



Cornell Cooperative Extension | Saratoga County

NEWSLETTER

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Sweet Traditions: 4-H Gingerbread Creations at the Victorian Streetwalk

The Saratoga Springs Victorian Streetwalk has been a cherished holiday tradition since 1986. By 1994, Saratoga County 4-H Clubs joined in with their own festive touch — handcrafted gingerbread creations. What began as a small community project quickly grew into a beloved display that blended creativity, service, and holiday cheer.

Former 4-H Staff Associate Diana Bennett and former 4-H Leader Linda Shay Scavone recognized that community service lies at the heart of 4-H, making this project a natural fit. After the Streetwalk, the gingerbread houses were donated to nursing homes and care facilities, spreading joy and wonder to residents across the county.

Over the years, the display grew in both size and spirit. The first gingerbread village appeared in the lobby of the Ramada Renaissance Hotel in Saratoga Springs. By the early 2000s, the display had expanded to more than 70 houses, complete with twinkling lights, snowy sidewalks, and festive trees — filling venues like the Arts Council, City Center, Visitors Center, and Saratoga Public Library. Thousands of visitors stopped to admire the creativity and care behind each sugary masterpiece.

In recent years, participation has declined as families juggle busy schedules and the time-intensive process of baking from scratch. Last year, fewer than 30 entries were submitted — but we're hopeful that with renewed enthusiasm, this tradition can grow once again.

Participating in the Victorian Streetwalk gives 4-H youth a meaningful way to showcase their creativity, dedication, and community spirit. As Diana Bennett once said, *"There was more exposure during the one day at the Victorian Streetwalk than there was all week at the fair!"*



Let's come together this holiday season to celebrate Saratoga County's 4-H gingerbread house history, our youths' talent, and their commitment to service. After all, 4-H members pledge their hands to larger service — for their club, their community, their country, and their world — all year long. Hope to see you on December 4th!

Victorian Streetwalk 2025

Thursday, December 4

6:00 –9:00 PM | Downtown Saratoga Springs

Step back in time and celebrate the holidays at the annual Victorian Streetwalk. Enjoy carolers, festive lights, and the 4-H Gingerbread House display located in The Festival of Trees at the Saratoga Springs City Center.

CCE Saratoga Hosts Food Entrepreneurship Workshop

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Saratoga County was host to more than 40 food producers and entrepreneurs at the William M. Schwerd Center on November 17th for the Center of Excellence for Food and Agriculture at Cornell AgriTech's food entrepreneurship workshop.

Participants learned about the wide range of resources available to food and agriculture entrepreneurs through Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and they connected directly with Taste NY Welcome Center managers from across the greater Capital Region—building the relationships that drive success.

Together, we are strengthening New York's food, beverage, and agriculture industry.



CENTRAL NEW YORK DAIRY, LIVESTOCK & FIELD CROPS

2026 Central NY Dairy Day

January 14, 2026 | 9 am—3 pm

William Schwerd Building
Saratoga Co. 4-H Training Center
556 Middle Line Rd., Ballston Spa, NY 12020

Cost: \$55 per attendee (lunch included)

Register: https://cnydfc.cce.cornell.edu/event/preregistration_new.php?id=2681

Contact: Erik Smith—315-219-7786
[email Erik Smith](mailto:erik.smith@cce.cornell.edu)

2026 Central NY Dairy Day

Two locations to choose from

\$55 per person
Tuesday and Wednesday
January 13 & 14
9am - 3pm
White Eagle Conference Center & CCE Saratoga County

Register here:
<https://bit.ly/2026DairyDay>

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Central New York Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops

CAR SEAT CHECK

CCE Saratoga is hosting their next **FREE** car seat fitting station:

Tuesday, December 9 | 4 pm—6 pm
New Country Toyota of Clifton Park
202 Route 146, Mechanicville, NY 12118

Call Cindy at (518) 885-8995 to schedule your appointment.

Please bring the following to your scheduled appointment:

- Your child(ren)
- Car seat owner's manual
- Vehicle owner's manual

We ask that your car is free of all debris so car seat technicians can access the inside of your vehicle.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

The next Board of Directors Meeting is scheduled for **January 21, 2025 | 7 pm** at the Extension Office.

CCE Saratoga's Board of Directors

John Mancini - *President*
Liz Newsom - *Vice President*
Mark Preissler - *Secretary*
Jim Pettis, Jr. — *Treasurer*
Tom Venditti
Alex Guilmette
Nancy Wade Leary
Kevin Veitch—*Board of Supervisors Representative*
Danielle Hautaniemi - *Cornell Representative*



BRING YOUR STUDENTS TO PITNEY MEADOWS COMMUNITY FARM!



GROWING MINDS

A LIVING CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE
WITH CORNELL COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION

Pitney Meadows' "Growing Minds" field trip program bridges the gap between classroom lessons and real-life experiences on a working farm. This living classroom experience is designed to enhance environmental and agricultural education for youth, offering a unique, hands-on learning experience for students and teachers alike!

WHAT CAN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS EXPECT?

