Gardening Matters

Master Gardener
Cornell Cooperative Extension

Yates County Master Gardener Newsletter

Summer 2021, Issue 2

Inside this Issue

Executive Director's Note

Summer is here and gardening is in full swing!

Photo Credit: John Munt

There is an old adage- *the bloom is off the rose*. This means that the initial newness (bloom) of a new project or happening (gardening) s waning. The novelty is gone; now it is about hard work and persistence.

* *Is it hot outside*? Your garden needs watering..
* *Was it raining in the last few days*? You need to check your garden for supports in growth (stake up limbs, blossoms, and fruit.)
* *Was it cool outside*? This may be a good time to do some weeding!

Photo Credit: Tomion's Farm Market

What if there is nothing new or specific? Now is the time to do a **garden check in**. How are things growing? What is ready for an early harvest (ex. Greens, peas, herbs)? What is ready for a July harvest (strawberries, rhubarb, garlic cloves)? Are there dried out flowers and stems that need to be removed (deadheaded) ?

But best of all, this is also a time to just sit still, enjoy the gentle breezes, birds singing, Yates County sunshine and revel in how your garden grows!

Life has been challenging—let your garden and green spaces be a positive outcome of a life challenge. Gardening is applied hard work, persistence, and attention that brings beauty, growth and produce! It also provides a space to give you comfort and joy!

Arlene A. Wilson

Executive Director & Master Gardener
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Yates County

***As of June 22nd, 2021, the Yates County Office Building is open to the general public from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.* CCE Yates County has daily office coverage, with 50% working in-person, and 50% working remotely. This includes work within the community (agriculture, gardening, natural resources, youth, and families) using social distancing protocols.**

Should you need to reach any of our staff members, visit http://yates.cce.cornell.edu/staff. You can also send us a message via our Facebook page, or call the office at 315-536-5123.

Garden Chat:

Catching up w/ the Yates County Master Gardeners!

What inspires you to be a Master Gardener?

Susan Baxter

What inspires me to be a Master Gardener? Why, the ability to hang out and talk plants, and gardening strategies with other Gardeners that are just as obsessed with plants as I am. Otherwise, my husband has to drag me kicking and screaming out of the Lowes Garden section.

Michelle Buschner

I love the learning process. There are so many of elements in nature that I never would have been introduced to without this educational exposure with professionals in their individual fields. There is still so much more to learn. The subjects and learning are endless. It's fun to share my knowledge with fellow gardeners and novices.

Karen Welch

Probably my favorite thing has been meeting others who also love to garden. No one understands this passion as much as those with a similar passion. My husband is also eternally grateful for my ability to talk plants with someone other than him! They don't call him "no rake Jake" for nothing! I never quit learning when it comes to gardening. I loved my job in the medical field for the same reason and it is awesome to have another passion that gives me that. Working on the master gardener projects is also aggregate as to give back to the community.

Arlene Wilson

1. I wanted to understand the science behind why what I do works
2. I want to understand why my compost stinks and how to make it stop!!!
3. I want to learn how to prune shrubs
4. I wanted to learn alternative strategies for weed and pest control

Have a gardening question?
Contact us at 315-536-5123, or stop by the CCE-Yates County office and fill out one of our Master Gardener questionnaires!

What to do in...

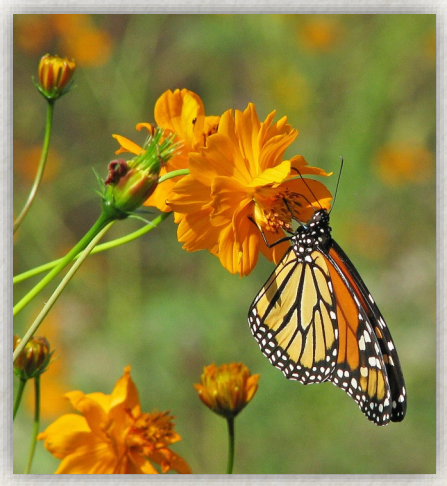
July:

* Refer to your spring garden pictures and make a list of supplies and plants you will need for fall.
* Order bulbs in July for the best selection- I usually order the bulk of my fall bulbs online so I can get larger quantities of the bulbs I'm most interested in. I fill in with impulse buys later in the fall but this way I know that I'll have what I need in time for fall planting.
* Freshen up your pots- fertilize and trim back your ornamental pots to ensure they look their best through summer.
* July is the perfect time of year to divide your bearded iris. See the included article for great tips on how successfully divide your bearded iris.

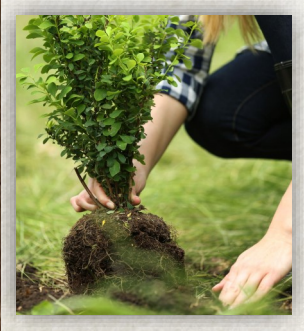
August:

* Make your garden shine again- if you have the time, re-mulching your garden in August helps with moisture retention and keeps it fresh looking through the fall.
* Plant leafy greens for fall feasts! Lettuce, spinach, kale and chard can shrug off late season frosts and will taster sweeter and milder when harvested in cooler temperatures.
* Evaluate which of your perennials need to be divided either this fall or in the spring. Plan and prepare where you are planning on planting the divisions.

