Do my coleus, enjoying an 80 degree October day, know they are actually sitting on death row? The weather-people say cooler temperatures are imminent, and even if we have another non-winter here, it will soon be too cold for coleus. A true tropical, the year-round residency of a tender coleus plant is confined to USDA Hardiness Zone 11, which is some pretty scarce real estate. I could take some cuttings and try to keep them alive on a windowsill. I am so enamored of their lovely leaves, perhaps I will.

With foliage in all of nature's colors except true blue, and leaf shapes ranging from thin and lacy to flapping elephant ears, coleus has a lot to offer the gardener who wants more than flowers. I became a coleus-ophile in the fourth grade. Our teacher, Miss Perna, had a classroom full of them, and my buddy Allen and I volunteered for the tending. This altruism wasn't inspired by a love of plants, but rather our schoolboy crushes on our mentor. When classes wound down in June, Miss Perna announced she was giving up teaching, getting married and moving to Cincinnati. How could she? Allen and I got to split up the coleus collec-
tion as a consolation prize.

With a kaleidoscope of colors to choose from, every coleus can be your favorite. This summer, I have a giant specimen with deepest purple leaves edged in green growing in my purple tire planter. A large affair with pink, green and white leaves hides the propane tank nicely. Perhaps the most exotic one sports finely-cut foliage of gold and maroon. Just a few years ago, plants in these loud regions of the color spectrum were considered crass and denigrated by garden experts, who decreed that only pink, blue, white and silver were to be used by the well-informed. As a result, the popularity of coleus in the 80’s tanked. Luckily, those conservative opinions have fallen away, and riotous, anything-goes color is now appreciated. The cry of the coleus today is “let the good times grow!”

The happy coleus came about in part due to a rather difficult man. Carl Ludwig Blume, a horticulturist of German extraction, was sent to Java from the Netherlands in 1819. In addition to studying the blooms, Blume also was the “inspector of vaccinations” and was tasked with protecting folks from cholera, typhoid, and the like. While plant collecting, he came across coleus, which was transported back to Europe and eventually became a hit in the gaudy gardens of the Victorians. By some accounts at least, Blume was autocratic, dominant, and generally antagonistic to his peers and potential friends. At least one historian today believes that Blume might have just been seeking to keep his employer, the Leiden Herbarium, number one in the uber-competitive world of nineteenth century botany. In any case, Blume would be peeved if he found out that coleus, once named in his honor as Coleus Blumei, is nowadays called by the charmless binomial Plectranthus scutellaroides.
To be, or not to be water-soluble (hydrophilic) is the question.

Last month I wrote about the colors of autumn and I had some doubts about my article. I checked my doubts and all the books I checked said that the red pigments are water-soluble. I thought about beets and red cabbage and had no doubt that the anthocyanins are indeed water-soluble. I kept having a nagging thought, however, that red maple leaves would not turn the water red. I actually gathered some red maple leaves and put them in water. The water did not turn red! Then I decided to boil them. After all, you boil beets and cabbage to get a significant amount of the pigment out. Very little color came out. So I wrote the article last month according to the books - anthocyanins are water-soluble.

I still had my nagging thoughts and I asked one of my former colleagues what she thought about red maple leaves having hydrophilic pigments. She said maybe the waxy coating on leaves prevented them from losing their red color. Well, boiling the leaves should have destroyed the wax. Also, I make applesauce from apples with their waxy peels on.

What I know for sure is that anthoerythrins (the red form of anthocyanins) are hydrophilic in apple peels (hence my pink applesauce) and various other plants. What I don’t know is why the red maple leaves are so tenacious about keeping their anthoerythrins.

On to a second thought about red pigments. As I mentioned last month, visible light consists of electromagnetic radiation of various wavelengths. The longest wavelength is expressed as red and the shortest wavelength is violet. Green, the principal pigment in plants, is right in the middle of the spectrum, so green pigments absorb light from both ends of the spectrum. A practical usage of this can be noted when one looks at grow lights. The light emitted by them is more lilac than the light emitted by normal neon lights. Another observation illustrates even more convincingly the role of red pigments. The tropical rainforest has such a dense population of plants that very little light reaches the floor of the tropical rainforest. Only plants that survive with little light, such as Rex begonias, are found on the floor of the tropical rainforest. If you are a lover of Rex begonias, you are aware that these plants have large leaves and the undersides of most leaves are red. For example, the beefsteak begonia was named beefsteak because the underside of each leaf looks like a bloody red beefsteak. The red pigment reflects the red color and this allows the chlorophyll to absorb the long red wavelengths to be used in photosynthesis.