- Co-created curriculum with teachers and Cornell Cooperative to tailor your field trip to your in-class lessons
- An outdoor, living classroom with experiences that touch our whole ecosystem
- Hands-on activities with food grown here on our Community Farm

**ALL FIELD TRIPS
FREE THROUGH
SEPT. 30TH 2026!***



Email contact@pitneymeadows.org
to book your **FREE** field trip today!





SARATOGA COUNTY HOLIDAY

FOOD DRIVE

LET'S FEED THE HUNGRY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



ITEMS MOST IN NEED:

Food items such as (tuna, chicken, spam, etc),
canned soups (especially the chunky style),
canned beefaroni, spaghetti and meatballs, ravioli,
peanut butter, canned fruits, canned vegetables,
and packaged side dishes such as instant mashed
potatoes, scalloped or au gratin potatoes, rice-a-
roni or past-roni style side dishes, stuffing mix,
instant oatmeal, pancake mix, and cereal.

Condiments and hygiene items such as coffee,
cookies, ketchup, vegetable oil, pudding, laundry
and dish detergent, shampoo, body wash, and
toilet paper.

NOW THROUGH DECEMBER 29TH
4-H STAFF WILL DELIVER ON DECEMBER 30TH

DONATION DROP OFF LOCATION:
CCE SARATOGA COUNTY
50 WEST HIGH STREET
BALLSTON SPA NY. 12020

OR AT ANY CLUB MEETING OR 4-H EVENT.

Christ Cupboard
Food Pantry



First Baptist Church
202 Milton Avenue
Ballston Spa, NY 12020
518-885-8361

DONATIONS TO BENEFIT:

Spread Warmth This Winter with the 4-H Holiday Mitten Tree!



We're excited to share that 4-H is once again partnering with the Saratoga Springs Public Library and the Ballston Spa Public Library to bring warmth and joy to our community through the Holiday Mitten Tree!

What's the Mitten Tree?

Each year, our Mitten Trees are decorated with donated cold-weather items to help local families in need

during the winter season. This year, we're collecting:

- New socks
- Hats
- Mittens & gloves
- Scarves
- Gently used coats

These items will be available at both libraries throughout the holiday season for anyone in need. After the holidays, any remaining items will be distributed to local organizations to continue supporting our community.

Why It Matters

Winter in Upstate New York can be harsh, and we want to do our part to help everyone stay warm. Your donations—big or small—make a real difference for families in need.

Donation Drop-Off Locations

Starting in mid to late November, you can drop off donations at any of the following locations:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Office
50 West High Street, Ballston Spa
- Saratoga Springs Public Library
49 Henry Street, Saratoga Springs
- Ballston Spa Public Library
21 Milton Ave, Ballston Spa

Get Involved!

This is a wonderful opportunity for 4-H Clubs and community members alike to take part in a meaningful act of service. Let's work together to spread warmth and kindness this holiday season!

Support 4-H During the 2025 Tractor Supply Paper Clover Campaign!

The 2025 Paper Clover Campaign runs from November 28 through December 14, and we invite you to stop by one of our local Tractor Supply locations in Wilton or Clifton Park to show your support for the 4-H Youth Development Program in Saratoga County. By purchasing a Paper Clover at checkout, you're helping local youth grow their leadership, citizenship, and life skills through 4-H programs and activities.

Since 2010, Tractor Supply Company has partnered with 4-H to empower the next generation of leaders across the U.S. Twice each year, Tractor Supply customers are invited to purchase a Paper Clover—the 4-H emblem—during checkout.

To date, this nationwide campaign has raised over \$20 million,

positively impacting more than 80,000 young people. Of every dollar donated, 90% stays within the state to directly support local 4-H youth, while the remaining 10% supports national 4-H programming.

Thanks to the generosity of Tractor Supply team members and customers, 4-H youth gain access to enriching camps, conferences, and community service projects that emphasize science, health, agriculture, and civic engagement—all grounded in the 4-H philosophy that *kids learn best by doing*.

Join us in supporting Saratoga County 4-H this holiday season—your Paper Clover purchase makes a difference!



It's Paper Clover Time!

Nov. 28 - Dec. 14, 2025

Funds support scholarships to 4-H camp and leadership activities.



Winter Bird Feeding Basics

-Tom Smith, Master Gardener

Are you ready to feed the birds for winter?

The following recommendations will provide hours of birding enjoyment at your own home. Did you know that you can attract many different species of birds with feeders during the winter? Thanks to years of data collected by Cornell University's Feed Watch Program, this is true.

Some planning is required for selecting the right bird feeder. Knowledge of the different kinds of seed and food is also important. I also recommend having binoculars and a bird field guide to help identify what species of birds you see.

To enjoy winter bird feeding, place your feeders in a location that you can see easily from inside your home. A patio or deck is usually convenient but the seed hulls can make a mess. Keep safety in mind for when you need to refill your feeders. No one likes slipping or falling when there is snow or ice. On occasion, birds may accidentally fly into windows. If this happens, use some window clings to help the birds recognize that the glass is there. Your feeders should have some shrubs or trees within 10 feet so the birds can find cover if a cat or hawk shows up. Shrubs and trees also give the birds a place to perch when eating the seed you are providing. For even more birds, provide a clean source of water.