September:



* Time to hit the nurseries again! Early September is a great time to plant shrubs, trees and perennials. The cooler fall weather will reduce transplant stress and they will still have plenty of time to establish their root systems prior to the ground freezing.
* Stop fertilizing your annuals and perennials- any additional food will not benefit the annuals and reducing fertilization will help the perennials begin to harden off to prepare for dormancy.
* Crabgrass or other annuals weeds plaguing your lawn? Consider overseeding in the fall to fill in the gaps and reduce annual weeds without herbicides. To learn how overseeding can help your lawn and how to do it see page 5 for an article on repetitive overseeding by David Chinnery.



Want to be featured in *Gardening Matters*? If you have any seasonal tips or photos you would like to share, please submit them to:

Master Gardeners/CCE Yates County
417 Liberty Street, Suite 1024
Penn Yan NY 14527

Repetitive Overseeding Can Replace Herbicide To Conquer Crabgrass

David Chinery (Sr. Resource Educator, CCE– Rensselaer County)

Would you like a better lawn without using herbicides? Although many Americans have been told that having a better lawn means using chemical herbicides, that isn't the only solution. Lawns infested with annual weeds, most notably crabgrass, can be improved through a technique called repetitive overseeding. First pioneered at Iowa State and Cornell Universities for sports fields, we've been demonstrating how repetitive overseeding can benefit lawns here in Rensselaer County, New York, for almost fifteen years. Beginning in August, 2017, we conducted a small repetitive overseeding project at the 9/11 Memorial Park in the Lansingburgh section of Troy. This fact sheet details our results.

The lawn at the park was sodded long ago, but by the time our project started there was virtually no desirable turfgrass remaining. A combination of drought, lack of fertilizer, low mowing and scalping, and damage from white grubs (which eat the roots of turfgrasses) killed the original sod. These forces led to the majority of the ground being covered with crabgrass, with low populations of prostrate spurge, white clover, and dandelion also present.

Crabgrass is an annual weed with coarse green leaves which germinates from seed in early spring and grows rapidly **(Photo 1)**. If left unchecked, the crabgrass creates a dense cover during the summer. After producing seeds, it starts to die in autumn, leaving the soil bare and exposed to erosion over the winter **(Photo 2)**. The following spring, new crabgrass seedlings emerge again. Chemical lawn-care programs rely on pre-emergent herbicides, applied in early spring every year, to keep these new crabgrass seedlings at bay. Thousands of acres of lawns re-treated with pre-emergent herbicide in New York State. These applications are made by do-it-yourself homeowners as well as certified pesticide applicators. Repetitive over-seeding can offer an alternative to using herbicide every year.

How does repetitive overseeding work? Our method of repetitive overseeding takes advantage of the annual lifecycle of the crabgrass plant. Quick germinating perennial ryegrass seed is spread on the lawn multiple times, beginning in August. As autumn approaches and the crabgrass dies, the perennial ryegrass establishes, so that by late fall, what would normally be bare soil is now covered by new seed-lings. In the spring, the perennial ryegrass will prevent the germination of new crabgrass seedlings by crowding them out, and pre-emergent herbicide will not be needed. Thus, our repetitive over-seeding method can reduce or eliminate the need for pre-emergent herbicide and be the cornerstone of a pesticide-free lawn-care program.

Overseeding is simply spreading grass seed over the existing lawn **(Photo 3)**. There is no turning of the soil (such as rototilling). Holes are not made in the soil (as in core aerating or spiking), nor is the seed incorporated into the ground (as in slit seeding). All that is needed is a simple lawn spreader, such as is used to apply fertilizer. After the gauge on the spreader is set to deliver the desired amount, simply pour the seed into the hopper and start spreading. The applied seed will eventually work down to the soil surface, and if conditions are favorable, it will germinate. We call it repetitive overseeding because it should be done several times during the late summer and autumn. This increases the chances of applying the seed when temperature and soil moisture conditions are favorable. By applying an excess of seed (which is relatively inexpensive and pesticide-free) it is very likely that a high percentage will germinate.

Continued on page 6

Repetitive Overseeding Can Replace Herbicide To Conquer Crabgrass

Our Project: At Lansingburgh's 9/11 Memorial Park, we established six different overseeding plots to study how variations on the method influence final results.

The variables examined were:

1. **Type of grass seed (perennial ryegrass or tall fescue).** Past projects showed that perennial ryegrass is often quicker to show results than tall fescue. We spread the perennial ryegrass seed at a rate of 3 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet of lawn and the tall fescue at a rate of 4 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet of lawn.
2. **Mowing.** We mowed the existing crabgrass short (to 1/2 inch in height) in two plots be-fore the first seeding to see if that might help the new seedlings establish faster. The other plots were not mowed before the first seeding. All plots were mowed occasionally there after.
3. **Starter fertilizer.** Starter fertilizer is often used to supply nutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, to hungry young grass seedlings, and we wanted to see if differences would appear at the park. We used a store-bought starter fertilizer which contained 24% nitrogen, 25% phosphorous and 4% potassium and applied it to three plots. The other three plots received no starter fertilizer. The soil pH at the park is 7.4 (slightly alkaline) and the soil texture is a sandy loam.

