled and reclaimed materials popping up in the garden. Things like tiles, charred timbers, and old rough shutters used vertically will be appearing in the garden landscape. Bold plants and clashing colors like pom-pom dahlias will be a trend. This emphasis on bright and bold colors carries over into the garden border.

Garden writer Margaret Roach suggests we replace some lawn with mini meadows and incorporate pollinator communities. These new small to medium meadows would consist of wild flowers and perennials along with sound-proofing hedge barriers.
A friend visited me in 1979. As she arrived, I was digging up some soil next to the chicken coop. She asked me what I was doing and I told her I was putting in an erb garden. She told me, “No, you are putting in a herb garden!” I asked her to explain. Apparently there is a group of people who meet at designated times to decide the correct pronunciation of Carribean/Carribean, and duodeen /duodenum and others. In 1979 they had decided that the “h” should be pronounced in herb. I accepted her explanation and told her that from that day on I would always, regardless of any official decision, pronounce the h. As it turned out, I am grateful to her and glad about my decision. The h is pronounced in herbivore, herbicide, herbaceous, etc. As a matter of fact the only herb-related words that Americans express with a silent h are herb and herbal. Apparently in Latin the word was herba and the h was pronounced. The h is also pronounced in Britain. So, when and why was the h dropped in America? As the Romans spread, herba changed. By the 13 hundreds most French referred to a herb as erbe, but French chefs called these plants airs. The French, known for their culinary skills, were soon followed by both English-speaking people in dropping the h. In the 18 hundreds, the British decided to go back to the old Roman custom and pronounce the h, but Americans continue to retain the silent h.

For me, personally, I will continue to pronounce the h in any word of the herb family. That brings me to another topic that has always bothered me - historic! Why do most educated people say an historic? For example, an historic event occurred in 1776. The rule is that one uses “a” if the ensuing word begins with a consonant sound and one uses “an” if the ensuing word begins with a vowel sound. Well, the h in historic is pronounced, so it seems to me it should be a historic. Examples of correct usage of “a” and “an” include “It is an honor to own a horse.” One more point of grammar: use “a” if the ensuing word starts with a consonant sound even though it may begin with a vowel. As an example, “He decided to join a union.” (y sound).

One final thought about our language, and it is not a kind thought: English is difficult! My middle child had trouble spelling when she was growing up. I always told her to use a dictionary and look it up. I realized the foolishness of my advice when I thought about sew (use a needle and thread), so, and sow (plant seeds). It gets even worse when one realizes that the same words, spelled exactly alike, may be pronounced differently: “I read most of the paper this morning, and I will read the rest of it this evening.” So, my concluding question is “How do other languages compare to English?”
Even non-plant people know forsythia. In these parts, it is the classic harbinger of spring, with its brassy yellow blossoms appearing along with the red-winged blackbirds, chorusing frogs and Florida snowbirds. But there is another woody plant, with just as much yellow appeal, which pops even before forsythia. It is the cornelian cherry dogwood.

You are forgiven if you’ve never heard of this dogwood, which botanically goes by the name *Cornus mas*. While many know the flowering dogwood, and some have heard of the kousa and redbuds, cornelian cherry is not a standby of the nursery industry and therefore doesn’t often show up in garden centers. It does have a lot going for it, most notably its ultra-early floral display when it cloaks itself in tiny blooms. This happens reliably each year, and while it might not compete with the showiest of magnolias or cherries, it beats them all to the punch, when we most desperately need some eye-candy. Ever see a magnificent magnolia hit by frost? That brown, mushy disaster is less likely to happen with a cornelian cherry, since the blossoms are resistant to temperatures down to 18 F.

Usually grown as a small, rounded tree, perhaps reaching 15 to 20 feet, *C. mas* in full bloom looks especially good in front of a red-brick building, and is sometimes deployed this way in urban landscapes and college campuses. Trees develop gray-brown to deep brown exfoliating bark, which provides character, and tend to be more adaptable than most other dogwoods as to sun exposure and soil. It also exceeds its kin in being quite insect and disease resistant. Cultivated examples well over 100 years old are known, which is positively ancient in the small tree world.