If you are new to feeding the birds, a trip to your local grocery or hardware store may be overwhelming. Keep your feeder selections simple. Many people use a hopper or house feeder. This feeder can be mounted on a post or hung from a tree branch and holds enough seed for several days.

You may then decide to add a platform feeder which can also be mounted on a post. Some are designed to be placed on the ground. Additional kinds of feeders are a tube feeder, suet feeder or peanut feeder. If you are reusing feeders from last year, make sure they have been cleaned. Before selecting a feeder, you may want to know which variety of seed attracts which kinds of birds. The variety of birds that will be attracted depends on the seed or other food you select and how it is provided.

The variety of seed mixes may cause confusion and convince you to buy something you don't need or may waste. The seed that will attract the greatest variety of birds is the black-oil sunflower seed. This seed may cost a little more but is much better than using mixed seed. Birds including chickadees, nuthatches and titmice prefer the black-oil sunflower seed.

If you are providing a mixed seed, these birds will just throw the other seed away to get the sunflower seeds. Sunflower seeds, millet, and cracked corn can be placed on a platform feeder or on the ground. If you are spreading seed on the ground, it's recommended to rotate where this is done and to routinely rake up debris and droppings. Other birds such as mourning doves, finches and sparrows are attracted to seed on the ground.

My personal favorite feeder is a peanut feeder. This feeder will



attract a variety of woodpeckers, wrens and nuthatches and is squirrel-proof. If you would like to offer a greater variety of food, suet or suet cakes work well. Real suet would come from a butcher shop and is a great source of protein. Other suet cakes commonly sold may be made of different blends to attract different birds.

One word of caution about suet: suet sometimes attracts undesirable birds such as European starlings. If starlings become a problem, the solution is to temporarily remove the suet.

Sometimes people report not seeing any birds at their feeders. A variety of reasons can cause this; there may be a hawk nearby, or seed you are offering could be moldy. If so, dispose of the old seed and install new clean seed. The birds may be feeding on other natural food such as seeds and berries that are still available. Maybe nearby neighbors also have bird feeders set up.

Remember the birds are more likely to visit feeders early in the morning or later in the day so during the middle of the day birds may not be present.

Fill your feeders, relax this winter and watch the birds!

Additional information:

- Landscaping for Wildlife: Trees, Shrubs, and Vines <https://extension.psu.edu/landscaping-for-wildlife-trees-shrubs-and-vines>
- Project FeederWatch: feederwatch.org

Prepare! Don't Let a Winter Storm Take You by Surprise

Before the storm strikes, make sure your home, office and vehicles are stocked with supplies you might need. Make sure farm animals and pets also have the essentials they will need during a winter storm.



Know how to dress for varying degrees of cold weather.

At Home & Work

Your primary concerns at home or work during a winter storm are loss of heat, power and telephone service and a shortage of supplies. If storm conditions continue for more than a day. In either place, you should have available:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio and portable radio to receive emergency information
- Extra food and water such as dried fruit, nuts, granola bars and other food requiring no cooking or refrigeration.
- Extra prescription medicine
- Baby items such as diapers and formula
- First-aid supplies
- Heating fuel: refuel before you are empty; fuel carriers may not reach you for days after a winter storm
- Emergency heat source: fireplace, wood stove or space heater properly ventilated to prevent a fire
- Fire extinguisher, smoke alarm; test smoke alarms monthly to ensure they work properly
- Extra pet food and warm shelter for pets
- Review generator safety: Never run a generator in an enclosed space
- Make sure your carbon monoxide detector is working correctly and that the outside vent is clear of leaves and debris. During or after the storm, make sure it is cleared of snow.
- Home fires are common each winter when trying to stay warm. Review ways to keep your home and loved ones safe.

In Vehicles

Each year, on average, more than 5,000 people are killed and more than 418,000 are injured due to weather-related vehicle crashes. If you need

to drive in snow or cold conditions, **TAKE IT SLOW IN THE SNOW**. Black ice can be difficult to see. If the temperature is near freezing, drive like you're on ice—you may be!

Before you leave the house, especially before a longer trip in winter, make sure all fluid levels are full and ensure that the lights, heater and windshield wipers are in proper condition. Keep your gas tank near full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines. Avoid traveling alone. Let someone know your timetable and primary and alternate routes. Then call 511 for the latest traffic and road incidents, including construction and weather conditions and restrictions. Every state offers this Department of Transportation service. Call before you leave; it might change your plans!

Fully check and winterize you vehicle before the winter season begins. Carry a Winter Storm Survival Kit that includes the following:

- Mobile phone, charger, batteries
- Blankets/sleeping bags
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Knife
- High-calorie, non-perishable food
- Extra clothing to keep dry
- Large empty can to use as emergency toilet, tissues, toilet paper and paper towels
- Small can and waterproof matches to melt snow for drinking water
- Sack of sand or cat litter for traction
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper and brush
- Tool kit
- Tow rope
- Battery booster cables
- Water container
- Candle and matches to provide light and in an emergency, lifesaving heat.
- Compass and road maps, don't depend on mobile devices with limited battery life.

