

Gardener News

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2020 PERSON OF THE YEAR



N.J. Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher

By Tom Castronovo
Executive Editor/Publisher
Gardener News

Gardener News proudly bestows our 2020 "Person of the Year" to New Jersey's Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher, for his dedication to the agricultural, farming, and horticultural

communities in the Garden State.

During the onset of the pandemic in early February 2020, Secretary Fisher credited the state's residents for doing their part to slow the spread of COVID-19, with a great many staying in their homes and practicing social distancing. As the pandemic continued, it became increasingly important for New Jerseyans to have the opportunities to engage in positive and constructive activities that also

provide fresh air, sunlight, and a sense of purpose. He realized being outdoors is therapeutic.

Early on in the pandemic, spring had sprung, and gardening could not be canceled, making our home and garden centers, and the nurseries that supply plant material to them, essential parts of helping residents deal with this new home-based reality in the way that we all live.

Secretary Fisher adapted to (Cont. on Page 3)

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2020 Person of the Year

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uncertain circumstances, a skill set that seems to have become the new norm. He knew deep down inside that gardeners have an innate ability to adapt and improvise. The industry is perishable and is always subject to the mercy of Mother Nature.

Secretary Fisher is always urging folks to visit their local garden center, supermarket, or farm stand to buy the Garden State's bounty. He constantly reminds folks that "local" means New Jersey.

He also realizes that growing fresh food offers another reward. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, people are concerned about their health, safety and nutrition: One way to know where your fruits and vegetables come from is to grow them yourself. When Secretary Fisher tends to his own gardens, he knows personally about the love and respect that are professed with the daintiest of greenery.

Secretary Fisher takes that

appreciation for horticulture and agriculture into his professional position as well. He has worked tirelessly to ensure that functions critical to the Department of Agriculture and industry needs are met and carried out in the interest of public safety and public health. He is constantly in contact with producers and agricultural organizations across the great Garden State to find effective ways to minimize negative impacts on growers and to address concerns and issues.

The State Board of Agriculture's appointment of Douglas Fisher as Secretary of Agriculture was approved by then-Governor Jon S. Corzine on Feb. 10, 2009. At the time, Fisher was serving as a member of the General Assembly. Governor Chris Christie issued a statement in January 2010 supporting Mr. Fisher's continued service and Governor Philip Murphy accepted the State Board of Agriculture's

recommendation for Fisher to continue as Secretary in January 2018.

Fisher received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Bryant College in Rhode Island in 1969. He served in the New Jersey National Guard from 1969 to 1975. In 1971, he began a 30-year career as a supermarket owner and operator.

Fisher was elected to the Assembly from the 3rd Legislative District in 2001 and was re-elected three times, serving as Deputy Majority Whip and Chairman of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. He also served on the Budget, Commerce and Regulated Professions committees. He was a Cumberland County Freeholder from 1992 to 2001 and was a Freeholder Director from 1996-2000. He also served as a Bridgeton City Councilman from 1990-92.

Secretary Fisher has been the treasurer of the

National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), President of Food Export-Northeast, and President of the Northeast Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NEASDA).

The Secretary of Agriculture fulfills executive, management and administrative duties prescribed by law, executive order or gubernatorial direction. The Secretary oversees the development and implementation of specific programs required to meet State Board policy directives. He is also an active member of a number of international, national, federal, state, county and local organizations with an interest in agriculture and related areas.

The Office of the Secretary supports programs relating to the economic development of production agriculture; the marketing of agricultural products through the *Jersey Fresh* program; conservation

and development of natural and renewable resources; distribution of surplus federal commodities to soup kitchens, food pantries, schools, state hospitals and institutions; and the health and well-being of the state's greenhouse/nursery and livestock industries as well as other programs related to these areas.

In addition, the Office of the Secretary directs and coordinates the development and analysis of agricultural policy and department budget for the Secretary and the State Board of Agriculture. The Office coordinates the department's legal and legislative services and rule-making functions, serves as the state's liaison for USDA agricultural disaster matters, and directs departmental efforts to support of the Governor's statewide policy initiatives.

The Office of the Secretary also oversees relations with agricultural and other organizations, (Cont. on Page 4)

New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association



*Congratulations
New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture,
Douglas H. Fisher,
on being selected as the
Gardener News 2020 Person of the Year*

Thank you for all you do for our industry!



www.NJLCA.org

It is fair to say, I think, that circumstances and events are swirling at a frantic pace in so many arenas of life that at times it can seem overwhelming.