With all the red foliage in autumn, shouldn’t that then enhance photosynthesis? Ah, but we must remember that it’s chlorophyll that performs photosynthesis, and as chlorophyll declines, so does photosynthesis.
I’m proud of myself: I’ve planted my garlic. It may not seem like much, but in some years the craziness of putting the garden to bed, raking leaves and just being alive in general trumps getting garlic in the ground. This year, things fell into place nicely. A friend gave me dozens of beautiful bulbs of a porcelain hardneck-type garlic to plant. I waited for a break in late October’s rain, turned over the soil, added compost, and got the cloves planted. While I should mulch the whole affair and I’m waiting for critters to move in and destroy things, so far, so good.

I’m not the only grower going for garlic. According to my Extension colleagues in the Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Program who work with vegetable farmers, “garlic production has increased significantly in New York over the last few decades, and garlic is now considered to be an important niche crop. In 1992, only 11 acres of garlic were reported in New York, but by 1997 the number grew to 153 acres and by 2007 it again doubled to 306 acres. Garlic is currently estimated to be a $20 million dollar crop. New York is the fifth largest garlic producing state in the country, and ten percent of all New York vegetable farms report growing garlic. That is a higher percentage of growers than for broccoli, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, or onions.” Clearly, growing garlic is no small potatoes.

Historically, garlic has been used to improve health, increase strength before battle, and ward off everything from the devil to the evil eye, making it especially useful in our modern world. Its cultivation is relatively simple. A well-drained soil, such as in a raised bed where other onion-family members haven’t been raised in the last 3 years, is ideal. Bulbs are broken apart at planting time, with the papery husks kept on the individual cloves. These cloves are planted tip up, 2 inches deep and 4 to 6 inches apart in rows 15 to 24 inches apart, with mulch applied on top. Roots will begin to grow on the cloves even though there may be no top growth. Most of the mulch can be removed in the spring, with only a modest amount left to thwart the weeds. The cloves then grow into bulbs, which are harvested in high summer.

The source of the cloves you plant is important. According the Eastern New York, “varieties of garlic grown in New York tend to be different from those you will find in the grocery store. New York is known for excellent hardneck garlic, which has a hard stalk running through the center of the bulb. The flavor of our hardneck garlic is often considered to be stronger and more unique than the flavor of softneck varieties found in the grocery store and grown primarily on the West Coast or in China.”

Text by David Chinery
What to do in November/December

Mother Nature threw us a curve ball with an early snowfall on November 15. Hopefully, you’ve already accomplished most of your outdoor jobs and have your garden buttoned down for the season!

You might still have time in November to plant garlic and summer bulbs if the snow clears and the ground is unfrozen. Whether this will happen is anyone’s guess.

Rake or mow leaves and add to garden beds as mulch to protect plants overwinter, if weather allows.

Drain and store hoses. Clean, sharpen, and store tools.

Protect your roses by mounding soil around the crown and covering the bud union.

Now’s the time to start forcing your holiday blooms: paper whites, amaryllis, hyacinth, etc.

Cut sprigs of holly and evergreens for wreaths, and holiday decorations.

Protect Trees and Shrubs from Winter Burn: Winter burn of evergreen trees and shrubs results from exposure to drying winds and afternoon sun. The best planting sites would be locations that reduce winter wind and sun exposure from the west and south. To prepare the tree for winter add loose mulch about 3 inches in depth from the outermost drip line to about 3 inches from the trunk. Continue watering until the soil freezes adding about 2 inch of water per week for new plantings and 1 inch for established plants. To prevent desiccation from winter winds and afternoon sun protect the plant with burlap. Install four to five stakes approximately two feet from the drip lines of plants especially on the south and west sides (or any side exposed to wind) and wrap the burlap around the stakes to create “fenced” barriers. Leave the top open.

Give thanks for the joys and harvest of the garden. Share your bounty and enjoy the holidays!

Text by Rensselaer County Master Gardeners Becky Raymond and Kim Mann
I'll let you in on a little secret: garden writers dread the winter. How many stories can one write about poinsettias? Trying to make the winter chore list—sharpen your mower blade, count your seed packets—sound scintillating is beyond even a Steven King or a Dan Brown, no less those of us toiling in the garden literature trenches. But autumn presents a feast of story ideas, not the least of which is Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*).

A bicycle ride through Rensselaer and Columbia counties this autumn piqued my interest in this native vine. On South Schodack Road it hangs low overhead. Along Duck Pond Road it carpets the forest floor. And at a large building in Valatie, Virginia creeper is sidling up the walls, soon to make the top floor. Although it clings to many tree trunks, it seems to strangle few, unlike the rampant Chinese bittersweet or wild American grape, both of which can smother a mighty oak or elm.

Outstanding fall color is what makes this vine vivid. In early fall when many trees and shrubs are still summer green, this creeper colors early. In one spot it shines scarlet red, in another dark burgundy. In deepest shade it often turns a pinky-yellow. By the time the last oaks color, Virginia creeper will be naked and asleep.

