

**TAKE
ONE**

Gardener News

Serving the Agricultural, Gardening and Landscaping Communities

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2011 PERSON OF THE YEAR



Tom Castronovo/Photo

By Tom Castronovo
Executive Editor

Gardener News proudly bestows our 2011 "Person of the Year" to New Jersey's 55th and current Governor, **Chris Christie**, for enthusiastically supporting New Jersey's agricultural industry and for his heartfelt dedication to the "Jersey Fresh" farming and "Jersey Grown" gardening communities in the Garden State.

Gov. Christie clearly appreciates the role agriculture and horticulture play in New Jersey. He knows our 10,000 farms growing over 100 types of healthy, nutritious fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products are a vital part of our state's economy, contributing over \$200 million in farm gate value; he takes pride in our top-10 ranking nationally in the production of more than a dozen crops, such as blueberries, cranberries, peaches, bell peppers, spinach and tomatoes; and he recognizes the significance of our \$451 million nursery, sod and greenhouse industry, the largest sector of New Jersey agriculture. To him, they are just as much a part of our state's landscape as

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CASE FILES

From the Rutgers Master Gardeners of Union County *Garden Help Line*

By Madeline Flahive DiNardo, Union County Agricultural Agent and Master Gardeners, MC Schwartz and James Keane

Q. A friend gave me a very cool Bromeliad for the Holidays. Its long spiny-edged leaves have silvery-white, powdery horizontal stripes. The leaves are in a rosette shape that forms a cup in the middle. There's a long pink flower stalk coming out of center cup with tiny purple flowers. Any idea what kind of Bromeliad it is and how I should take care of it?
-Grateful in Garwood

A. Great description! It sounds like you have an *Aechmea fasciata*, common name Urn Plant or Silver Vase. These plants are native in tropical and sub-tropical regions of South America. It grows on the floor of the rainforests. Bromeliads absorb food and moisture mostly through their leaves instead of roots. The leaves have that spiral rosette form to capture and hold water.

Urn Plants bloom when they are mature, about three to four years old. One flower stalk will grow per rosette. The flower stalk has a pink inflorescence, from which tiny purple flowers appear. The flowers do not last long, but the attractive pink inflorescence will last for as long as six months. The Urn plant will grow two or three offsets, new rosettes, as the blooming rosette eventually dies back.

An important care task is to keep the rosette cup filled with fresh water at all times. Once in a while, empty the cup and refill it with new water to prevent staleness and odor.

Potted urn plants prefer direct sunlight, a south-facing window would be ideal. They need to be close to the light source in order to bloom. Temperatures between 60 degrees Fahrenheit and 75 degrees Fahrenheit and high humidity create a good atmosphere for these plants to thrive. You can provide humidity by placing the pot and its saucer on a tray of moist pebbles. Keeping the pebbles moist will provide a constant humidity source. During the summer urn plants can be kept outdoors, provided temperatures are in the 70-85°F range.

Allow the top half-inch of potting mix to dry out between watering. Hard water can build up lime deposits on the foliage. If you have hard water, you might consider using rain barrel water or distilled water. Occasionally setting the plants out in gentle rains when temperatures are above 60 degrees Fahrenheit is another option.

Apply a liquid houseplant fertilizer once every two weeks to the roots, leaves and cup at half strength during the growing season. Take a break from fertilizing during the urn plant's short resting period in mid-winter.

Although the urn plant looks big, it does best in a five- to seven-inch pot, as it has a very small root system. If the plant is a bit top-heavy, use a clay pot as it offers better stability than a plastic pot. The best time to repot is just as new growth is beginning. An appropriate potting mix would be a 1:1:1 ratio of leaf mold, peat moss and sand or perlite.

There are two options for caring for the rosette once it has finished blooming. One is to remove the new rosette offsets that grow from the base of the "parent" rosette in the spring when they are about half the size of the parent rosette. The offsets feed off the decaying leaves of the parent plant. It takes about four to six months for the offsets to reach a good size to be propagated. Use a sharp clean knife to remove the offsets.