On the Farm, Pet Owners

- Move animals to sheltered areas or bring pets inside. Shelter belts, properly laid out and oriented, are better protection for cattle than confining shelters, such as sheds.
- Haul extra feed to nearby feeding areas.
- Have water available. Most animals die from dehydration in winter storms.
- Make sure pets have plenty of food and water and a warm shelter.



Venison Recipes

Carbonnade: Field & Stream's Favorite Venison Stew Recipe



Carbonnade is a traditional, rib-sticking Belgian stew made with beef, onions, and a spike of dark beer. Adapted for wild game, this venison stew recipe is the perfect remedy for a cold day in the field, and a sly way to integrate the two primary hunting-camp food groups (those being meat and beer).

Venison Stew Ingredients

- 3 lb. venison stew meat, cut into 2-inch cubes
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 4 slices bacon, chopped
- 3 yellow onions, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. dark brown sugar
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 16 oz. Belgian dark strong ale or other dark flavorful beer
- 1 cup (or more) chicken stock
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- 1 tsp. apple cider vinegar (or lemon juice)
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Directions

1. Heat a large pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the butter and bacon, and cook until barely crispy. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon, reserving for later. Dry the venison with paper towels, then salt and pepper generously. Add the meat to the pot, in batches to avoid overcrowding and raise the heat to high. Sear the meat well on all sides, then remove to a plate.
2. Add the onions and brown sugar to the pot or Dutch oven and reduce the heat to medium-low. Cook, stirring occasionally, for about 20 minutes, or until the onions are soft and caramelized, with a deep golden-brown color. Stir in the garlic and cook for 2 more minutes.
3. Raise the heat to medium-high. Pour in the beer and scrape the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon to dislodge any tasty brown bits. Bring to a boil, then add the reserved bacon and the meat along with any accumulated juices. Add the chicken stock you may need more than a cup to cover the meat), bay leaf, and thyme, and bring to a low simmer. Reduce the heat, cover, and simmer until the meat is very tender,

about 2 hours.

4. Before serving, uncover and raise the heat to medium to bring the stew to a fast simmer. Simmer for about 10 minutes, or until the liquids are reduced to a sauce-like consistency. Stir in the vinegar or lemon juice, and check the seasoning, adding salt and pepper as needed. Serve the stew over buttered egg noodles or dumplings, if desired, topping each bowl with a sprinkling of parsley. **Serves 6.**

PRIMAL PIONEER

Ground Venison Meatballs

We love to keep a batch or two of these classic venison meatballs in our freezer. They're perfect for when you need an easy weeknight dinner. This recipe calls for baking the deer meat meatballs, but check out the recipe not section below for alternative cooking options.



Ingredients

- 1 lb. ground venison (ground deer meat)
- ½ lb. ground Italian sausage or ground port
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 large egg
- 1 Tbsp. Italian seasoning
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ white onion—diced
- 1 tsp. minced garlic
- 1 jar marinara

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a large bowl, add all the ingredients and mix to combine.
3. Roll the meat mixture into 1-1.5 inch round meatballs and place onto a baking sheet. Continue until all meatballs are formed.
4. Bake for 25-30 minutes, or until the internal temperature reaches 160°F.
5. Remove from the oven.
6. Transfer the meatballs to a large oven-safe skillet, and pour the jar of marinara over the meatballs. Place the skillet into the oven and let heat for about 10 minutes, just enough to warm the sauce.
7. Serve over pasta or enjoy on their own!

Do pine trees and pine needles make soil more acidic?



A very common gardening myth is that pine trees and the needles they drop acidify the soil. While it's true that the soil near pines is often quite acidic, the soil pH was not determined by the tree. Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) is one of the dominant forest tree species in

much of New Hampshire (and New York), and it grows best in places with acidic, well-drained soil. Pines grow where they do because the soil and climate are suitable, and they are not creating acid conditions themselves. When nothing grows beneath a white pine tree, it is probably because the tree has numerous shallow roots and is casting too much shade.

Benefits of Using Pine Needles As Mulch

Pine needles themselves are acidic but do not have the capacity to appreciably lower the soil pH. To do that, it is necessary to incorporate a soil acidifier such as sulfur or aluminum sulfate. If you are unsure of the pH in your garden, you should have the soil

tested. As pine needles break down and are incorporated into the soil, decomposing organisms gradually neutralize them. Thus, there is no harm in using pine needles to mulch shrub borders, flower beds and vegetable gardens. Even a 2 to 3 inch layer of pine mulch will not change the soil pH enough to measure.

There is a long list of benefits to using pine needle mulch, including that it is free and often readily available. Pine needles provide all the advantages of any other mulching material, including conserving soil moisture, suppressing weeds, adding soil nutrients, moderating soil temperature and keeping plants and fruit clean during heavy rains. Additionally, pine needles have a tendency to stay loose and light, not forming an impenetrable crust like wood mulch. They are quite stable and do not tend to wash out of beds during heavy rains. In spots where it is difficult to keep mulch in place on a slope, pine needles may be the answer. Finally, pine needles are longer lasting than other types of organic mulch, and their fine texture is quite attractive against most permanent plantings.

If you have a pine tree in your yard, start taking advantage of fallen needles. They are a free mulch and will benefit your garden.