The last characteristic I’ll describe, fruit production, can be looked at in at least two ways. At Rutgers, we were taught that the large, bright red fruits, often borne in great abundance, were a nuisance. Don’t plant a cornelian cherry dogwood near a walkway or building entrance, it was said, because everyone will be traipsing through the mess on the sidewalk and dragging it indoors. Certainly true. There is much more at hand than messy feet, however. *Cornus mas* is native to eastern Europe and western Asia, and has been part of the regional people’s diet for some 7,000 years. Initially quite tart, the fruits reportedly take on a sweeter, more plum-like flavor as they fully ripen, making them useful for fresh eating as well as for preserves, wine, pies and baked goods. Unfortunately, I’ve never sampled one, so I’m no help here, but I pledge to nibble on some in the future.

Rich in a variety of vitamins and minerals, including the always-important “C,” the fruits also contain significant levels of calcium pectate fiber, which can positively impact cholesterol levels, and anthocyanin, an anti-oxidant. Large pits, difficult to remove from the fruits, and a prolonged period of ripening are challenges to wide-scale production, but cornelian cherry might just be a super-food of the future.
What to do in March

The days are getting considerably longer and warmer, even though we may experience an early spring frost. Begin your gardening by walking outdoors around your garden and plantings and note winter damage to lawn, plantings and trees.

Damage to lawns by plowing or areas saturated by moisture can be repaired now depending on soil warmth. Do, however, be sure the ground is not frozen when you do repair work. Scoop up a handful of soil, if it falls apart the soil is dry enough to begin work. If the soil is holds together, or is saturated, wait. Do NOT dig or turn over soil in your garden until it is dry. You could destroy the soil structure.

Edge gardens beds when ground thaws.

This is the time to remove dead and damaged wood and plantings. Also, look for diseased limbs and plant parts for removal by selective cutting.

Sharpen and oil your cutting tools.

Early March, when shrubs and perennials are dormant, is the best and perhaps only time to prune many ornamental shrubs and perennials. For example, junipers may be aggressively pruned while dormant to remove dead limbs and also shape the remaining branches for new growth. Crabapple trees should be conservatively pruned to remove shoots, crossing or rubbing branches, and inward growth to open up the tree canopy for glorious spring blooming. Avoid over-pruning. Pruning crabapple trees should be annually planned so not more than 25% - and probably much less – of growth is removed by pruning.

Cut branches of crabapple, pussy willow and forsythia can be brought inside to “force” early blooming for decorative use.

Prune oak trees in March. Later pruning, in April through June, attracts beetles to open wounds and can be a portal to the oak wilt organism. This disease, newly detected in the Capital District, may cause oaks to wilt in June and die entirely within three weeks. Report suspected oak wilt trees to your local Cooperative Extension Office.

Remove protective burlap wraps on any plants by second half of March.

Late March: Roses and old-wood clematis are also best pruned now to remove damaged canes, and to promote growth from healthy wood. Look for buds on clematis and prune dead vines/wood back to buds. Buds will grow into new vines to train and blossom. In the northeast, most clematis varieties bloom from new growth, but do check your variety for the best time to prune.

Transplant shrubs and trees before they leaf out.

Fertilize spring bulbs when flower stalks start to emerge from among the leaves.
Our photos this month come from Rensselaer County Master Gardener Pat Thorne. Pat writes, “This past summer, while returning from Georgia, my husband and I stopped at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, located in Richmond, Virginia, and considered one of the top 10 public gardens in America. The garden has 50 acres of themed gardens, including a Conservatory, a Children's Garden and a Butterfly House. When we visited, there was a special exhibition of "Origami in the Garden." World renowned artists Jennifer and Kevin Box, Tim Armijo, Te Jui Fu, Beth Johnson, Micheal G. LaFosse and Robert Lang contributed to the 21 metal sculptures tucked into the beautiful garden settings. Enjoy this brief glimpse.”
Peat Moss - This is a natural organic product and not to be confused with products labeled "sphagnum moss." Peat is the submerged and long dead remains of sphagnum moss along with anything else that might have died and sunk with the moss into the bog. Peat moss frequently serves as the organic component of economical planting mixtures and is also a practical way to add organic material quickly to garden soils. Being organic, it will continue to decompose in your garden over several years and will eventually need to be replaced. Because it can absorb and hold a lot of water, peat can also help to keep sandy soils from drying out. However, it is acidic; and if you use it extensively in your gardens, you should monitor soil pH and occasionally amend the soil with a little lime.