But that’s the extent of this plant’s virtues, you exhort. Virginia creeper doesn’t have the classy good looks of climbing hydrangea. True, I admit. Nor does it offer the colorful floral display of a clematis or honeysuckle, you opine. True again, I concede. But it is probably the best vine for deep shade, tough enough to succeed in any soil, and cheap—just go dig some up. It can quickly hide an unsightly shed or Uncle Ted’s rusting Chevy with its neat green foliage, in leaflets of five, as it scampers about using tiny holdfasts which it cements to any surface.

Virginia’s most serious handicap to garden credibility is its botanical doppelgänger, poison ivy. A superficial glance often has even those with some plant savvy doing a double take, but further inspection reveals serious differences. Poison ivy has three leaflets, not five, and climbs by a hairy rope, not fingertip holdfasts. It sports white berries, vs. the blue of Virginia creeper. While poison ivy can have outstanding fall color, I cannot sing the virtues of a vine which causes so much human misery. Be aware, however, that Virginia creeper may also cause skin irritation, although only rarely.

Perhaps our growing love affair with native plants will work to Virginia’s advantage. So often our native flora is carefully cultivated in Europe while simultaneously scorned stateside. Gardeners in the United Kingdom value *P. quinquefolia* for its ease of cultivation, fall color and novelty, especially as an alternative to ivy. It has earned the Award of Garden Merit by the Royal Horticultural Society, which lists at least a dozen cultivars in addition to the species. Meanwhile, Americans have largely failed to invite it inside the garden gate. Yes, Virginia, you deserve a second look.

Text by David Chinery
If you, like me, are ready for some good news, I can oblige: dahlias are making a comeback. While trolling in my archives, I discovered a story I wrote in 2009, lamenting the disappearance of dahlias from gardens. My thesis then was that two of the requirements for a dahlia’s life – the need for staking the vigorous shoots and the mandated digging for winter storage – made them seem too inconvenient for our post-modern, low-maintenance gardening world. Dahlias had once been second only to the rose in the eyes of American gardeners, so something had to explain why their simply stunning flowers had disappeared.

Some of today’s dahlias have solved the staking challenge by being short. Billed as dwarf dahlias, they grow into busy subjects about two feet tall, perfect for a moderate to large-sized pot. Last summer, I grew a lovely example of a dwarf dahlia in a square tub. It sported eye-catching purple and white blossoms from the day I bought it until the first hard frost. Other than watering it, I removed the spent blossoms every couple of weeks, and it remained covered in clean, green foliage. Unfortunately, I didn’t save the tubers from this dahlia and I don’t even have its name. No duplicates appeared in nurseries this spring, but I did end up with two dwarfs in the Dalaya series, unimaginably named ‘Red’ and ‘Red +White.’ Both still are pumping out the blossoms in early October. Who could ask for anything more in terms of garden color?

Other dwarf dahlias are also tempting. ‘Happy Single Party’ has bright yellow flowers and dark foliage, ‘Impression Fantastico’ sports maroon and white petals surrounding a yellow center, and ‘Park Princess’ is a cactus-type dahlia with vibrant pink, pointy petals. It seems that the dahlia breeders are striving to make as wide a variety of dahlia flowers available in the shorter sizes. And oh, there are so many dahlias to choose from. The American Dahlia Society, ambassador for the breed, recognizes five flower size ranges, from M (miniature), up to 4 inches in diameter, to AA (giant), over 10 inches across. There are fifteen colors and mixes, including light blend, bronze, dark blend, variegated and bicolor. The flowers come in assortment of shapes I can’t describe, but are given names like miniature ball, incurved cactus, and waterlily. The result of all this genetic variation is that dahlias are classified into about 570 individual classes, and there are over 40,000 named varieties.

Although my large-sized dahlia collection has dwindled thanks to the depredations of voles, I’ve flirted with giant dinner-plate sized dahlias for years. Given decent soil, full sun, and yes, some effort expended to keep them staked, mammoth examples of the light yellow ‘Kelvin Floodlight,’ deep purple ‘Thomas Edison’ or any of the hundreds of others can be raised. Maybe, just maybe, if local nurseries continue to offer modern dwarf dahlias, a few adventurous gardeners will open the door to all that these flowers have to offer.
“Genesis got it all wrong. Adam should have been exiled from town as a punishment, and put to slave in a garden.”

Clarence Day (1874-1935, 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

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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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Holiday Greening & Wreath Making Workshop

Date: Saturday, December 8, 2018
Time: 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Location: Cornell Cooperative Extension
24 Martin Road
Voorheesville, NY 12186
Cost: $25.00
Includes: Wreath Frame, Mixed Greens, Wire, Cones, and Velvet Ribbon to Make a Bow.
*Extra Decorations will be available to purchase or bring your own.