What happened? In a year with normal rainfall, four applications of seed, spaced two to three weeks apart, would be adequate to establish a dense turfgrass cover by October. Unfortunately, August 2017 was a very dry month, with only 1.24 inches of rain for the second half of the month (2.06 inches is average). September was also dry, with 1.68 inches of rain (3.5 inches is average). In October, the dryness continued, with only 0.79 inches of rain up to October 23, the last day of our project. Dry conditions will reduce seed germination significantly. A few new turfgrass seedlings were observed to be poking through the crabgrass on August 31 in all the plots **(Photo 4)**. Through September, these new seedlings persisted, but did not increase, and by October 6th, the new seedlings were disappearing due to drought.

In a previous project under similarly droughty conditions, we found that the only plots where we could get new seedlings to establish were those with extremely high seed rates. Since we could not irrigate, but we could spread more seed, the plots were seeded an additional two times, for a total of six times.

Final Results: Conditions remained very dry but by October 23 we were able to see some dramatic results. In **Photo 5**, a perennial ryegrass plot is the green strip on the left, a tall fescue plot is the green strip next to it on the right, and the surrounding brown areas are the dead crabgrass. More detail is shown in **Photos 6 and 7**.

In brief, all of the plots had a dense cover of new grass seedlings. Mowing before the initial seeding didn't make a significant difference. Plots which received starter fertilizer had about 10% more new grass established than those which did not. Plots with perennial ryegrass were about 95% covered with new grass seedlings, whereas plots with tall fescue had about 85% new seedlings. Perennial weeds, such as dandelions, persisted (we didn't expect the overseeding to crowd them out). Check plots (which didn't receive seed or fertilizer) were 100% weeds, 95% of which were dead crabgrass by October 23rd, and are depicted in the brown areas of Photos 5, 6 and 7.

Conclusions: We have shown that both perennial ryegrass and tall fescue can be used to significantly increase turfgrass density (and crowd out crabgrass) when overseeded multiple times in the late summer and autumn. We recommend making four applications of seed, spaced two to three weeks apart, during the late summer to autumn period when there is average rainfall, and increasing the number of applications if weather conditions are dry and there is no irrigation available. Perennial ryegrass will provide faster results than tall fescue. Use of a starter fertilizer will also increase success if soil fertility is poor.

Container Gardens

Caroline Boutard-Hunt (CCE-Yates County Ag Educator/Master Gardener)

It's around this time of the summer that my container gardens can begin to look a little ragged around the edges. Many of us love to pot up our containers in the spring as they give us a chance to try out new color combinations and brighten up our outdoor spaces. However, sometime after June, many containers begin to look a little faded and worse for wear. Luckily there are a few simple steps you can take to bring your containers back to their early summer glory.

Containers are a challenging growing location. We tend to plant fast-growing annuals close together for maximum impact. However, it's easy to forget that we need to fuel that dramatic growth. At planting I always mix a generous amount of slow-release fertilizer to my potting mix. This helps keep the plants well fed for about a month. After that, if your plants are beginning to slow down, consider adding a little more slow-release fertilizer on a monthly basis. Regular fertilization throughout the season will keep your plants growing well until frost.

Container gardens need much more regular watering than any plants in the ground. Your plants' roots also must contend with a lot more heat. When the soil dries out on a hot day, some of the smaller feeder roots may die off which reduces the plants' ability to uptake water and nutrients. Making sure your pots remain moist will keep the soil cooler and your plant roots growing. Some plants such as Cannas will require a great deal more water than others. If you have a hard time keeping up, swap out some of your thirstier choices for more drought tolerant plants such as succulents. I try and water all my containers first thing in the morning and again in the late afternoon on really hot days.

To preserve moisture in my containers and protect the potting mix from downpours before the plants grow in, I've started using a little of my garden mulch as a top-dress. You can also purchase buckwheat hulls locally which give the pots a nice look as well.

Even the most pampered container plant will need a trim or a pinch here and there to maintain their good looks. Regularly pinching back the growing tips of coleus and other foliage plants will keep your plants looking bushy and bright all season long. Since pots tend to highlight whatever plants are in them, make sure to keep your containers deadheaded to encourage new blooms and to keep your flowers looking fresh.

If any of your plants are looking less than lovely mid-season, replace them! It's easy to swap out plants in containers and will keep your pots looking interesting and fresh all season long. As you get closer to fall, pop in some hardier plants such as pansies, asters, or sedum or even parsley to keep them looking amazing until well after frost.

The Do's and Don'ts of Composting

Steve Reiners (School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell University)

Turn kitchen scraps and other organic wastes into a valuable amendment to improve your soil's health.