We have to stay grounded, though, and it certainly has been the case for millions that outdoor gardening (we can talk about indoor at another time) has provided an escape, an oasis for the mind and body to filter out all the negativity that can find its way through endless channels to each of us.

Gardening is personal. It can be a display of sheer beauty, as you define it, or a place to supply your table with fruits and vegetables of your particular liking.

A garden can be your place of supreme peace, where you reconnect to nature and the ethos. Simply put, a garden is a manifestation of what only you alone have envisioned.

Some of these spaces are so precise they appear to be engineering miracles, while others are more random plantings whose order only the one who planted it all understands its non-patterned arrangement.

This actually is the cathartic power of creating whatever



NJ Dept. of Agriculture

By Douglas H. Fisher
Secretary of Agriculture

Winter's Thoughts Turn to the Gardens We Will Pursue

patch of grass, flowering beds, groves of fruit, or rows of vegetables you want. Plain and simple or complex and complicated, this is your own creation.

More than those you alone will see, though, are the beneficiaries of this labor of love and many may not realize it as profoundly as is the actual case.

Properly enriching the bed tilth helps to preserve precious soil that is so randomly spoiled by practices from another time that are still happening today. Beneficial insects can be nurtured, like the oft-overlooked earthworm. These natural "friends of the garden" can help the growing process of whatever you plant, as their mere existence can help your soil's health.

If created with real thought, your garden can be a respite for other creatures we share our time with here on Earth (and in the earth). The birds can find refuge picking the seeds off our spent sunflowers and cone flowers. Bees can dance happily on the flora, gathering nectar and doing their job, pollinating our plants.

It's a very symbiotic relationship where the benefits far outweigh the occasional tussles we might have with fitting ourselves within the much more balanced natural environment.

There are so many ways to garden – in total solitude, or with friends and family in community settings. A garden is a lab for learning about nature and all its mysterious complexities, and about

ourselves, as we ply the earth and peer into the sky, bathed in sunlight and rain.

A few years back, I had the extreme pleasure to meet an icon in the plant world, Douglas W. Tallamy, who gave me even more inspiration than I already had about plants. In his book *Bringing Nature Home* he stated that "plants are not optional on this planet. With few exceptions, neither we, nor anything else, can live without them."

He inscribed that book to me by writing, "Garden as if life depended on it." His focus was on native plants in back yards and their ability to restore habitat.

It really does not matter how you approach the task. Gardening will take you on a lifelong journey of discovery

and passionate emotions once you touch the earth in earnest.

Let me close with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "When I go into the garden with a spade and dig a bed, I feel such an exhilaration and health that I discover that I have been defrauding myself all the time in letting others do for me what I should have done with my own hands."

As the cold winds begin to blow now, think about the balmier days ahead and the gardens you will start, or tender, and begin to take on their glow as spring arrives.

Editor's Note: Douglas H. Fisher is New Jersey's Secretary of Agriculture. He is the department's executive officer, secretary to the State Board of Agriculture and a member of the Governor's cabinet. Secretary Fisher fulfills executive, management and administrative duties prescribed by law, executive order or gubernatorial direction. He can be reached at 609.292.3976. For more info, please visit: <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture>

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outreach to news media and the public, liaison to the State Legislature and United States Congress, the Ag in the Classroom Program, and other state and national agricultural organizations.

N.J.'s Diverse Agriculture

The job of New Jersey's Secretary of Agriculture is made challenging by the wide array and diversity of the crops, livestock, and other agricultural products the industry creates in this state.

There are 215 soil types found in New Jersey that have been rated and categorized into five clearly defined soil groups by the Soils Department at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

According to the most recent Census of Horticulture conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, New

Jersey producers reaped \$505 million in sales in 2019. New Jersey growers were seventh nationally in sales.

New Jersey sales for principal vegetables totaled \$229 million.

New Jersey blueberry growers harvested just over 46 million utilized pounds from 9,300 acres. The value of utilized production was over \$85 million.

Cranberry growers produced 490,390 utilized barrels from 2,700 acres. Value of production was \$14.5 million, and the average price was \$29.60 per barrel.

New Jersey peach growers harvested 17,980 utilized tons from 3,900 bearing acres. New Jersey ranked second nationally in price. Value of utilized production was almost \$25.7 million.

New Jersey Assemblyman Eric Houghtaling, Chairman of the Assembly's Agriculture and Natural Resources

Committee, credited Secretary Fisher with "extraordinary stewardship during our difficult times."

