

Welcome to the Horticulture Committee's second Quarterly Bulletin! We hope you find it helpful. The next issue will be distributed by email in early March, 2021.

## Winter Perennial Garden Maintenance & Planning

December, January, February

### Maintain current gardens:

- Mulch garden plants with 3-5 inches of pine needles, straw or chopped leaves once the ground has frozen, especially for fall-planted perennials. You can also mulch with old Christmas tree boughs. (Mulching before the ground has frozen can delay dormancy and makes a good home for voles.) Mulch your garlic beds with 4-6 inches of chopped leaves or shredded straw to avoid frost heaving.
- Protect shrubs that are vulnerable to deer and rabbits by adding netting or chicken wire, wrapping in burlap or applying repellents.

### Plan garden designs:

- Review garden catalogs, magazines, books, websites to get those creative juices flowing. What is the look and feeling you are trying to create?
- Take inventory of the plants you have. What is working? What isn't?
- Note the bloom period, size and color of each plant. Plant database websites and guides such as "Succession of Bloom in the Perennial Garden" by Nancy Dubrule-Clemente (Natureworks) can help you do this. Where are the gaps in the succession of bloom?
- As you walk through your gardens, take notes on what is working (or not) from a winter interest point of view. Do you want to add a few shrubs or grasses come spring to make it more interesting in the winter?
- See separate Landscape Design handout.

### Order seeds:

- If your garden plans identified a need for more color, long-blooming annuals might be the solution. Or maybe you want to add different species or try your hand at growing edibles. Whatever your needs, don't wait until late winter to order. Many companies sell out their most popular varieties early.

### Sources:

[www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu), [www.acergardens.com](http://www.acergardens.com), and [www.naturework.com](http://www.naturework.com)

"The Well-Tended Perennial Garden; The Essential Guide to Planting + Pruning Techniques" by Tracy DiSabato-Aust.

## Firewood Ashes in Gardens

With COVID-19 changing how we get together, many families are entertaining in their backyards around a firepit. With all those extra ashes, here is some information regarding ashes in your gardens:

- Ash does not improve drainage in garden soil.
- Ash has a high pH, so it should not be added to alkaline (high pH) soils and not worked in around plants such as blueberries, red maples, rhododendrons, and others that require acidic [low pH] soil.
- If the ash is from untreated wood, you can add it to the compost pile—by sprinkling a little at a time, as you layer your compost pile. Wood ash helps neutralize the acidic nature of compost.
- Do NOT use ashes from charcoal briquettes or treated wood or painted wood.

By Denise Forrest

## Keeping Holiday Greenery Fresh

### Preserve Freshness of Greens:

- Try to cut your greens close to when you are going to use them. You can cut evergreen branches and berry sprigs from your own yard to ensure freshness in making holiday arrangements.
- Keep them in a cool location out of the sun.
- If you can, put them in water. If your greens will be in water or floral foam, make fresh diagonal cuts on the ends. This will help keep the water traveling up the stem. Give the cuttings (ends can be crushed) a soaking in a bucket of water for 24 hrs. or more to rehydrate the stems before making centerpieces, cut arrangements, or indoor garlands.
- If your greens will not have a water source, give them a misting of water every day. Misting with water helps them last longer.
- After conditioning, spray the leaves, needles, and branches with an anti-transpirant, such as WILT-PRUF, before making the centerpiece to keep the greens from losing moisture in the house.
- Outdoor wreaths and garland can also be sprayed after they're made to prolong their freshness in the cold dry air.
- Keep the fresh-cut centerpieces away from direct sunlight and heat sources.

### Maximize Fragrance:

- If fragrance is of the utmost importance, select a combination of aromatic evergreens for your garlands and wreaths. A mix of pine, cedar, eucalyptus, balsam, and juniper will result in a uniquely wintery sent. (Martha Stewart)

By Carolyn Bernard & Judy Van Heiningen

## Winter Plant Lore, Legends and Uses

- **Evergreen boughs** were used in mid-winter celebrations throughout history. Druids thought that evergreens were sacred since they "do not die" and they brought boughs inside to help their house survive the winter. Primitive tribes in Europe hung evergreens above their doors at the winter solstice since they believed woodland spirits were forced to wander in the cold. By offering the spirits shelter, they hoped for good fortune and good health.