You've read this advice before: "Spread one inch of compost across your garden." But what is compost? How do you make it? And can you make it in your yard? Doesn't it attract rodents and other undesirables? Let's answer some of these questions.

Compost is simply the rotted remains of plants and animals (or animal wastes). This organic matter is exactly the type of material we want to add to our soils. It adds nutrients just like fertilizer. But it does much more. Organic matter helps sandy soils hold more moisture, so they don't dry out as much. It can improve drainage in heavier clay soils. And it feeds beneficial soil microbes.

Compost also helps fight climate change. Being about 40% carbon, applying compost increases the carbon in the soil which helps decrease the carbon in the atmosphere. Plus, by composting in your backyard rather than sending scraps to the landfill, you reduce the amount of methane released to the atmosphere. Methane is produced when organics decompose in landfills, and is about 30 times more potent as a heat trapping gas than carbon dioxide.

Ideally, a well-made compost pile should be a balance of materials that are high in nitrogen (the greens) and those that are high in carbon (the browns). We classify compostables by the ratio of carbon to nitrogen or the C:N ratio. For example, sawdust is high in carbon and may have a C:N ratio of 500 to 1, 500 units of carbon for every one unit of nitrogen.

At the other extreme, poultry manure is high in nitrogen, with a ratio of just 10:1. Coffee grounds are in the middle, about 20:1. See Table 1 for a list of C:N ratios of common compost ingredients.

C:N ratios of high *nitrogen* materials:

- Poultry manure: 10:1
- Hair/fur: 10:1
- Vegetable waste: 11:1
- Alfalfa: 12:1
- Sheep Manure: 17:1
- Vegetable trimmings/scraps: 17:1
- Grass Clippings: 20:1
- Coffee Grounds: 20:1
- Manure (Cow): 20:1
- Fresh weeds: 20:1
- Horse Manure: 25:1

C:N ratios of high *carbon* materials:

- Nut Shells: 35:1
- Manure (Horse) with bedding: 60:1
- Pine needles: 70:1
- Autumn leaves: 80:1
- Corn Cobs: 100:1
- Straw: 110:1
- Paper towel: 110:1
- Office paper: 129:1
- Shredded Newspaper: 170:1
- Cardboard (shredded): 350:1
- Sawdust (fresh): 500:1

The ideal C:N ratio for compost is about 30:1. Higher values have too much carbon and not enough nitrogen for hungry microbes. The process stays cool and breakdown is slow. Compost with lower values have too much nitrogen and can become slimy and smelly.

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The Do's and Don'ts of Composting

Examples of green materials include freshly cut grass, garden waste, vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, weeds, fresh manure from horses, rabbits and guinea pigs, hair and fur. Browns include fall leaves, straw, wood chips, shredded paper, paper bags, and sawdust.

You don't need to make precise calculations when you mix your compost ingredients together. But I find it helpful to have some browns handy so that when I have greens that need composting I can layer in some browns to get a good blend. Also throw some soil or old compost in to help introduce microbes. No need to add worms, they will find it on their own.

For a backyard compost pile, don't put in things that will attract rodents and other animals. Meat, bones, fish, dairy products and bread should be saved for a municipal compost facility. Check to see what's available in your town. Waste from cats and dogs should also stay out of the compost as it may contain human pathogens. Don't use ash from a coal-burning stove as it may contain heavy metals. Ash from wood burning fires is okay but use sparingly as it can raise the compost pH much too high.

Some people complain that making compost is a lot of work. That depends on how quickly you want the compost to go from its raw form until it's ready to use. For example, you can make a big pile of leaves in the fall and not do a thing. It may take two years before it turns into leaf mold compost.

Or you can take those leaves, chop them with a mower and mix it with some high nitrogen materials like fresh horse manure. Then every 2 weeks, "turn" the compost. That means taking a pitchfork and turning it over – the top becomes the bottom and the bottom the top.

Turning the compost puts a lot of air into the pile and the microbes that make the compost breathe air just like you and me. A well aerated pile with the right C:N ratio can even get hot, over 150F. Temperatures like that can help kill weed seeds and disease organisms. In a home compost pile these high temperatures rarely occur. But when they do, you can get compost in a couple of months.

You can make your compost in premade plastic composters available at garden centers or sometimes at your county's solid waste and recycling center. Some purchased models can actually be turned or tumbled to make aerating easy. These aren't necessary to make compost. Freestanding piles in a corner of the yard or wooden bins improvised from scrap lumber work fine. For best results, you probably want a pile that is at least 3x3 feet in size.

I like a two-bin compost system. I can throw all the fresh material in one side through the summer. Layers at the bottom will start breaking down. Come autumn or the following spring, just shovel off the top un-rotted material into the empty bin to get down to the ready to use compost.

Try putting the pile in a shady part of the yard. The sun will dry out your pile fairly quickly and a dry pile will break down slowly. Water your compost pile just as you would your garden to keep it moist. Also, shredding material speeds breakdown. The smaller the pieces, the faster they will compost.