NYS IPM Program

What's Bugging You?

Not all things that buzz, crawl or slither are pests. Figuring out WHAT is bugging you is the first step.

DECEMBER 5: IPM for clothes moths and pantry moths – This month we'll focus in two moths that can be pests in your home—clothes moths and pantry moths. Learn how to use IPM tools to deal with them.

[Register Here!](#)



MSU EXTENSION SERVICE—Steve Duncan

Avoiding the Holiday Blues



Holidays are supposed to be a time full of joy, good cheer, and bright hopes. Unfortunately, for some people this is not so. Some common reasons people experience the holiday blues include; increased stress and tiredness, unrealistic expecta-

tions, too much commercialization, overcrowding in shopping areas, and unpleasant holiday memories. What can you do to avoid or cope with the holiday blues?

Here are some ideas to help you avoid the holiday blues:

- Keep holiday expectations realistic. Examine your personal holiday-related expectations and priorities for housekeeping, gift-giving, decorating, food, as well as visiting friends and family.
- Plan well in advance. Make a detailed, prioritized list of necessary items and activities. Involve others in preparing and implementing the plan.
- Pace yourself. Don't take on more activities than you can realistically handle and still enjoy the holiday.
- Spend time with people who are supportive and who care about you.
- Maintain year round some of the holiday activities you enjoy. Spread out beyond the holiday period those things that brought you joy and happiness.
- Try to maintain a balanced diet, get plenty of rest, and exercise regularly.

Keeping the Holidays Safe for Your Family

December is the season to be safe, not sorry. As we deck the halls for the holidays, let's remember that safety comes first. Here are some tips that will keep your holidays jolly and safe.

Lights

- Buy lights that are UL-approved. Check for frayed wires, loose connections, cracked sockets and spots where bare wire is exposed.
- Do not overload extension cords, outlets and electrical circuits. Follow manufacturer's instructions when stringing light sets together. In general, there should be no more than three sets of lights to each outlet or cord.
- Use only light sets labels "outdoor," "weatherproof" or "all-weather" on the outside of your home.
- Never run an extension cord under a carpet, through a door or in any other area where there is the potential for wear and tear.
- Turn off lights when you go to bed or leave the home.

Decorations

- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant decorations and trimmings.
- Avoid placing breakable decorations and ornaments within reach of small children.

Trees

- Select only fresh, natural trees. The best way to ensure your tree is fresh is to cut it yourself. Otherwise, look for a tree with branches that are supple and needles that bend without breaking. If you tap the tree on the ground and many needles fall off, the tree is too dry.
- Keep your tree as fresh as possible. Store it outside in water until you are ready to decorate it. When the tree is brought inside, cut off the butt end diagonally, one or two inches from the end. Place in a sturdy base and keep end covered in water.
- Make sure your tree is stable and secure. Keep away from any sources of heat. Dispose of your tree when lots of needles start to fall off.
- If you have infants or toddlers, cut back the lower branches to prevent eye injuries.
- Avoid decorating the tree with breakable ornaments, ornaments with small parts or ornaments that resemble food -- these are potential choking hazards for young children.
- If you buy an artificial tree, choose one that is flame-resistant and keep it away from heat sources.

Candles

- Candles are an important part of many holiday traditions. Never use candles on or near trees. Always keep candles in safe bases, away from flammable materials and out of reach of small children.
- Light candles and leave them burning only when an adult is present in the room.

Fireplaces

- Many people like to set a holiday mood by having a fire in the fireplace. Make sure your damper works and the chimney flue is clean. Always keep the damper open while the fire is burning. Never have a fire without a fireplace screen.
- Never use gasoline or other flammable liquids to start a fire. Remove all decorations from the fireplace.
- Never use the fireplace as an incinerator. Burning packaging can produce



carbon monoxide and other toxic fumes.

- Install UL-approved smoke alarms on every level of your home and UL-approved carbon monoxide detectors in or near bedrooms.

Toys and Gifts

- Buy toys suited to the age and abilities of the child. Use manufacturers' age recommendations to guide your purchases.
- Examine toys for sharp edges, small parts or sharp points. Avoid toys that produce extremely loud noises that damage hearing or propel objects that can injure eyes.
- Do not buy toys with small, detachable parts for young children. Manufacturers warn consumers when toys are not recommended for children under three. Choose non-toxic toys for young children, who will probably stick them in their mouths.
- Teach children how to use toys properly and safely. Examine toys periodically and repair or discard broken ones.
- Dispose of all plastic bags and other packaging that could be choking or suffocation hazards.
- Keep round, hard foods like candy cane pieces, mints, nuts and popcorn out of reach of young children.

Poisons

- Vent all fuel-burning appliances like fireplaces and space heaters. The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning dramatically increases during the winter.
- Keep alcoholic drinks out of reach of children.
- Some holiday plants like holly, mistletoe, amaryllis, Christmas rose, crown of thorns, English ivy and Jerusalem cherry are poisonous if eaten. Poinsettias are not, but can cause skin irritation and stomachache.
- Artificial snow spray can cause lung irritation if inhaled. Use only non-toxic snow spray.