Plant each offset in a two- to three-inch pot filled with same potting mixture used for mature plants. If the offset has developed roots, gently press the roots into the potting mix. Avoid planting the offsets too deep, as it may lead to problems with root rot. Keep the offsets in bright filtered lights for about four months and water sparingly – just enough to prevent the mix from drying out. When the offsets are well established you can move them into full sun and treat them as a mature plant.

The second alternative is to cut back the parent rosette with a sharp clean knife when its foliage naturally deteriorates. Make the cut as close as possible to the potting mix, giving the offsets room to mature in the pot.

Whichever way you decide to grow the offsets, be patient. It may take three to four years to bloom. If the offset does not bloom after four years, try adding a small pinch of Epsom Salts (magnesium sulfate) to the water. The magnesium helps stimulate flowering. Another option is to cover the mature offset and a mature apple with a clear plastic bag. Keep the covered plant out of direct sunlight. The apple emits ethylene gas, which encourages bud formation.

Enjoy your Urn Plant and its future generations!

Editor's Note: The Union County Master Gardener's HELP LINE fields hundreds of citizen inquiries a year – offering assistance with their indoor as well as outdoor gardening and pest control questions. Responses to resident phone calls and on-site visits comply with current Rutgers NJ Agricultural Experiment Station recommendations. Union County residents can call (908) 654-9852 or email mastergardeners@ucnj.org for assistance. A complete listing of Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) offices where you can contact a Master Gardener in your area can be found on page 22 of the Gardener News. Free RCE fact sheets are available at www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs.



Expanding fresh

Tom Castronovo/Photo

Shopping for delicious and nutritious produce is now getting easier. Paul Kneeland, right, Vice President of Floral and Produce for Kings Super Markets, and a featured columnist for this paper who writes the "Passionate About Produce" column; Kathy Fiduccia, center, Bedminster Kings Store Manager; and Tom McNerney, an area director for Kings Super Markets, all work together to bring a newly expanded fresh and healthy produce market to the Kings Bedminster store. Kings Super Markets is a 24-store chain based in Parsippany, N.J., with stores serving Northern New Jersey and New York.

2011 Person of the Year

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the more urbanized scenes much of the rest of the nation associates with the Garden State.

During the peak months of New Jersey's growing season, it's not unusual to see him and his family at any number of New Jersey's approximately 150 community farmers markets, encouraging the farmer-vendors there to continue bringing their fresh products directly to the citizens of the state.

New Jersey's image as an agricultural powerhouse in the nation has never been in doubt among those who compete against us for market share or those who rely upon the 100-plus produce items, beautiful nursery and landscape materials or other top-notch agricultural products that come from the Garden State.

Sometimes, though, even our own state leaders lose sight of the importance of agriculture to New Jersey. Witness the (thankfully unsuccessful) move to abolish our own Department of Agriculture altogether in 2008.

However, when Gov. Chris Christie came into office, one of the first things he did was to show his support for this vital industry. In February 2010, barely a month after being sworn into office, Gov. Christie addressed the annual Delegates Dinner at the State Agricultural Convention. And it wasn't one of those 15-minute greetings that public officials sometimes give. The Governor spoke for 45 minutes, with passion and in great detail, about his appreciation for what agriculture means to New Jersey.

In the March 2010 issue of *Gardener News*, we named Gov. Christie one of New Jersey's "Three Great Leaders" along with New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher and New Jersey Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Al Murray

The Governor, who had recently announced he asked Secretary Fisher to remain in his position, praised both the agricultural industry in the Garden State (Cont. on pg. 18)



Unique Plants

By Bob LaHoff
Nursery Specialist

10 Questions for "The Dr."

I happened into the world of horticulture simply by needing a summer job after my freshman year at Rutgers University. Metropolitan Plant Exchange in West Orange, New Jersey, is where my formal education began. Two of my favorite people in this world, Tony Maiello and Stephen Schuckman, have been guiding and mentoring me for the past two decades, not as employers anymore, but as business professionals and friends concerned for my well-being. Tony taught me Business 101 and Steve, aka "The Dr.," helped me on my way with horticultural discipline.