Can you put diseased plants in the compost pile? It's possible that some plant diseases could survive in the compost, especially if it does not heat up. But if I didn't put diseased plants in my compost, I wouldn't have much to put in. I hope with all the diversity in my compost pile, diseases won't stand a chance!

The author designed this three-bin composting station for the faculty-staff-graduate student gardens at the Cornell AgriTech campus in Geneva, N.Y.

Dividing Irises

Laura Spencer (Master Gardener, Penn State Extension

Dividing irises is good for the plants and will result in irises to give away to friends or increase the display in your garden.

Photo credit: Albert Dezetter from Pixabay

The tall, beautiful iris, named after the Greek goddess of the rainbow, is one of the oldest garden flowers. In spring, bearded irises unfurl their buds to reveal a kaleidoscope of color.

Irises are hardy, reliable, easy to grow, and are deer-resistant and drought-tolerant. They also attract butterflies, hummingbirds and make lovely cut flower bouquets. These perennials flourish where winter temperatures dip below freezing and allow the plant to go dormant before next year's growth.

There are some 200 to 300 species in the genus Iris. The most familiar irises are the tall bearded irises, named for the soft hairs along the center of the falls. Species are separated into two major groups, rhizomatous and bulbous. Rhizomes are rootlike structures growing horizontally underground that are used as food storage. The bearded iris falls into this group. Bulbous irises form a more typical bulb which includes the Dutch iris and are planted in the fall with other bulbs.

It's important to know which irises you are seeking to divide. Division differs slightly. This article applies to the bearded iris.

As irises mature, the rhizome produces more rhizomes. When bloom production slows, about every three to five years, it is necessary to divide by removing and replanting the small rhizomes.

Divide at the right time of year, after flowering, when irises become dormant during late summer, reducing the chance of bacterial soft rot. Avoid dividing during winter when irises are trying to survive on stored energy in their rhizomes.

Snip the leaf blades to about one third of their height. This reduces stress as it concentrates on new roots, not maintaining the leaves. Carefully remove the entire clump with a spade or garden fork. Divide the rhizomes by pulling them apart with your hands. The rhizome should easily break off at a joint. If a sharp knife is needed to separate the rhizome, dip the knife into 10% bleach and water solution after each cut.

A good rhizome should be about as thick as your thumb, have healthy roots and one or two leaf fans. Large, old rhizomes that have no leaf fans should be discarded. Inspect each rhizome for iris borer (a fat, white worm). If you find a borer, destroy the rhizome. Soft, smelly, or rotting rhizomes should also be destroyed. Do not place in the compost. When planting the rhizomes, dig a shallow hole approximately ten inches in diameter and four inches deep. Build up a small mound of soil in the center of the planting hole. Center the rhizome on the soil mound and spread out the roots on either side. Fill the hole with soil. The top surface of the rhizome should be just visible at the soil surface. It's a common mistake to plant irises too deep. Tamp the soil firmly to anchor the rhizomes.

Good air circulation is essential. For the best display, plant the rhizomes singly or in groups of three so the fan of leaves face the same direction. Space the plants 12 to 18 inches apart (closer for dwarf varieties, farther apart for taller varieties). Newly planted rhizomes should be watered thoroughly. Do not mulch. Mulching retains moisture and could cause the rhizomes to rot.

Bearded irises will thrive in most well-drained soils. The ideal pH for irises is 6.8 (slightly acidic) but irises are tolerant of less-than-perfect soils. Test your soil before making any correction.

It is important that the roots of newly planted irises be well established before the end of the growing season, four to six weeks before the first hard freeze or killing frost. New growth may be noticeable within two to three weeks and begins with a new center leaf in the fan.

Leaves carry on photosynthesis for next year's growth. Don't trim iris leaves until fall. Only snip brown tips and cut the flowering stalk to the ground at a slant to discourage rot. This will reduce the chance of overwintering pests.

Break off seedpods that form after the blooms have faded. Seed formation saps energy needed by the rhizomes, roots, and leaves. Keep your iris beds free of weeds and fallen leaves so the rhizomes may bask in the sun.

Don't be afraid to divide your rhizomes. Dividing will multiply your iris to give to friends or barter with gardening pals. Remember your supply is always growing.

https://extension.psu.edu/dividing-irises

Living On The Edge

Caroline Boutard-Hunt (CCE-Yates County Ag Educator/Master Gardener)

Edging your garden beds really enhances all the hard work you've put into weeding and mulching. Edging clearly defines the line between where your lawn ends and your garden bed begins. Edging also really helps with weed control in your garden. Many weeds spread through roots and runners and edging will prevent the creep of lawn plants into your bed. Finally, edging allows you to put a nice thick layer of mulch on your beds without it moving into your lawn.

There are two basic methods for edging- natural and permanent edging. Natural edging simply involves creating a cut line between your bed and lawn. All you really need is a sharp shovel or other tool to cut a line between the sod and garden bed, however, there are a variety of edging tools available on the market including powered edging/trenching tools to speed up the job.

