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January 2026

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## 2025 PERSON OF THE YEAR



# Joe Bolognese Jr.

**By Tom Castronovo**  
Executive Editor/Publisher  
*Gardener News*

*Gardener News* proudly bestows our 2025 “Person of the Year” to Joe Bolognese Jr. for his volunteer dedication, leadership, and vision in helping educate the outdoor living,

landscape, hardscape, and irrigation communities in the Garden State. 2025 marks his 25th year as a true volunteer professional.

Joe has been actively involved with

the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA) since 2000 as a champion for professional development. He has served as a board director and vice (Cont. on Page 15)



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# 2026 Garden Outlook Study

Gardening time and spending in 2025 hit the highest rates since 2022. Planned time and spending for 2026 looks to be even higher. A record 64 percent of respondents say they will plant more and expand their gardens in 2026. The research was conducted by Axiom, a Minneapolis based marketing firm serving horticultural, agricultural and home improvement markets.

“Data on 2025 activities and expected activities in the coming year paint a promising picture for the 2026 gardening market,” says Mike Reiber, founder and CEO of Axiom. “In spite of economic uncertainty, job losses and inflation, gardeners spent record amounts of time and money on their gardens. Respondents say they’ll likely continue this in 2026 – especially respondents who are 22-28 and 29-44 years of age.

## Key findings related to time and money spent gardening include:

- 47.6% spent more time gardening in 2025 – the highest level since 2022
- Respondents spending 50% more time gardening increased 27% in 2025 vs. 2024.
- Respondents spending 100% more time gardening increased 41% in 2025

vs. 2024.

- 49.5% spent more money gardening in 2025 – an 11.5% increase from 2024.
- 42.8% expect to spend more money gardening in 2026.
- 50.2% expect to spend more time gardening in 2026.
- 63.6% will plant more and expand their gardens in 2026.

## Key findings related to Gen Y and Gen Z respondents include:

- Gen Y (66.7%) and Gen Z (63.8%) spent more time gardening in 2025 versus Gen X (33.1%).
- Gen Y (66.7%) and Gen Z (65.2%) expect to spend more time in 2026 versus Gen X (37.2%).
- Gen Y (61.1%) and Gen Z (53.6%) spent more money gardening in 2025 versus Gen X (43.0%).
- Gen Y (63.9%) and Gen Z (49.3%) expect to spend more money in 2026 versus Gen X (31.4%).

## Key purchase drivers for garden plants and supplies include:

- Specific variety of plant type (36%) remained the most important decision factor in 2025. Price (19%) and

highly descriptive tags (11.6%) were the second and third most important decision factors.

- 77% willing to pay more for the specific color of flower or variety.
- 52.1% willing to drive 6-10 miles for the color or variety they want.
- 55.2% have a shopping list.

## Preferred purchase outlets for gardening supplies and plants

Although Home Depot remained the leading purchase outlet for garden supplies and garden plants, however, mentions of the retailer as the source for most garden product purchases were significantly lower than 2024.

- In 2025, 24.6% purchased most of their garden supplies at Home Depot versus 32.2% in 2024.
- In 2025, 23.6% purchased most of their garden plants at Home Depot versus 33.9% in 2024
- Lowe’s and Walmart also declined slightly.

## IGC visit frequency and duration

For the first time ever, Axiom queried respondents about the number of IGC visits, the duration of visits and factors that would increase time and money spent

at IGCs.

- 39.3% made 4-7 visits to IGCs during the 2025 gardening season.
- 39% spent more than 30 minutes during each IGC visit.
- 37.1% cited inspiration as #1 driver to increase time and money spent at IGCs.

## Key information sources for plants and gardening supplies

According to Reiber, 2025 key information sources for garden plants and gardening supplies include:

- IGCs (22%) surpassed websites (19.8%) as the top information source.
- IGCs (28.5%) cited as having the most knowledgeable store associates of all retailers.
- Google Lens cited as the most important smart phone app to learn about new plants.

Founded in 1993, Axiom specializes insight-driven marketing. Axiom provides market research, new product development, channel strategy, and sales-first communication services for manufacturers of horticultural, agricultural and home improvement products. Learn more at [axiomcom.com](http://axiomcom.com).

Dwarf maple or mountain maple, *Acer spicatum*, is a large branching shrub or small tree which at maturity is 12-25 feet and is NJ’s smallest native maple. The genus name *Acer* is Latin for maple and *spicatum* refers to the long, spike-like, upright flowers. NJ has two uncommon native dwarf maples, mountain maple, and striped maple. This article will be confined to mountain maple.