- **Holly** in early times was believed to be a deterrent against witches and evil influences. It was also a symbol of domestic peace and eternal life. Others thought a sprig of holly on a bedpost brought happy dreams.
- **Rosemary** was enjoyed during the Middle Ages. Housewives spread it on the floor at Christmas, and as people walked on it, a pleasant aroma arose.
- **Mistletoe** developed many legends. After the Druids' winter solstice ceremony, followers hung it above their doorways to ward off evil spirits. All who entered received a kiss of friendship. Kissing associated with mistletoe is probably related to the kiss of peace that welcomed visitors in medieval times. After Christianity replaced many older religions, mistletoe was forbidden in churches, but it became part of Christmas in some homes, where they believed it brought couples a happy marriage.
- **Various trees and leaves became decorations.** Before the traditional Christmas tree was popular, one custom was to bring small potted cherry trees inside so they might bloom at New Year. Czechs and Polish people cut branches from the cherry tree. If the branch bloomed indoors, it was a sign of good luck in the coming year. In the south where evergreens are less prevalent, glossy magnolia leaves are used in holiday decorations. In the southwest, the indigenous pinyon pine [both tree and seed] and red chili peppers are common holiday decorations. In India, mango and banana trees are used in place of evergreens. Some Chinese decorate trees with paper flowers.
- **Fruit and vegetables** are used to celebrate Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa translates to "first fruits" in Swahili. Patterned after the African harvest, celebrants gather fruit, nuts, and vegetables for decorative purposes.  
By Denise Forrest

## Christmas Cactus

- Native to Brazil, Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) can bloom in shades of pink, white and even yellow around the end of December. Shortened days and longer nights plus temperatures below 68 degrees can trigger the plants to set flower buds. A cool room with 12 hours of darkness is the perfect location to initiate flower buds.
- Provide well-draining potting mix such as a cactus mix and allow the soil to feel dry on the surface before watering. They do better in clay pots and flower better when slightly root bound.
- Holiday cacti need full sun in spring and fall. They can be placed outside in dappled shade during the summer. Fertilize with an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer every two weeks during the summer growing season. Bring the plants in before first frost and never let them be in temperatures below 50 degrees F. They will need a rest and reduced watering after flowering.

Source: [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu)

## Connecticut Native Plants with Winter Interest

1. American Cranberry bush (*Viburnum trilobum*) 5'-6' tall - red fruit persists into winter and attracts birds.
2. Creeping Juniper (*Juniperis horizontalis*) low, 4" tall - its silver-blue foliage turns a purple tone in winter.

3. Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) tall tree - can eventually reach 60' tall; evergreen with soft 3"-5" needles.
4. Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) 5'-12' tall - our state flower; evergreen and interesting branching structure.
5. Red-twig Dogwood, aka Red Osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) 6'-9' tall - deciduous shrub; bright red stems are most striking in winter after its leaves fall off (brighter stem color if pruned each year).
6. Winterberry (*Ilex verticillate*) 6'-10' tall - deciduous holly with bright red berries throughout winter; food for birds.
7. Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) 12'-18' tall - This Connecticut native has small fragrant twisted flowers in November. (Please note that *Hamamelis x intermedia* is a hybrid that blooms in February and is important because it provides a necessary source for very early pollinators.)

By Denise Forrest

An excellent resource for looking up plants, shrubs and trees is: [www.hort.uconn.edu/Plants](http://www.hort.uconn.edu/Plants)

Another resource is: <http://plants.usda.gov/>

## Horticulture 2020-2021 Challenge

- If you haven't planted garlic yet, be sure to get it in this month before the ground freezes. Garlic is usually planted in November/December. See our garlic instructions sent out in early November. We will provide more guidance on harvesting, curing and storing garlic in our June issue.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Challenge is growing gourds. More information on gourds will be in our March, 2021 issue. In the meantime, check out the birdhouse gourd!