It is always a good idea to know where water and cable lines are running before starting any digging project. Even though we're not digging a deep trench, it's also probably best to call 811 to ensure it's safe to dig. Edging is also much easier to install in damp soil I suggest watering well a couple of days prior to edging. Some people prefer to edge early in the spring when the soil is soft. However, if you wait until later June or early July your grass will have slowed it's spring growth and your edge will stay sharper looking for longer.

Natural Edging Installation

First off, facing your garden, begin to cut your border. Sink your shovel straight down several inches deep along where you would like the line to run. Move over and repeat so that the cuts overlap slightly and continue for the length of your bed. Next, turn around so you are facing your original line and just inside of your original line. Begin cutting the line on the inside, slicing at an angle to connect to the first line and make a wedge. Remove the sod and soil from between the two cuts and if necessary, clean up the line with a narrow trowel. Some gardeners like to mulch immediately after edging.

Garden beds should be re-edged annually for best appearance. As with most projects, the first year is the hardest and future edging should go fairly quickly. If the idea of another annual chore doesn't appeal, permanent edging may be a better solution for you.

Pictured: First cut is straight down (Photo Credit: Lowes.com)

Pictured: Making the wedge with the angled cut (Photo Credit: Lowes.com)

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Living On The Edge

Caroline Boutard-Hunt (CCE-Yates County Ag Educator/Master Gardener)

Permanent Edging

One of the best decisions I made when installing the garden at our house was to bite the bullet and install permanent edging. It has made a huge difference in the amount of time I spend in garden maintenance. There are a huge number of edging materials available to achieve a look that fits your garden and budget. Here are a few of the most common options along with some installation tips.

Photo Credit: https://bit.ly/3yy6drP

Brick: One of the most traditional choices for garden edging. Brick can look beautiful in it's own right and adds a level of maturity to a garden. Installation will take more skill and patience than other edging techniques. To install, you will need to create a trench as wide as your brick and an inch or two deeper than their height. Try and keep the depth as even as possible for the best appearance. After you dig the trench, add an inch or so of sand then lay your bricks down, using a level and additional sand to make sure the edge stays level. Fill in the cracks between the bricks with more sand and tamp it down.

Plastic/Rubber: Plastic or rubber edging are some of the most widely available options for edging material. You can buy rolls most anywhere that sells landscaping supplies. Both are also fairly easy and quick to install. The downside of plastic edging in particular is that after several years of sun exposure, the plastic can become very brittle and prone to cracking. I've also found that plastic edging is prone to "lawn maintenance blight," from getting nudged by the lawnmower or nicked by the weed-whacker.

Pictured: Rubber edging can be quick to install
Photo Credit: manufactum.com

Metal: This is what I personally use in my garden. It's easy to create wide curves and simple to install. You may be able to find it locally but so far I haven't had luck so I've had to order it online. Metal edging can come in several colors and finishes including galvanized, which can look very modern. I personally prefer raw steel which quickly oxidizes and blends in well with most mulch.

Stone: Stone can be a nice option if you don't want the formality of brick but prefer a substantial material. If you can source the stones from your property, this is a very low cost edging material. Installation is similar to brick edging and can be difficult to get a clean line with a variety of shapes and sizes. Maintenance can also be more challenging as it's difficult to trim around irregularly shaped rocks.

Wood: Wood can add a nice rustic look to your garden. This material works best for creating straight lines and is quick to install. However, depending on the wood you pick, the lifespan of wood edging is significantly shorter than other materials.

No matter which technique you choose, edging can enhance your garden, reduce weed pressure and keep your mulch where you want it. I hope you'll consider trying it on at least part of your garden this summer!

Soil pH Testing Services

Are you starting a new bed or troubleshooting and older one? Spring is a good time to do a soil test. CCE Yates offers free garden pH testing through the Master Gardener program.

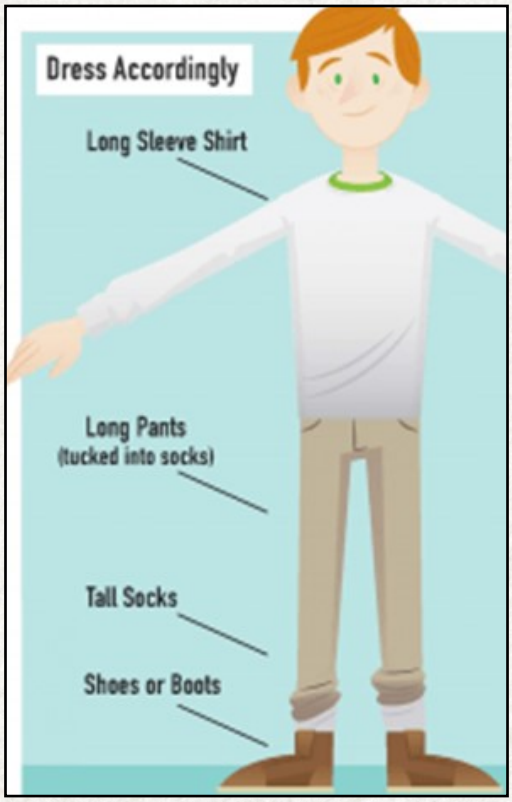
Contact us at (315) 536-5123 or Master Gardener Coordinator Cheryl Flynn at cj348@cornell.edu for more information.