Perlite - This is also natural product. As a material, it is an amorphous volcanic glass, i.e. a non-crystalline material and, therefore, not considered to be a mineral. Perlite derives from obsidian, a product of rapidly cooling felsic lava that contains high amounts of both silica and entrapped water. The perlite found in soil mixes has been crushed and then heated driving off the water. The fragments expand like popcorn kernels during the heating process. In soil mixes these expanded fragments can reabsorb water and, because of their irregular shape, also allow for air circulation. Its industrial applications include use in plasters, insulation, filtration and as a stabilizer for explosives.
Sphagnum Moss - This is another natural organic product, but it is derived from the harvesting of living sphagnum mosses. Unlike its dead remains, i.e. peat, it is chemically neutral despite growing in an acidic environment that it has helped create. Being chemically neutral means that you do not have to worry about it acidifying your garden soil; however, it is a lot more expensive than peat. Like peat, sphagnum moss also retains water well and is used especially in seed starting mixes and in container gardening. Orchid growers and growers of carnivorous plants love sphagnum moss too because it provides the natural soil environment that their pets need.

N.B. Sometimes the word "sphagnum" appears on packaged soil products, but if the labeling does not explicitly state "sphagnum moss," it is probably something else, frequently peat.

Vermiculite - This is also a natural product. As a material, it is a hydrous phyllosilicate mineral, i.e. it formed into layered sheets with a definite crystalline structure (think mica) resulting from the interaction of felsic and mafic rocks. Unlike perlite, vermiculite contains relatively high amounts of magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, some calcium and relatively low amounts of silica. Vermiculite is also heated to drive off its entrapped water and to "exfoliate" (i.e. separate) its layers. Like peat and perlite, as a soil amendment, vermiculite can retain water, but the presence of the other elements both serve as buffers against changes in soil pH and as sources for some plant nutrients. In addition to its horticultural uses, vermiculite has many industrial and construction applications including those of insulation, fire retardant and waste water filtration.

Happy mixing or spreading...

Adopted from a March 18, 2018 post of the Rensselaer County Vegetable Blog by Irv Stephens, Rensselaer County Master Gardener. You can visit the Blog at: https://rensselaercountyvegetable.blogspot.com/
“The plants you tend become the companions that need you, they mitigate the early evening hours, surely the loneliest time of day; they welcome your return after an absence.”

Helen Van Pelt Wilson (1901—2003, American author)

Gardening Questions?

Call The Master Gardeners!

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

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

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

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“Root Concerns: Notes from the underground” is a shared publication of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer, Albany and Schenectady Counties. It is published by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County.

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Garden Tools: Choosing and Using

Discover the tools you need to garden well, where to get them and how to use them. Examples of tools, good and bad, will be available, and a Weed Bandit™ will be raffled off.

Saturday, April 13, 2019
10:30 am – Noon

Cornell Cooperative Extension Albany County
24 Martin Road, Voorheesville

$5.00 Registration Fee

For more information, please contact:
Carole Henry @ 518-765-3516/ch878@cornell.edu

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Garden Tools: Choosing and Using

-Registration-

Fill out this form and mail with check for $5.00 payable to CCE Albany to:
Carole Henry, Cornell Cooperative Extension Albany County, 24 Martin Road, Voorheesville, NY 12186

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# Attending  Cost
___ Don’t Get Ticked?............................ FREE
___ Children’s Terrarium Class.................... $20 ea.
___ Native Plants.................................. $25 ea.
___ Container Herb Garden....................... $20 ea.
___ Introduction to Horticulture............... $595
___ Little Diggers.................................. $80 per child
___ Harvest Share Full............................ $360
___ Harvest Share Half............................ $200

Total Remittance $ ___________________________

Please make checks payable to CCE,SC
and Mail to:
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107 Nott Terrace, Suite 301
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The Sustainable Living Center is located next to the tennis courts in Central Park, Schenectady, NY

The address is:
180 Pt. Arthur Chaimes Lane
(formerly 180 Courtside Lane)

All classes will be held at the Sustainable Living Center, unless otherwise noted

Visit our website: www.cceschenectady.org

Individuals with special needs requiring accommodations should contact our office prior to the event at 518-372-1622 ext 259

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HARVEST SHARE 2019

Roots & Wisdom offers a unique vegetable-buying opportunity to the local community – HARVEST SHARE – a weekly program starting in June and continuing through September. Harvest Share brings together local consumers and a youth agriculture initiative.

