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Environment, Gardening & Land Use

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Spring Lawn & Garden Tips

Submitted by John Farfaglia

mow lawns at 2-3" heights to help reduce weed competition and promote healthy root systems.

- Lime can be applied to lawns and gardens now if your soil test shows a need for it. Our office can test your soil samples for \$2.
- Although fall seeding is best, grass seed can be planted in late April – Mid May.
- An easy way to remember lawn fertilizing schedules is by the holiday dates. Memorial Day, 4th of July and Labor Day. Using a high nitrogen fertilizer on those dates will promote a thick green lawn.
- Clump Forming perennial flowers like mums, hosta, rubeckia and daylilies are best divided in early spring while they are still small.
- The best time to prune spring flowering shrubs like forsythia and lilac is right after blooming. This assures normal flowering for next year.
- Most evergreens are best pruned after they have developed their new growth. This is normally in the mid-June to early July period.

Do not plant tender vegetables like tomatoes before our last expected spring frost. The average date is May 12 but we have had frost as late as May 20 in recent years. If you are moving any hou outside for the summer do it gradually. Th leaves can burn if placed directly into sunshine.



Xeriscape Gardening: What is it?

Submitted by John Farfaglia Originally developed in Colorado, xeriscaping is fast becoming the choice of many gardeners who have experienced long, dry spells during the summer. Xeriscaping, sometimes called Water Wise Gardening, is a method of planting drought tolerant, disease resistant plant varieties that create a lush landscape that also conserves water.

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Cornell Cooperative Extension in Niagara County provides equal program and employment opportunities.

Most plants are perennials and are readily available at local nurseries, plant swaps, or growing in your neighbor's backyard. Although these plants are low maintenance, there are a few general guidelines for initial planting. Select a dry site. These plants do not like wet feet, so good drainage is required for optimum plant health. Mulching will help preserve soil moisture during those hot, mid or late summer dry spells. If selecting shrubs, provide plenty of water for the first growing season. Use a slow-release fertilizer and remove faded or dead flowers and leaves

The following plants were chosen for their ability to thrive in tough conditions, for their low usage, and for their potential to add beauty and diversity to any landscape.

Yarrow – (*Achillea* sp.)
Butterfly Weed – (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Bergenia – (*Bergenia cordifolia*)
Flowering Quince – (*Chaenomeles speciosa*)
Wand Flower – (*Gaura Lindheimeri*)
Heliopsis – (*Heliopsis* sp.)
Siberian Iris – (*Iris siberica*)
Red Hot Poker – (*Kniphofia ivaria*)
Russian Arborviate – (*Microbiota decussata*)
Bee Balm – (*Monarda didyma*)
Russian Sage – (*Perkovskia atriplicifolia*)
Blackeyed Susan – (*Rudbeckia fulgida*)
Stonecrop – (**Sedum sp.**)
Goldenrod – (*Solidago rugosa*)
Lamb's ears – (*Stachys byzantina*)
Bush Cinquefoil – (*Potentilla fruticosa*)
Thyme, Oregano, Winter Savory
Grasses – (*Calamagrostis*, *Festuca*,
Miscanthus, *Pennisetum* spp.)
Blue-mist Shrub – (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*)

For more information on Xeriscaping, refer to the following:

Xeriscape Handbook (A How To Guide To Natural, Resource Wise Gardening) By: Gayle Weinstein, Fulcrum Publishing
Xeriscape Plant Guide (200 Water Wise Plants For Gardens and Landscaping) Introduction by: Rob Proctor, Fulcrum Publishing
Source: By Dom Parise, Program Assistant, CCE of Ulster County

Doing More With Less

By Paul E. Lehman

These are times that are creating a lot of aggravation for many people in our county. Not only is there employment insecurity but with ominous forecasts on global fossil fuel supply and demand and high health care costs, people have a lot to worry about.

Sadly, there are people out there who are increasingly up against it when it comes to allocating scarce dollars between filling the fuel tank (car or home) and putting square meals on the table much less finding affordable medical care. Sadly, the safety net in one of the richest nations has a lot of holes in it.

Whether you view the government as owing stability in prices or not, leadership in planning for the future or not and a support system if you are feeling desperation about your financial situation, you owe it to yourself to stretch your dollars in ways you may not have considered before.