"Doug lobbied to keep garden centers open last spring, ensuring New Jersey residents could enjoy the therapeutic benefits of gardening while confined to their homes," Houghtaling said. "He visited farms and distribution operations at the height of summer harvest to see first-hand how farmers and nursery growers were doing and to promote their *Jersey Fresh* fruits and vegetables and their *Jersey Grown* plant material.

"Whether visiting local farms and growing operations or joining local officials in his home county to unveil the *Jersey Fresh* logo on the water tank overlooking the Vineland Produce Auction, Doug is Garden State agriculture's biggest promoter. He has made the

Jersey Fresh and the *Jersey Grown* program the envy of many states. His sincerity and dedication to public service have had a calming effect on the farming and gardening communities over the past year. Thank you, Doug."

Senator Robert Smith also had high praise for his former legislative colleague,

"I had the pleasure of working with Doug in the Assembly and vividly recall his keen interest in agriculture and New Jersey outdoors," Senator Smith said. "He has done a magnificent job in the agricultural community keeping our state clean and green"

Brian Schilling, Director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension added: "In a year where the agricultural industry faced daunting challenges, Secretary Fisher's leadership and foresight on important issues -- working to facilitate farm market operations and

fall agritourism during the pandemic, to name only a few -- have been essential. He was a strong voice for the industry in a time of uncertainty and represented the needs of the farming community well. I applaud *Gardener News* for recognizing him as its person of the year, a well-earned distinction."

The New Jersey Farm Bureau (NJFB) offered congratulations to Secretary Doug Fisher for being named the 2020 *Gardener News* Person of the Year.

"Secretary Fisher has always worked for all of us in agriculture with great energy and perseverance, especially in this past year of great struggles for our industry," said NJFB President Ryck Suydam. "He works hard and does his homework, working through some exhausting meetings, leading the way and working to get us through this pandemic. (Cont. on Page 12)

Now that we have reached the new year, it is time to start planning for next year's planting season. One of the main areas of concern is what type of tillage to use in preparing the soil for planting. First, let's go over the types of tillage that can be used.

The one that people are probably the most familiar with is moldboard plowing. This is where the top few inches of soil or sod is completely turned over. Then, after plowing, the soil usually has to be disked or rototilled to further break up the soil and make it suitable for planting.

This method of tillage is useful only in certain situations and not nearly as popular as it used to be. It is an excellent way to incorporate nutrients and especially bulky soil amendments uniformly throughout the top layer of dirt.

The downside to this, however, is that it does disturb the existing organic matter and soil structure that is already present and can make the ground more susceptible to erosion. On our farm, we might use this method of tillage right before planting a new block of fruit trees. Because once the trees are



The Town Farmer

By Peter Melick
Agricultural Producer

Tillage Options

planted, the ground will not be disturbed again, it is important to evenly work into the soil the proper nutrients so that they are available to be taken up by the roots throughout the life of the trees.

Another popular method of tillage is done by using a chisel plow. Just as its name implies, a chisel plow is simply an implement with chisel-shaped shanks that rip through the soil and break it up. While this method does loosen the soil up quite a bit, it does not turn it over the way a moldboard plow would.

The advantage to this is you are left with a nice and loose soil that still retains a great deal of the organic matter on the top of the soil. This residual debris can

help with conserving available moisture as well as helping to protect it from erosion. This is an excellent method of tillage to use if there is some soil compaction already present and the ground needs to be loosened up.

It is also much faster to chisel plow than it is to moldboard plow and will require a lot less fuel on a per-acre basis. And once a field is chisel plowed, it usually only requires a limited amount of additional tillage to make it suitable for planting.

No-till planting has become very popular over the past 20 years or so. With the advent of new and improved planting equipment, as well as seeds that are resistant to certain herbicides, no-till planting has become the tillage system of choice for

many row crop growers.

How this works is rather simple. A farmer will make only one pass over a field pulling just a planter. As long as it does what it is supposed to do, the planter will uniformly place the seeds at the optimal depth at the required population per acre. In order for this to work properly, the ground must not be too wet or to dry, and the weeds must be adequately controlled going forward.

The obvious advantages to this method are that it conserves the moisture available in the soil while preserving the existing soil structure. This will help with the growth of the plant and also greatly control, if not eliminate, any erosion while saving considerable amounts of

time and fuel in the process.