Shopping with kids

- Keep children under the age of four in a stroller or on a harness.
- For children four and up, designate a safe meeting place in the event you get separated. However, the best way to keep kids safe in public places is by vigilant supervision.
- Don't get overloaded with packages. Make frequent trips to the car to leave packages.
- Teach a child older than three to yell, "Help! This isn't my mommy (or daddy) if someone tries to grab him/her."
- Drive defensively, especially during the holidays when drivers are stressed and rushed.

Source: Consumer Product Safety Commission and National SAFE KIDS Campaign.

How to Build a Healthy Charcuterie Board for the Holidays

Heading to a holiday party, but not sure what to bring? Everyone loves a well-assembled charcuterie board (pronounced: shaar-koot-tr-ee). While charcuterie traditionally refers to the preparation of cured meats, the term is frequently used to describe snack trays and plates with a variety of themes and compositions. Our take is to create a healthful snack plate using the MyPlate food groups and guidelines. Charcuterie boards are the perfect option for any holiday party because:

1. There is minimal cooking involved;
2. It contains a variety of options for everyone and
3. A charcuterie board can be a light and healthy snack for those who don't want to fill up before a main meal.

Building a charcuterie board based on MyPlate guidelines can ensure that guests have a satisfying and healthier selection while celebrating this holiday season. MyPlate was developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is a visual representation of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans depicted in five food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy. Incorporating these food groups into your diet regularly promotes a healthy lifestyle and reduces risk for diet-related chronic disease. Keep reading for MyPlate-inspired tips on how to create a mouthwatering charcuterie board.

FRUITS & VEGETABLES

MyPlate encourages you to make at least half of your plate fruits and vegetables – and this can directly apply to your charcuterie board! Not only do fruits and vegetables contain fiber and other essential nutrients that benefit your health, but they can also add eye-popping colors to your spread. The fruit group consists of all fresh, frozen, canned and dehydrated fruits in any form (i.e. 100% fruit juice, whole, cut up, pureed, cooked). At least half of the fruits you eat should be whole fruit, rather than 100% fruit juice. Your board will shine with vibrant-colored fruits like blueberries, raspberries, red apples (leave the skin on for even more fiber!), grapes of any color, cherries, pomegranate seeds and orange slices.

Vegetables can also contribute to the aesthetic appeal of your charcuterie board. Any raw, cooked, fresh, frozen, canned, dried vegetable (or 100% vegetable juice) are in MyPlate's vegetable group. MyPlate encourages you to vary your veggie routine, providing all the more reason to add multiple types of vegetables to your board. Consider adding green pepper slices, cauliflower, carrot sticks, [EFNEP's Roasted Garlic Brussel Sprouts](#), sugar snap peas and [EFNEP's Harvard Style Beets](#).

GRAINS

MyPlate encourages us to make half the grains we eat whole grains. On a charcuterie board, you can incorporate whole grains from the grain group by adding small slices of whole grain bread or whole wheat rolls, graham crackers, whole wheat crackers, slices of whole grain pita bread, and even popcorn! Whole grains contain all parts of the grain, including the

bran, germ, and endosperm. These parts of the grain are beneficial for our health because they contain essential B vitamins, iron, magnesium, selenium and dietary fiber. *Refined* grains on the other hand, such as white bread or pasta, are processed to remove the bran and the germ. Incorporating whole grains instead of refined increases the amount of health-boosting benefits we consume, reducing our risk of chronic disease.

PROTEIN

Dietary protein is essential for immune health, maintaining and growing muscle, repairing tissues and maintaining fluid balance in the body. MyPlate's protein guideline is to eat a variety of lean or low-fat protein sources, including seafood, lean ground beef, pork, eggs and skinless poultry. There are also multiple vegetarian options in the protein group, including beans, peas, nuts, seeds, soy products and lentils. For a holiday charcuterie board, try vegetarian protein sources for a fun twist on the classic charcuterie board. Consider including a variety of nuts, like almonds, cashews, pistachios, pecans, or walnuts to your board. Seeds, like [EFNEP's Roasted Pumpkin Seeds](#) or sunflower seeds, are savory, easy-to-add protein options. Roasted chickpeas and edamame are also fan favorites given their crunchy texture.

DAIRY

MyPlate's dairy group includes milk, yogurt, cheese, lactose-free milk, fortified soy milk, and yogurt. Try to consume mainly low-fat and fat-free dairy options (or lactose-free/fortified plant versions). Charcuterie boards are the perfect opportunity to taste test a variety of hard cheeses (cheddar, gouda, mozzarella) and soft cheeses (brie, feta, Camembert). One of my favorite ways to add dairy to a charcuterie board is through a yogurt dip. Try [EFNEP's Cinnamon Yogurt Dip](#) to meet your dairy needs, while also having a side that perfectly complements your desired fruit choices.

ASSEMBLY, GARNISHES & GENERAL TIPS

Now that we have our nutrition bases (and food groups) covered, time for the best part! Building a charcuterie board provides an opportunity for you to be creative and play with your food. To make your board more alluring, place smaller items like nuts and seeds in bowls that fit on top of the charcuterie board; then, place items that take up more space like whole grain bread and sliced fruits around the bowls. Embrace your inner food artist by seeing which colors look most attention-grabbing when placed next to each other. There's really no wrong way to do this! Decorate your board with simple garnishes like fresh sage, rosemary or small jars of honey and jams.