Stephen Schuckman attended Quincy College and obtained a bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry in 1981. He attended the University of Missouri-Columbia and achieved a master's degree in botany, studying tall grass prairie and old growth sugar maple/basswood forest. He managed Metropolitan Plant Exchange, "Metro Plants," from 1987-1993, where we both worked for Tony. Steve has worked for the city of Montclair as the Superintendent of Parks and Shade Tree, was horticultural manager of the Van Vleck House & Gardens from 1998-2005, and is currently the owner of First Mountain Arboriculture, a horticultural consulting and urban forestry company. Concurrently, he is also the forestry consultant for Bloomfield, Montclair and Hawthorne. Steve is an ISA-certified arborist; N.J.-certified Tree Expert and continuing education instructor at Rutgers OCPE, where he teaches advanced pruning and Municipal Shade Tree Management. This guy is no dummy, and there should now be no doubt why his friends and colleagues call him "The Dr."

Thinking about a topic that would be interesting for gardeners this month, it dawned on me to ask my friend and colleague a number of questions about trees... so here we go.

1) **How often do you see trees planted incorrectly?** "Every day... by the public and by people who claim they are professionals in the industry."

2) **What is your favorite tree and why?** "Black Tupelo or Black Gum, *Nyssa sylvatica*, has good bark appeal, structure and outstanding fall color. It also makes the finest honey in the world. Tupelo honey is fragrant and delicious." Did I mention that Steve is also an apiarist?

3) **How often do you recommend pruning, fertilizing and having your trees assessed by a professional?** "Landscape trees every three to five years. Fertilization... only with a soil test first!"

4) **What is a fall dig hazard and what trees do you recommend not planting in the fall?** "Trees whose roots don't recover from being dug late in the season or thin-barked trees i.e. Swamp White Oak, Elms, Beech and Hornbeam."

5) **Explain the difference between planting and transplanting.** "Transplanting is digging a plant and moving it from one location to another. Planting is a technique that varies depending on the circumstances."

6) **How do you feel about spraying trees/shrubs with insecticides/fungicides as a preventative?** "Not necessary... unless prior conditions/events require you to. Do you really need to spray a pest unless you know that pest exists?"

7) **What are some telltale signs your trees may be in trouble?** "Trees that don't "leaf out," have undersized leaves, show early fall color and/or are declining at the top of the crown are all indicators."

8) **Explain what the "Root Flare" is and why it is so important to know what it is when planting?** "A root flare is simply the transition from stem to root! Roots belong underground and stems above the ground. When stems are below... trouble ensues!"

9) **Describe what a girdled root is and why it is detrimental to a trees success?** "A root encircling the stem, it chokes off water and nutrients. Think of how you would feel if you buckled your belt too tight!"

10) **Describe the differences of park grade plants, #2 plants and premium plant material.** "Sadly, New Jersey does not have an established grading system like Florida. Premium plants have had much more care given to their roots and tops. Without this understanding... buyer beware. Seek a professional's advice you feel comfortable with."

To this day Tony Maiello and Steve Schuckman remain two of my dearest friends. These two gentlemen have guided my well-being both personally and professionally. One of my favorite movies of all time is Frank Capra's, *It's a Wonderful Life*. In it, "an angel helps a compassionate but despairingly frustrated businessman by showing what life would have been like if he never existed." Every person can have an effect on another's outcome! These two gentlemen have given me more, in life, than I could ever hope for... for that, I am always indebted to them.