Tick Bite Prevention– Dressing the Part

Joellen Lampman (New York State Integrated Pest Management Program)

You can have anything you want in life if you dress for it. —Edith Head

Blacklegged ticks usually quest below knee-height.



Covering your skin keeps ticks on the outside of the clothes and away from your body.

I don't know about you, but what I want in life is to go outdoors and enjoy beautiful weather without contracting a life-changing illness. And, thank goodness, it IS possible.

In the long list of items you can do to protect yourself from ticks, dressing the part is usually high up on the list. It's also one of the first ones to be ignored. "It's too hot for long pants" is a common theme.

People are notoriously bad at discerning how dangerous a situation really is. "I'm going to die of heat stroke" will always trump "I'm going to get babesiosis" because feeling hot is more immediate than the possibility of getting sick a few weeks from now. Now, if you felt ticks crawling up you, you might feel a more immediate need to keep those critters off your skin. But ticks are notoriously sneaky with their small bodies, stealth method of walking on their toes, and ability to inject pain killers and antihistamines.

So rather than just tell you to wear close toed shoes, long pants tucked into socks, and a long-sleeved shirt tucked into pants, let's explore the goal of the recommendation.

First things first, ticks typically hunt by questing, holding onto vegetation with their back legs and their front legs out front waiting for a host to pass by so they grab on. Once on the host, the tick travels up, looking for a dark, moist area to embed and feed for up to seven days.

When we are out and about, most ticks are going to grab onto us at feet, ankle, or shin height and crawl up. On a bare or sandal-clad foot, the tick might decide between the toes is the perfect dark, moist spot. Or it might keep going. If we are wearing socks, the tick might stop at the top of the sock. Or not. If we are wearing loose pants, capris, or shorts, there is nothing that will stop the tick from crawling under the fabric and maybe stopping behind the knee, or at the underwear line, or it might keep going. Long pants tucked into socks exclude ticks from reaching skin. From the waist down is a good portion of your body's real estate. And includes some of the more complicated areas of the body, needing a more focused approach to your tick check.

If your shirt isn't tucked in, the tick now has access to your belly and can choose to stay at the waist line, check out the belly button, end up under breasts (Women, your bra strap is an important area to incorporate into your daily tick check) or underarm area, or head higher to the hairline or ears. Or it might stop anywhere any between.

So wearing clothing that exclude ticks from reaching skin from your toes to your neck is the goal. Really light knit fabrics will work. They make mosquito netting clothes you can wear over shorts and a t-shirt. What ideas can you come up with?

And, just saying, if you are really in danger of heat stroke, you shouldn't be outside anyway.

For more tips on protecting yourself from ticks, visit the Don't Get Ticked NY webpage: https://bit.ly/tickedNY

Pass the Salt for Tasty Tomatoes

Steve Reiners (School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell University)

How can you get the best-tasting tomatoes from your garden? Obviously, you start with a variety that we know from previous experience is good. Then hope for lots of sun, well timed rain, and warm but not hot temperatures. But is there anything you can do now to maximize flavor?

Harvest tomatoes when they have vine-ripened, but before they soften. Once harvested, keep them in the dark.

Photo Credit: DaneeShe, Getty Images/iStockphoto

Does location make a difference? I'm sure many of you have heard about the great "Jersey tomatoes" - the supposedly superior tasting fruit from our southern neighbor. Their superior taste is attributed solely to the fact that they are grown in the Garden State.

Now I'm *from* New Jersey. I lived there for almost half my life. But I have to say, I just don't buy it. And I even have proof to back up my claim.

Every year, Rutgers celebrates their signature commodity with a giant field day at their research farm dubbed the "Great Tomato Tasting." There, they celebrate all things tomato and especially the superiority of their Jersey tomato. In 2012, having tired of their claims, I challenged them. I would put a New York-grown tomato up against theirs and may the best tomato win.

We didn't have many rules other than to use the same variety, a popular variety grown in both states. But it was up to us how we wanted to grow it in terms of soil types, fertilizers and pest management practices. I grew mine at Cornell AgriTech in Geneva and didn't do anything special. In late August, I picked about 20 fruit and headed south to see if we could compete with their state specialty.

We had more than 200 people taste each and we had a clear winner. My New York tomato! And although I love nothing better than to share this news with the tomato growing public, I do need to be fair. There may have been a variable more important than location.

I picked my tomatoes at close to peak ripeness, kept them at room temperature for two days and by the time we had the taste test, they were just about at the perfect eating stage. The Jersey tomatoes probably had one or two days to go before they would be at their peak. So, it was a win for New York, but one with an asterisk next to it. If the contest were a couple days later, their tomatoes might have caught up in the flavor department, while the ones I brought would have been past their prime.