In terms of food safety, remember to wash your hands, all surfaces, produce, your platter, and any utensils being used for serving. Encourage your guest to wash their hands prior to enjoying your creation and opt for single-use toothpicks or tongs to pick up items from the board. Keep all perishable items in the refrigerator prior to your event and refrigerate your charcuterie board after two hours.

Charcuterie Board Check List

CHEESES 3-4

- ☐ HARD (PARMESAN, ASIAGO, ETC.)
- ☐ SEMI-HARD (CHEDDAR, MANCHEGO, ETC.)
- ☐ SEMI-SOFT (GOUDA, BLUE CHEESE, ETC.)
- ☐ SOFT (BRIE, GOAT CHEESE, ETC.)

MEATS 2-3

- ☐ SALAMI
- ☐ CAPICOLA
- ☐ PEPPERONI
- ☐ HAM
- ☐ PROSCIUTTO
- ☐ CALABRESE

FRUITS 2-3

- ☐ RED (STRAWBERRY, RASPBERRY)
- ☐ PURPLE (GRAPE, BLUEBERRY)
- ☐ BLACK (BLACKBERRY, DRIED FIG)
- ☐ WHITE (APPLE, PEAR)
- ☐ ORANGE (ORANGE, APRICOT)

NUTS 1-2

- ☐ CASHEW
- ☐ WALNUTS
- ☐ PECAN
- ☐ PEANUTS
- ☐ PISTACHIO
- ☐ OTHER

SPREADS 2-3

- ☐ SWEET (JAM, MARMALADE, HONEY)
- ☐ SALTY (MUSTARD, AIOLI, HUMMUS)
- ☐ EXTRA

CRACKERS 2-3

- ☐ PLAIN
- ☐ MULTI-GRAIN
- ☐ FLAVORFUL

EXTRA

- ☐ CUCUMBERS
- ☐ CARROTS
- ☐ TOMATOES
- ☐ DARK CHOCOLATE

BRINY 1-2

- ☐ OLIVES
- ☐ PICKLES
- ☐ PICKLED ONIONS

How to Grow and Care for Amaryllis

Introduction

Bold and beautiful, the huge, showy flowers of hybrid amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) raise gardeners' spirits during the cold, gray days of winter. These large, tender bulbs produce spectacular flowers that can be up to 6 inches across in colors that range from reds, oranges, and pinks to whites, yellows, and bicolors on thick stalks that can rise 24 inches high! And they will re-bloom year after year with only minimal care.

About Amaryllis



Photo credit: Tom_F_GA

Native to tropical Chile and Peru, amaryllis normally blooms from February to April. The leaves grow during spring and summer. With cooler fall temperatures and dry soil, the bulb goes dormant until December or January. Once you understand the amaryllis' natural growth cycle, you can mimic it to bring your bulb into bloom year after year.

Planting Instructions for Amaryllis

When you purchase your amaryllis bulb it will be in a dormant state (unless, of course, you buy a potted plant in bloom). Often bulbs are sold as kits containing a bulb, an appropriately sized pot, and some growing medium. If you are not starting with a kit, choose a pot size that leaves no more than 2 inches between the bulb and the edge of the pot. Using sterile, peat-based planting mix, set the bulb, pointed end up, high in the pot so that the top third of it will be exposed when you fill the space between the bulb and the side of the pot with potting mix. Water well with lukewarm water; then place the pot in a sunny window at average room temperatures (65-75 degrees F). Water only sparingly to keep the potting mix from drying out until a shoot emerges. Since plants will be top-heavy when they're in bloom, if you're planting in a plastic pot it's a good idea to set it inside a heavier clay or ceramic pot for added stability.

Ongoing Care of Amaryllis

The growth coming out of the bulb initially is usually the thick, leafless flower stalk with a large flower bud at its tip; the leaves will emerge later. As this giant stalk grows, begin watering whenever the top inch of potting mix is dry, taking care not to get water on the neck of the bulb. Also start feeding with a balanced houseplant fertilizer every 10 days, applying according to the manufacturer's instructions. Because the flower stalk is so tall, you may want to stake it. Just be careful not to stab and injure the bulb when you place the stake in the pot. Give the pot a quarter turn every few days to keep the flower stalk from bending toward the light.

It usually takes amaryllis about 6 to 8 weeks from potting up to come into bloom. Each flower stalk will produce 2-6 flowers, and large bulbs may produce two or more flower stalks. Once the plant has come into bloom, moving it to a cool, bright location will prolong the flowering period. As the individual flowers fade, carefully cut them off. When all the flowers on a stalk have gone by, cut off the stalk a couple of inches above the neck of the bulb.

Continuing Care

The long, strap-like leaves will continue growing actively through the spring and summer, so give your plants lots of sun and continue to water and fertilize regularly. After all danger of frost is past, the pot can be set outdoors in full sun for the summer months. Be sure to gradually harden off your amaryllis before setting it outside so that it is ready for exposure to outdoor sunlight and temperatures. If you keep your amaryllis indoors over the summer, provide the brightest light possible and continue to fertilize and water regularly.