Editor's Note: Bob LaHoff is co-owner of Hall's Garden Center and Florist in Union County, a member of the Union County Board of Agriculture, the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association, the American Boxwood Society, the European Boxwood Society, the Metro Hort Group, Inc., the Garden Writers Association, a lifetime member of the Conifer Society and past member of the retail council for Monrovia Growers. He can be reached at (908) 665-0331.

2011 Person of the Year

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and the Department of Agriculture. One of numerous standing ovations for the Governor came after he said he would not propose the Department for elimination. Another came when the Governor said he would like to see some funding restored to the *Jersey Fresh* and other branding programs run by the Department, if the budget allows.

The Governor spoke of his longstanding appreciation for agriculture, about how he has taken his children to county agricultural fairs, and how important he feels agriculture is as a part of New Jersey's economy.

Proving that this wasn't "just a speech," the Governor has gone on to back up those words with support for agriculture across the state. This hasn't only been true in his public-life actions. He and his family belong to a Community Supported Agriculture operation in Morris County, and they also have volunteered in a "Grow-A-Row" project in Pittstown.

In his official capacity, the Governor has always been willing to listen when the agriculture community speaks, starting with the formation of his own cabinet. When the industry, through the State Board of Agriculture, urged him to keep Agriculture Secretary Douglas Fisher on-board, the Governor did just that, and has formed a solid working relationship with the Secretary.

Gov. Christie has shown an enthusiastic willingness to work with legislators of both parties to embrace and enact legislation that helps agriculture remain a vital industry in the state. He has signed agriculture-promotion bills such as:

- Expanding the *Jersey Fresh* promotional program to include *Made With Jersey Fresh*, which allows individuals and companies to make items using *Jersey Fresh* products as their main ingredients. This extends the cache and the heavy value placed on *Jersey Fresh* items by the food retail and restaurant industry to items that can be used beyond the traditional fresh-market season.

- Encouraging a preference for purchasing *Jersey Fresh* and other New Jersey-produced agricultural items by state agencies, departments and facilities. This helps ensure that tax dollars spent by these public bodies stay in New Jersey and help rebuild the state's economy.

- Establishing "*Jersey Fresh* Farm to School Week," which is to be celebrated the last week of every September as a way to promote the value and importance of connecting the fresh foods produced by New Jersey's agricultural industry with the schoolchildren who will benefit from eating nutritious foods and who will make up the next generation of customers for New Jersey agricultural products.

- Authorizing the sale or lease of unneeded public property to certain non-profit organizations for gardening and urban farming and exempts such lands from property taxation.

- A series of bills appropriating monies approved by voters in a 2009 ballot referendum to be spent for a variety of farmland preservation efforts, including: \$23.5 million for farmland preservation; \$39 million for the State Agriculture Development Committee to administer county planning incentive grants; \$23 million for planning incentive grants to municipalities; and \$8.8 million for grants to non-profit agencies for farmland preservation efforts.

In signing those farmland-preservation bills, Gov. Christie summed up both his public-policy view of the importance of agriculture to New Jersey and his own personal commitment to the industry, saying: "It's important for us to be supporting our local farms in our state with our dollars, but also that the Governor and his family are supporting these farms personally and believe they are important and a part of who our State is."

He added: "Everybody enjoys *Jersey Fresh* produce and products. (My wife) Mary Pat belongs to a CSA at Alstede Farms in Chester, and so every week she comes in with a load of fresh New Jersey produce that we use in our house every week."

And so it is, that because of both his public support for agriculture and gardening in New Jersey, and his own personal commitment to helping to keep the state's agricultural industry strong, that we name Gov. Chris Christie the *Gardener News* "Person of the Year."

Thank you again, Governor Christie, for helping to keep the "garden" in the Garden State!

Gardener News began the annual "Person of the Year" cover story in 2008. *Gardener News* will annually bestow our "Person of the Year" award to a person who performs exemplary outstanding service to the agricultural, gardening and/or landscaping communities.