## Hot Topics: Spotted Lanternfly



UConn Master Gardener Program

- Unfortunately, the latest insect pest, the spotted lantern fly (SLF), has made inroads into Connecticut. The insect is actually a leafhopper, not a fly. It is an attractive insect but a crop and landscape pest. At this time, small populations have been found in Greenwich and New Canaan. Single individuals have been found in Stamford and West Haven. The CT Agricultural Experiment Station, DEEP, and USDA have been doing surveys in Fairfield County and West Haven to find additional populations.
- As long as the weather remains warm, the adults will be active and egg masses visible. When cold finally settles in for good, egg masses will be visible. The spotted lantern fly prefers Tree of Heaven

(*Ailanthus altissima*) as a host. Unfortunately, it also infests many other woody plants. Grapes are also a favorite.

- Here are some links with pictures. Keep an eye out on your travels and if you see any adults or egg masses, snap a picture and contact [ReportSLF@ct.gov](mailto:ReportSLF@ct.gov). There have been finds all the way from Oregon to Maine of dead SLFs on nursery stock from Pennsylvania, the SLF hotbed.  
<https://portal.ct.gov/CAES/CAPS/CAPS/Spotted-Lanternfly---SLF>  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Forestry/Forest-Protection/Spotted-Lanternfly>  
<https://extension.psu.edu/spotted-lanternfly>

## What You Shared with Us (See the September Bulletin Survey)

### ➤ **Easy fruit jam recipe**

A friend and I have been making autumn olive jam and jelly for the past couple of years. As well as being rather good (raspberry/strawberry taste) and pretty healthy, it makes good use of an invasive species. Here are the recipes we've tried and there's a link to the benefits of lycopene.

<http://the3foragers.blogspot.com/2012/09/autumn-olive-recipe-autumn-olive-jelly.html>  
<https://ouroneacrefarm.com/2014/09/13/autumn-olive-jam/>  
<https://superfoodsrx.com/healthyliving/lycopene-the-power-of-red-in-your-superfoods/>

Pippa Mannino

### ➤ **Best method to dry or freeze herbs** (which varieties do you store?)

I use almost all of the herbs I grow to make pesto and freeze it in ice cube trays for storage in plastic bags. Great for soups, pasta, stuffing seasoning, spread on Italian bread for appetizers, added to omelets, and the list is endless, you can use as many of the cubes as you need at any one time.

Judy Whitehead

### ➤ **Favorite way to enjoy zucchini**

Batter-dipped and vegetable-oil-fried zucchini slices are a great way to use up all that zucchini. Cut in 3/8 inch slices, dip in flour, egg, then Italian bread crumbs. Fry in hot oil about 2 minutes per side, drain on racks over newspaper. Wonderful freshly fried when hot and crispy. Freezes well separated by paper towel layers. Can reheat in oven to crisp up or just defrost and drip tomato sauce over and heat in microwave as a side vegetable. Set up as an assembly line as it takes a lot of time.

Judy Whitehead

### ➤ **Favorite vegetable recipe**

As I am Polish, I also make a huge vat of cabbage soup with a head of cabbage sliced thinly, some chopped carrots, chopped onions, a large can of diced tomatoes and some ground beef cooked and drained. Cover with water or bouillon (I use bouillon cubes), cabbage will cook down, cover pot and simmer, stirring occasionally. Salt and pepper to taste. Simmer until cabbage is tender. The measurements are not fixed firmly, use what you want to your taste. Freezes well flat in plastic bags.