We commonly use a no-till system when planting pumpkins. We will plant a cover crop of rye grass in the fall and then harvest the straw from that in late May. Then, we no-till plant the pumpkin seeds into the remaining rye stubble.

While saving time and energy, this method also creates a much cleaner environment for the pumpkins to rest on, as a conventionally tilled field could make for some very muddy pumpkins when it is time to harvest them.

Happy New Year!

Editor's Note: Peter Melick is co-owner of Melick's Town Farm in Oldwick and a 10th-generation New Jersey farmer. Peter is Mayor of Tewksbury Township, Hunterdon County, NJ. He also served as a director for the New Jersey Farm Bureau and is a past president of the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture. Peter has also been featured on NJN, News 12 New Jersey and on the Fox Business Network.

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He has our back when working with the Governor and his administration, having gained great respect with 12 years as Secretary and long legislative experience. Thank you, Secretary Fisher, and congratulations!"

Jeannie Geremia, Garden Club of New Jersey, Inc. President and the 2012 *Gardener News* Person of the Year, said Fisher "has been an ongoing presence in my life in the New Jersey gardening world ever since our paths first crossed in June, 2008 at the Seeds for Salad Day at Branchburg Township's Old York School."

"Little did I know," Geremia added, "it was just the beginning of numerous occasions to get the full measure of this devoted spokesperson for agriculture and gardening as he passionately promoted the Garden State in events far and wide in the state of New Jersey and nationally.

"No one in the field of

agriculture and gardening deserves to be the '2020 Gardener News Person of the Year' more than Doug Fisher," Geremia added. "New Jersey is so fortunate to have this dedicated public servant who has been in every village, hamlet, town, city, highway, and byway, from the Highlands in Sussex to Cape May, north, west, south, and east, and always with a personal, genuine, kind and caring way.

"Doug Fisher was an essential part of the partnership. The Garden Club of New Jersey, Inc. has had with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's *Jersey Fresh* and *Jersey Grown* campaigns and subsequent grants for funding garden education, community gardens, and inspiring the public to eat local and support our hard working nurserymen, garden center owners and growers as we strive to stay healthy eating *Jersey Fresh*, *Jersey Grown*! Congratulations to

a New Jersey hero, Doug Fisher!"

Richard Goldstein, president of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA), said he was pleased to hear that Secretary Fisher was chosen for this prestigious award as the 2020 *Gardener News* Person of the Year.

"Doug Fisher has been a great ally to the NJLCA and the horticulture and landscape industry for many years," Goldstein said. "Recently, he helped us to keep the industry in operation during the early days of the pandemic, when most everything else was shut down. Doug Fisher understands the importance of landscape and horticulture to the mental health of those quarantined at home during lockdowns and helped us bring color and light to those dark days."

The New Jersey Agricultural Society congratulated Secretary Fisher "on this wonderful

honor," said Richard Norz, President of the Society and a past-president of the State Board of Agriculture. "I have had the privilege to work with the Secretary in different capacities during his tenure. Secretary Fisher is a tireless advocate for New Jersey farmers. He has always supported our Society's mission to promote and educate the public about New Jersey's agricultural industry, and remains engaged in the advancement of the NJ Agricultural Society's three programs: Farmers Against Hunger, Learning Through Gardening, and the NJ Agricultural Leadership Development Program."

Chris Nicholson, president of the New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association, said his association is thrilled with Secretary Fisher being selected as the *Gardener News* Person of the Year for 2020.

"For as long as he has served as the Secretary of

Agriculture for the Garden State," Nicholson said, "he has been a true advocate and voice for the real Christmas tree industry in New Jersey. Both he and the department which he oversees have helped tremendously through the years to raise consumer awareness for the real Christmas tree industry in New Jersey."

Hubert Ling, president of the Native Plant Society of NJ, extended his congratulations to Secretary Fisher for earning the title of 2020 *Gardener News* Person of the Year, saying, "I sincerely appreciate his accomplishments in keeping New Jersey agriculture and horticulture open for business during the pandemic.

"This has been a banner year for the increased use of native plants in home gardens," Ling added. "A record number of New Jersey residents have turned to their home gardens for meaningful activity (Cont. on Page 13)

This New Year, perhaps we need to offer some acts of kindness to each other in these tough times.

Order some take-out from your local restaurant, offer to shovel an elderly neighbor's snow, or let a neighbor use your snow blower if you have one. Drop a few extra dollars in the Salvation Army collection bucket. Volunteer your time at the food bank in your town or mow your neighbor's lawn while they are away.