Enjoy the bounty of the garden, including eggplant, tomatoes, summer squash, cucumbers, peppers, bunching onions, garlic, salad mix, different herbs, flower bouquets and more. Grown and processed by our youth participants naturally without any chemicals. All proceeds go back to support the program.

- Full share $360 • Half Share $200

PICK-UP OPTIONS:
more information to follow

Master Gardener Plant Sale
Friday, May 17 • 3 pm - 7 pm
Saturday, May 18 • 10 am - 2 pm

Organically grown tomato and vegetable plants including heirloom and disease-resistant varieties •
- Herbs & Herb Containers • Perennial Plant Divisions •
- Native pollinator plants • Annuals •
- Miniature/Fairy Garden Containers • Raffle Baskets •
- Garden Theme Tag/Book Sale •
- Soil Testing, $5.00 donation • Kids Garden activities •
- “Ask the Master Gardener” information table •
**Spring 2019 Classes**

**Introduction to Horticulture**  
**Wednesdays, February 27 - May 15**  
**10-11:30 am**

This certificate program is offered in conjunction with Schenectady ARC and Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County. It is appropriate for diverse populations, including senior citizens and individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities who are interested in hands-on training in the horticulture field and who would like to obtain employment in a garden center, farm stand or greenhouse. Topics include basic botany, care of annuals, perennials and vegetable crops, and weed identifications. Participants will gain experience in customer service, working and learning in a greenhouse, as well as a variety of outdoor garden settings. Classes will be held at the Sustainable Living Center at Central Park in Schenectady and the Schenectady ARC’s Maple Ridge Horticulture Center in Rotterdam.

For more information or to sign-up, please contact Maria C. Kotary at (518) 595-1101 x4  
— or to register —http://sunysccc.edu/About-Us/Workforce-Development-and-Community-Education/WFD-CE-Course-Registration

Fee $595.00

**Don’t Get Ticked NY**  
**April 4, 6:00 - 7:30 pm**

Avoiding Lyme and other tick-borne diseases requires avoiding a tick bite! Join Joellen Lampman as she talks about the different ticks in our area and their biology, the diseases they carry, and how to protect yourself and others from being bitten. Free tick removal kits will be offered to attendees willing to participate in a short survey. Free! Space is limited, please register by March 28.

**February Break Week**  
**Kids Terrarium Class**  
**February 21, 10 am – 12 pm**

During this class, students will design their own terrarium to take home, accompanied by fun and engaging experiments on soil pH and permeability. This class will raise your child’s self-awareness of environmental issues while furthering their understanding of nature. Ages 8 and up. $20 per child. Please register with payment by February 14. Drop off welcome!

**Container Herb Gardening**  
**May 9, 6:00 - 7:30 pm**

This class will cover all the techniques necessary to create and maintain your beautiful container garden, such as plant selection and planting tips, design considerations, watering and fertilizing. Hanging baskets and placement of your container for greatest impact will also be covered. After the presentation participants will create their own container garden to take home. A selection of veggies and herbs will be available. $20.00 per person. Please register with payment by May 2.

**Little Diggers**  
**Wednesdays, May 29 – June 26**  
**Morning Session 10:00 –11:15 am**  
**Afternoon Session 12:30 – 1:45 pm**

Preschoolers (age 3-5) will discover the wonders of gardening and nature through a series of hands-on educational programs. Each themed class introduces children to gardening including planting and tending the garden; harvesting and tasting, discovering insects in the garden such as ladybugs and butterflies, and much more! Cost is $80.00 per child. Please register with payment by May 15. Limited need-based scholarships are available. If your child (or you) receives assistance or is eligible for special programs, he/she can be considered for a scholarship to the 2019 Little Diggers program.