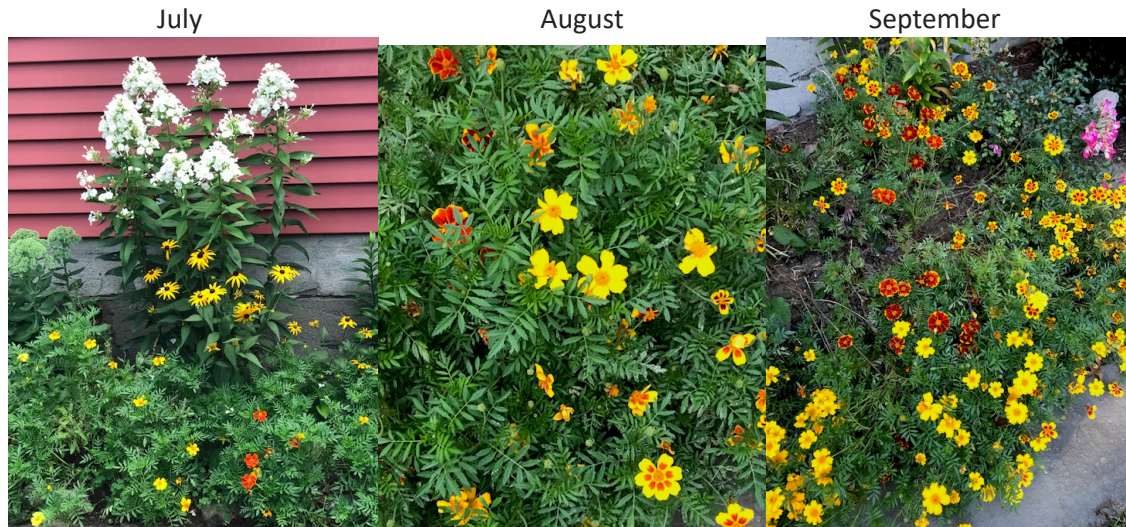
Judy Whitehead

### ➤ **2020 Challenge garden successes**

The heirloom marigolds were my first try EVER to nurture a plant from a minuscule seed to a flourishing & colorful garden border specimen. Who knew they'd become so lovely in our garden? All seeds grew. It was an act of faith that the thin seedlings would grow once they were placed in the ground. But they

were champs. The sprawling and gracious cascade of this variety was especially appealing. Enjoyed this challenge. My Stupice tomato seed also took root and produce a tasty mini-crop of tomatoes. The experience was great! Good selection of marigold companion plants. Thank you!

Nan Sutherland



➤ **2020 Challenge garden successes**

Still harvesting the yellow pear tomatoes in mid-October!

Catherine Ferguson



➤ **2020 Challenge garden successes**

I truly enjoyed the seed challenge, most especially the Celery Seasoning herb, Opal Basil, and Signet Lemon & Tangerine Marigolds. Both herbs were used in cooking throughout summer and fall until recent frost. The Celery Seasoning was a delightful surprise and so delicious in stir-fry, soups and stews. Pots of the Signet Marigolds graced my porch, and just a touch on its leaves produced the lovely scent of

lemon while cheery tangerine flowers bloomed profusely all summer and fall. I also picked an abundance of Yellow Pear Tomatoes.

Denise Forrest



➤ **More garden successes**

Watering the garden at regular intervals kept things doing well, cut back somewhat in the fall, leave lots for the birds to forage on.

For the first time this year I tried to grow garlic, great fun as the fronds are long, green and have really cute bulbils on the ends of the stalks. I put them in the back of the garden as they are quite tall and fall over if not supported. Used some in shrimp scampi 2 weeks ago. Delicious. They also photograph well.

Judy Whitehead



## Future Issues

If you would like to submit information for a future Horticulture Bulletin or have a topic you would like us to include in a future Bulletin, please send them to **SUE KELLEY** at [kelleys4@gmail.com](mailto:kelleys4@gmail.com).

**Published by GCM Horticulture Committee:** Susan Kelley (Chair), Catherine Ferguson, Denise Forrest, Judith Tosiello and Judy Van Heiningen