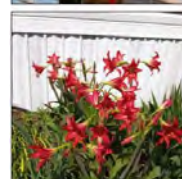
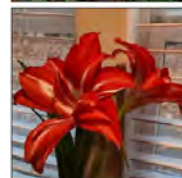
Dormancy

In early fall the leaves will begin to turn yellow. At this point, gradually decrease watering; then stop altogether when the foliage has died back. Clip off the old leaves a couple of inches above the neck of the bulb. Bring the potted bulb indoors before the first frost and store it on its side in a cool place (50-55 degrees F) for 8 to 10 weeks. Don't worry if your bulb doesn't lose all its leaves. What is important is that the bulb receives that 8 to 10 week period of exposure to cool temperatures.

Reflowering

Once your bulb has had at least an 8-10 week dormant period or when you see the tip of the new flower stalk just beginning to emerge from the neck of the bulb, it's time to prepare for another season of bloom. If the bulb has outgrown its pot, repot it in a slightly larger one. Otherwise, carefully remove the top inch of potting mix from around the bulb while it's still in its pot and replace it with fresh mix. Any offsets (small bulbs attached to the side of the mother bulb) that have formed should be left in place for two seasons, after which they can be removed and potted up separately. Then care for the bulb just as you did the first time it was planted, and in 6 to 8 weeks you'll be enjoying another round of beautiful flowers.

If you have a number of amaryllis bulbs, you can bring them into flower in sequence just by staggering the times you awaken them from dormancy and pot them up. This way you can enjoy the spectacular blooms of these awesome plants throughout the winter and early spring.





Homesteading



CCE Tompkins County—Guillermo Metz

Wood Stove Safety

Maintenance Check



Have your chimney and wood stove inspected by a certified chimney specialist once a year, well before the heating season. If you would like, there are a few simple checks of your chimney and stovepipe you can do yourself (see our [Proper Maintenance](#) pages for more on maintenance of your wood stove):

- Stovepipes can deteriorate over time, so you should test the soundness of your pipe on a regular basis after the first year or two of use. You can do this by simply squeezing the pipe: the walls should not be crushable; if you can crush the walls then the creosote has eaten away too much metal for the installation to be safe.
- To test the soundness of a chimney, plug the top of the flue then start a small smoky fire below. The smoke will puff out of any leaks that the chimney liner contains. This technique is known as puffing.
- Before firing up the stove, check the amount of creosote accumulation. More than ¼-inch of creosote is considered hazardous and should be cleaned out before your next burn. Perform the check for creosote every two weeks until you have become accustomed to the stove's behavior. You can do this by peering into the system or by tapping on pipe sections with a metal object. Once you're used to the ringing sound that a clean pipe makes, you should be able to distinguish the dull thud of a dirty one.

Chimney Fires

Chimney fires are caused by an accumulation of creosote on the stovepipe or chimney. Creosote is made up of condensed volatile gases created by incomplete combustion of the wood. As these gases rise in the chimney walls. When sufficiently heated, through normal wood stove operation, the creosote can ignite, causing a chimney fire.

Chimney fires can start quickly and be very powerful, shooting flames many feet above the chimney cap and producing a loud rumble like a freight train going by. They can also be less dramatic: slow-burning chimney fires don't get enough air to become "ragers". But they can still reach excessively high temperatures and

can cause as much damage to the chimney structure and nearby combustible parts of the house as their more spectacular cousins. With proper installation and chimney care, chimney fires are entirely preventable, but if you are faced with one, here is some basic information about them.

- Chimney fire signs
 - The chimney is emitting sparks
 - The stovepipe is exceedingly hot, maybe even glowing
 - Air is rushing through the draft in the stove
 - Loud cracking or popping noises can be heard or you hear a rumbling like that caused by a low-flying plane or a freight train.
- If you have a chimney fire
 - Call 911 and get yourself and your family out of the house.
 - If the fire has kicked in and only if it is safe to do so, before leaving the house you should close up the stove to starve the fire of oxygen.
 - Never pour water into the stove! The rapid cooling of the stove's body can cause it to crack, which will only aid oxygen flow to the blaze.
 - If oxygen is leaking up to the fire through a crack or other imperfection in the stove then flashing can occur (brief, very hot ignitions caused by the influx of oxygen). Repeated flashing can tear apart masonry chimneys and stovepipes. If you suspect that flashing is occurring, the best line of defense is to leave the dampers open.
 - Retreat a safe distance from your home and wait for the fire department to arrive. Even if it looks like the fire has burned itself out, don't return until they have done a thorough check of your house. Spray your roof--not directly on the chimney--with a garden hose to help limit the possible spread of fire. Even if flames have stopped shooting out of the top of the chimney and the rumbling noise has stopped, there may still be enough heat on or near combustible parts of your house to ignite them.
- After a chimney fire, have a certified installer or chimney sweep do an extensive cleaning and check of your system for soundness. The blaze likely transformed any creosote within your chimney into a thicker, crustier layer which will cause extremely rapid creosote accumulation during your next burn if left in the chimney. The stovepipe and chimney may also have become damaged by the fire.

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