Tips for maximizing flavor

But there are some lessons here: Harvest tomatoes when they have vine ripened but before they soften. Once harvested, keep them in the dark or away from bright windows. They do not need sunlight to ripen or for their flavor to reach its peak. And never, ever place tomatoes in the refrigerator. Temperatures below 55F will destroy their flavor.

Can the way you fertilize your tomato plants have an impact on flavor? My colleague at Rutgers, Joe Heckman, thinks that may be possible and he believes one nutrient may be the key – sodium.

Sodium was routinely added to soils when sodium nitrate (Chilean nitrate) was used as a source of nitrogen. But since the 1940's other non-sodium nitrogen sources have been used. And that's been a good thing as we know sodium can have detrimental effects on soils.

But research in Israel and Italy suggest that tomatoes from plants treated with small amounts of brackish, saline solutions were preferred in taste tests, possibly due to increased acids, sugars or other components. And Heckman did some research in New Jersey with similar results.

He actually applied some ocean water, about a quart and a half, as a foliar drench to each plant. There was some leaf burning from the salt, but the plants recovered quickly. And in an informal test, the ocean-water tomatoes tasted better.

There is even a fertilizer called SEA-90 that is nothing more than sea salt that gardeners can use for this purpose. Just make sure you don't apply too much as sodium is not good for our soils or plants. But it may give you a tastier tomato

And it might not be the sodium having a direct effect. Salt stresses plants. And the stress may improve flavor as it has an impact on flavor compounds. Some growers in the southwest actually stress plants by limiting irrigation. And, we recommend this for cantaloupes and other melons to maximize their sweetness.

The Mid-to-Late Summer Vegetable Garden: Keep Planting

Dixon Zorovich (CCE-Yates County Master Gardener Volunteer)

After a flurry of activity in May and June to get our vegetable gardens underway, July is a time to enjoy the first fruits of your harvest. From carrots to cabbage to garlic, you will have an abundance of fresh produce to eat immediately or to put up for the winter. While enjoying your bounty, don't forget to keep planting!

The key to keeping your harvests going through the fall is planning ahead and succession planting. Vegetables such as carrots, beets, bush beans, and lettuce and other greens (except spinach, which does not tolerate hot weather) can be planted every two weeks or so to ensure that you have a steady supply. In our area, you can plant bush beans through about mid-July and still have time to harvest before first frost. Faster growing veggies such as beets can be planted through mid-August. If frost comes early, just harvest as baby beets! By succession planting crops such as these, you can keep your garden in production well into the fall.

You may also find space freed up once you harvest "one and done" crops such as garlic and potatoes, both of which are typically harvested beginning mid-July. Garlic is a heavy feeder and will have extracted a good deal of nutrients from your soil, so mix in some mature compost and replant with an easier keeper. I have had good luck with replanting my garlic beds with dwarf snap peas. These fast-growing, bushy peas are nitrogen fixers and will help to return some much needed nitrogen to the soil, while giving you a nice little batch of delicious peas. Planting a cover crop in the empty space is another good option. For example, Buckwheat is fast growing and drought tolerant and will improve your soil while suppressing weeds and providing food for bees and other pollinators. Once frost kills it back, it will provide a natural mulch for your bed, helping to hold the soil in place throughout the winter.

Depending on the size and variety of your vegetable garden, keeping track of what to plant when can be a challenge. I use two simple tools to help me manage my garden all season long. One is a simple spreadsheet, organized by month and week, with a column listing what needs to be done that week and another column where I record what I actually did (often woefully different!). I also make notes about the weather and rainfall, what critters I am battling, and how everything is progressing. My second, more low-tech tool is a simple poster board of my garden, which provides a visual, at-a-glance snapshot of my whole garden. I use Velcro-backed paper squares to represent my beds and my first task in mid-winter is to decide what is being planted where and attaching the appropriate square to each bed. During the season, I remove or move the squares around as I replant. Once the season is done, I leave all the squares in place, so I have a record of what was planted where, and can rotate them accordingly the following year.

As your harvest those first juicy tomatoes or crunchy beans, take a moment to congratulate yourself. Then get your hands dirty again with your late season garden. Happy gardening!

About Us

The Master Gardener Program is a national program of trained volunteers who work in partnership with their county Cooperative Extension Office to share information throughout the community.

Master Gardeners are neighbors teaching neighbors about landscapes, vegetables, fruits, herbs, houseplants, beneficial and harmful insects, plant diseases, integrated pest management, wildlife management, soils, birds, composting, water conservation, and much much more.

Master Gardeners are considered researchers rather than experts. They participate in 40 hours of training provided by experienced staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension to gain a basic understanding of horticulture and available horticultural information and online resources. Course topics include plant nutrition, soils, vegetable, fruit culture, trees, shrubs, lawns, diseases and insects that affect plants, pruning and more.

You don't need to be an expert to join, if you enjoy gardening as a hobby, this may be perfect for you.

To become a Master Gardener, all you need to do is attend a 10-week training offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension.

For more information, please call us at 315-536-5123!

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