How about sharing your lawn success secrets with your neighbors? What did you do to your lawn? It looks great! Can you help me out? What grass seed did you use?

You can begin at home with acts of kindness, too. Spending time with your loved ones, I hope that much of that time is spent outside enjoying your lawn. Even your lawn appreciates acts of kindness. Both you and your lawn will appreciate a new mower.

Have you loved your lawn as much as you should have? Maybe it's time for a new lawn mower; you're home more now than ever and perhaps you have taken on the task of mowing



Turf 's Up

By Todd Pretz
Professional Turf Consultant

Acts of Kindness

your lawn yourself. Is your sprinkler or irrigation system broken? Perhaps you need to treat yourself to a new hose; your lawn will love you for it. Remember how much better your lawn looked last year with the proper watering methods?

Hey neighbor, you renovated your lawn last fall and it turned out great. I tried and I wasn't so successful? Did you first test our soil pH? Your lawn grows best with a pH value between 6.2 and 7.0. If you do not know your soil pH, how can you grow a great lawn? If your soil pH is outside of this range, you may be wasting 20 to 70 percent of your lawn food.

The nutrients are not available to the grass plants outside of this proper pH range. And pH test kits are available

at most lawn and garden or hardware stores. Please make a New Year's resolution to test your soil pH; your lawn will love you for it.

Is this the year to switch to an organic lawn program? Organic lawn foods deliver a slow-steady feeding of the nutrients over time. This helps to avoid volatilization or leaching of the nutrients into groundwater supplies.

Is your lawn tired of being treated with crabgrass, broadleaf weeds and insect killers? Why apply these to your whole lawn when you only have 10 to 20 weeds in the whole yard? Do you really have grubs; have you monitored your lawn for these pests? If you don't have grubs, why treat for them? This is the ultimate act

of kindness to Mother Nature, to allow her to grow a great lawn the organic way.

Being kinder to your lawn follows the premise of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is a process you can use to solve pest problems while minimizing risks to people, pets and the environment. IPM is an eco-based strategy that focuses on long-term prevention of pests or their damage through a combination of techniques such as biological control, habitat manipulation, modification of cultural practices, and use of resistant pesticides.

Pesticides are used after monitoring indicates they are needed according to established guidelines, and treatments are made with the goal of

removing the target organism. Pest control materials are selected and applied in a manner that minimizes risk to human health, beneficial and non-target organisms, and the environment.

That's a lot of words, but basically you are going to monitor weeds, insects and fungus throughout the year on your lawn to use control products if all other methods of control or suppression are not doing the job.

Your lawn is part of your yard family. Some of us talk to our plants; others like to get their hands dirty in the soil, and others like the smell of a freshly mowed lawn, unless you have allergies!

Offer some acts of kindness. Your lawn will thank you for it. Happy New Year!

Editor's Note: Todd Pretz is Vice President of Jonathan Green, a leading supplier of lawn and garden products in the northeast. For more information, please visit: www.jonathangreen.com

Congratulations to
New Jersey
Secretary of Agriculture

Douglas H. Fisher
2020 Gardener News
Person of the Year

Thanks for all of your contributions to
the lawn and garden industry.

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2020 Person of the Year

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and discovered the fulfillment of working with their hands and enhancing gardens in which native plants provide essential benefits to all of the state's ecosystems. Without Secretary Fisher's efforts, the Native Plant Society's goals of promoting the use and appreciation of native plants would have been severely hampered."

This paper now wholeheartedly salutes New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher for his outstanding ability and passion on protecting and watching over all facets of the Garden States agricultural sector, and, for constantly promoting an understanding of the state's diversity of agriculture, its cultural heritage, and its agricultural contributions to the state's economy.

The agricultural industry, which includes enterprises engaged in the science of cultivating plants, growing crops, preparing the soil for optimum returns, landscaping services, natural resources, raising fish and animals, and logging wood, farms, dairies, hatcheries, and ranches in the Garden State, is lucky to have New Jersey

Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher's leadership in promoting consumer protection and healthy living.

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, farming, gardening, landscaping and/or Nursery communities.

Editor's Note: Tom Castronovo is executive editor and publisher of Gardener News. Tom's lifelong interest in gardening and passion for agriculture, environmental stewardship, gardening and landscaping, led to the founding of the Gardener News, which germinated in April 2003 and continues to bloom today. He is also dedicated to providing inspiration, and education to the agricultural, gardening, landscaping and nursery communities through this newspaper and GardenerNews.com.