Cornell Cooperative Extension has offered workshops through the "EmPower Program" and many people have called seeking assistance from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) Assisted Home Performance Program. The former for households earning 60% of the median income in New York State (for a given household size) and latter for households earning 80% of the median income (for a given household size) do involve jumping through some hoops in having your home assessed by an approved contractor and following through on having the work professionally done.

So now that the lazy hazy days of summer are looming, don't sit on your hands just because the furnace bills are dropping (or you managed to live with the balanced billing monthly obligation). Call 1-877-NY-SMART to get the process moving before the end of June. You want improvements made before next winter rolls around and if affording new windows, better insulation or more efficient appliances is the hold up,

you won't have it easier by ignoring these energy drains.

Even if "programs" are not for you, there are a host of tips you can take to tighten up your home and even alternative fuels that will cost less to heat your home. Ask Paul Lehman (433-8839 ext. 241) about these and read the brochures he can send you on energy conservation. Fuel for the vehicle and health costs are not so easy to deal with. But, at least address the things you can control!

Fertilizing Plants

Submitted by John Farfaglia

Fertilizer is like multivitamins for plants. It helps assure that nutrients are available as needed for healthy growth and production. In the vegetable garden, soil nutrients are harvested in the crops and need to be replaced. In the flower garden, appropriate applications of fertilizer encourage ornamentals to put on their best show.

Before beginning a fertilization program it would be advisable to have a soil test done. This service is offered at a fee of \$2.00 per sample at Cornell Cooperative Extension, Niagara County office. Test results will enable you to customize the fertilizer application to the needs of your soil and the plants you intend to grow. Too much fertilizer can damage or kill plants, so it is better to find out ahead of time what is lacking.

Soil pH also matters, because extreme pH values, say less than 6 (acidic) or greater than 7 (alkaline) greatly reduce the availability to the plants of certain nutrients, even if those nutrients are present in the soil. For example, phosphorus is most soluble in a pH range between 6.2 and 6.8. A pH of 6.5 is ideal for the majority of cultivated plants. A determination of pH is part of the soil test mentioned above.

The three numbers on a package of fertilizer can be thought of as the active ingredients. They represent the percentages of the

macronutrients nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K). A bag of 5-10-5 contains 5% nitrogen, 10% phosphorus and 5% potassium. The remaining 80% of the weight of the fertilizer is fillers.

Nitrogen promotes leaf growth by stimulating production of chlorophyll. A deficiency shows as stunted plants, yellowing leaves, with the oldest leaves turning yellow first, and leaf drop.

Phosphorus strengthens stems, improves disease and pest resistance and promotes flowering, fruiting and root development. A deficiency is revealed in stunted plants and purplish coloration of seedling leaves. Potassium helps plants digest and manufacture their foods. Leaf tips and edges turning yellow, then drying, oldest leaves first. The percentages of macronutrients in fertilizer vary to meet different plant needs and gardeners' goals. For instance, to boost flower production, apply a fertilizer high in phosphorus, such as 15-30-15. To green up a lawn select a mixture high in nitrogen, such as 25-6-4.

Organic or chemical products may supply the nutrients in fertilizer. Organics are derived from plant, animal or mineral sources. They rely on manure and compost, which are excellent for soil building, but not highly nutritive, bloodmeal, seaweed products and fish emulsion for nitrogen, bonemeal and rock phosphate for phosphorus, and wood ashes or greensand for potassium. Greensand is derived from an ocean mineral called glauconite, which is bright green. Organics offer us the opportunity to recycle materials such as brewery waste (Nutribrew), and sewage sludge (Milorganite). Milorganite has the added advantage of repelling deer.

Organic fertilizers break down slowly and deliver nutrients over a period of time. They encourage soil microorganisms, help soil retain moisture and carry little risk of over-fertilizing. Because of the lower percentage of nutrients, a larger quantity is needed, but it is applied less often since it is released slowly. A natural product may furnish only one nutrient, but the gardener

has the opportunity to customize the combination and the application as needed. While organics will not dissipate as rapidly and are available to plants over a longer period of time, they are made available to plants by microbial action, and that does not occur until the soil warms in spring.

Chemical fertilizers are synthetically manufactured, and require large amounts of energy, generally from non-renewable

sources. Chemical fertilizers do not add organic matter to the soil and do nothing to improve soil structure. Too much can burn plants, or wash away in heavy rain and add nitrate pollution to the water table. The advantage of chemical fertilizer is its ease of application and ready availability, like fast food for plants.

Source: by Sandy Melville, Chenango County Master Gardener