Bring: Your own clippers, gloves, wire cutters if desired. We will have some to share.

Pre-Registration Required

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To Register
Fill out this form and mail with check for $25 payable to CCE Albany to:
Carole Henry
Cornell Cooperative Extension
24 Martin Road
Voorheesville, NY 12186

Name______________________________________Phone#__________________________
Address___________________________________City________________________State_____
Email_____________________________________

$25.00 x ___ attending = $_____ enclosed
Holiday Centerpiece Workshop

Date: Saturday, December 8, 2018
Time: 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm
Location: Cornell Cooperative Extension
24 Martin Road
Voorheesville, NY 12186
Cost: $20.00
Includes: Mixed Greens, Cones, Assorted Small Decorations, Ribbon, and Dish with Oasis
*Extra Decorations will be available to purchase or bring your own.

Bring: Your own clippers, gloves, wire cutters if desired. We will have some to share.

Pre-Registration Required

Special Discount: This is the 2nd workshop being offered on December 8th. If you registered for the Holiday Wreath Making Workshop in the morning, please feel free to deduct $5.00 from the Centerpiece Workshop.

To Register
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Name_________________________Phone#_________________________
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Southern Charm Garden Tour

Discover Charleston & Savannah

March 26 - April 1, 2019

Rensselaer County, New York Master Gardens are continuing their quest to see Gardens in America. Join us on a wonderful trip to the Southern part of the United States - South Carolina and Georgia. Here we will explore the native plants of this area and experience gardens so different from our own. We will also see many other hidden gems in Charleston, SC, Murrells Inlet, SC, Beaufort, SC, and Savannah, GA. Included will be the House in Garden Tour in Charleston along with guest speakers throughout the tour.
Southern Charm Garden Tour

DISCOVER CHARLESTON & SAVANNAH
MARCH 26 - APRIL 1, 2019

Day 1 - Tuesday, March 26: Arrive in Charleston. Your transfer is included to the hotel. Check-in at the Hampton Inn, located in the heart of the Historic District of Charleston. A Welcome Dinner is included this evening at Virginia’s on King. (D)

Day 2 - Wednesday, March 27: A hot breakfast is included at the hotel. Enjoy a city tour of the Historic District. Travel to Magnolia Gardens where your lunch is included. After lunch tour Magnolia Gardens and grounds, beginning with a guided tour of the Plantation House, followed by a guided tour of the Gardens. Conclude with the Swamp Garden. (self-guided) tour. (B, L)

Day 3 - Thursday, March 28: A hot breakfast included at the hotel. Depart for a tour of Brookgreen Gardens in Murrells Inlet, SC. Tour the Gardens upon arrival, then enjoy an included lunch and speaker followed by free time to enjoy the gardens. Dinner is on your own in Charleston upon your return to Charleston. (B, L)

Day 4 - Friday, March 29: A hot breakfast at the hotel. Enjoy the Charleston House and Garden Tour today. Afternoon is on your own. Dinner is on your own this evening. (B)

Day 5 - Saturday, March 30: A hot breakfast at the hotel. Check-out of hotel and board the bus to Charleston Tea Plantation for a tour of the plantation. Arrive in Beaufort SC for lunch at Panini’s on the Waterfront. After lunch, Laura Lee Rose (Beaufort County Master Gardener Coordinator) will lead the group on a walking tour of Old Point in Beaufort. The historic district is a National Historic Landmark and is renowned for its impressive collection of architecture. A variety of homes, gardens, commercial buildings, and houses of worship are featured in the district. The walking tour will end at The Chocolate Tree. The Chocolate Tree was the creator of the iconic ‘box of chocolates’ in the movie, Forrest Gump. All treats are made in-house daily. Continue to Savannah and check into the Doubletree in the Historic District. Dinner on your own. (B, L)

Day 6 - Sunday, March 31: Breakfast is included at the hotel. Trolley tour of Savannah and tour Juliette Gordon Low’s birthplace. Lunch is on your own before departing for the Coastal Georgia Botanical Garden. Dinner is included this evening at River House Seafood. (B, D)

Day 7 - Monday, April 1: Breakfast is included at the hotel. Check-out of hotel and depart for drop off at Charleston Airport for flights leaving after 1:00PM. (B)

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Master Gardener Tour Price: $1,885 per person/double, $2,685 per person/single  
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Includes: All hotel accommodations, transfers to/from Charleston airport, all motorcoach transportation, meals as indicated Breakfast (B), Lunch (L), Dinner (D), meal gratuity, all taxes.  
Not Included: Airfare, meals not indicated, guide and driver gratuity, baggage gratuity.

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Final Payment: Remaining balance is due on or before 1/25/2019

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