Mountain maple naturally grows in cool, shady, moist woods and along streams in rich, well drained, neutral (pH 6-8) soils. But it also grows on rocky hillsides and along bog edges. Although it generally prefers partial shade, it also grows in full sun and adapts to a variety of soils. The natural range is Southeast Canada south to Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee and in the mountains to northern Georgia. The plant was fairly widespread in seven counties of northern NJ before 1980 but unfortunately iNaturalist has no recent reports of it in NJ. I presume the plant along with many of the other uncommon plants is now extinct (extirpated) in the wild in NJ.

Like most maples, mountain maple has 3 to 5 lobes on 3.5



## The Native Plant Society of New Jersey

By Hubert Ling  
Horticulture Chair

# A ‘Rare’ Dwarf Maple

to 4.5-inch, soft, bright green leaves. The leaves are coarsely and irregularly toothed with fine hairs on the underside. In fall the leaves turn a vibrant yellow to orange-red. The greenish-yellow flowers appear after the leaves sometime in June. Generally, the flowers are either male or female, but some flowers contain both male and female structures (perfect flowers). The flowers are borne singly on long stalks attached to a central upright stem. This flower structure is termed a raceme. Both types of flowers are found in a single raceme and are about 3/16 of an inch in diameter. Although most maples are wind pollinated, mountain maple is pollinated by insects and provides nectar and pollen. The fruits are typical paired maple

fruits. Each is a flat, dry wing that is connected to a shared stem. It is named a double samara or, in the New York vernacular, a helicopter or ‘polynose’ and is wind distributed.

Mountain maple is generally propagated by seed. However, the seeds must be scarified and stratified for good seed germination. The plant is also propagated by simply dividing clumps since mountain maple often sprouts from lateral underground stems, and lower branches readily root when they contact soil. Mountain maple is generally disease and insect resistant. The growth rate is slow-medium and old age is at 50-70 years.

Mountain maple is a very important understory plant

particularly for wildlife. It sometimes grows aggressively after timbering or a fire. This is ecologically significant since it rapidly covers bare ground and provides wildlife with food and shelter. The plant is used for summer browse for woodland caribou, cottontails, deer, moose, and snowshoe hares. The young bark is also used for food by beavers, cottontails, deer, and moose. Pheasant, grouse, and wild turkey eat the buds in winter when there is a scarcity of food. Several species of beetles and aphids also utilize the plant as do the imperial, dagger, and banded tussock moths. The seeds are eaten by deer and birds. It is rather fortunate for all of us that the plant is very nutritious for wildlife, is important to

prevent erosion on steep slopes or streambanks and has remarkable powers of regeneration. In fact, mountain maple shows the greatest regeneration if 80% of the twigs are removed.

The sap in early spring can be used to make maple syrup or taken as is for a mildly sweet drink. The bark has been used to tan leather. Native Americans used boiled twigs as an eye wash and boiled root chips as a poultice to reduce infection and inflammation. As usual I caution everyone from using any medicinal product which has not been thoroughly tested for safety and effectiveness. Although the wood is limited in size, it is popular for musical instruments because of its strength and durability. The stems were also used for arrow shafts.

Consider mountain maple if you want a multi-branched dwarf maple and help reestablish it in NJ.

**Editor’s Note:** Hubert Ling is Past President of The Native Plant Society of NJ and Horticulture Chair. He can be reached at [milhubling@verizon.net](mailto:milhubling@verizon.net).

In addition to being the month of my birth, January is better known as the beginning of a new calendar year. It is a time of resolutions and a “new you.” But it is also a time to consider new approaches to gardening.

As I start my next trip around the sun, I’m starting to feel like the “old dog” but I’m still eager to learn new tricks, because I believe that once you stop learning, you stop living. I love to read physical and digital media to generate new ideas and new approaches.

If you’re not familiar with what’s known as the “70/30 Gardening Rule,” it’s a design principle originally popularized by garden designer Piet Oudolf. Initially, it suggested that 70 percent of your garden should be composed of safe, structural plants that were reliable and provided long-term or year-round interest and served as the backbone of your garden.

The remaining 30 percent would be filler or experimental plant matter that could provide seasonal color, and which can be changed out with the shifting of the growing periods. More recently, the 70/30 rule



## NJ Dept. of Agriculture

By Joe Atchison III  
Assistant Secretary of Agriculture

### New Year: New Ideas and New Approaches

has morphed into a variation that promotes wildlife support by including 70 percent native plants that focus on local insects and birds and other wildlife, and the other 30 percent potentially being non-invasive, non-native species that will not negatively impact the local ecosystem. This is a new twist on an old approach.

The benefit of a 70/30 garden is that it guarantees a garden that remains beautiful to the eye in every season, not just when flowers are blooming. It also creates a stable, balanced composition, and when utilizing the native plants, it provides ecological support.

The important thing to remember is to develop relationships with your favorite

local nursery and garden center’s owners and staff. They can assist with finding new and exciting plants for your garden and they know what grows best in New Jersey’s climate. Ask for *Jersey Grown* or *Jersey Native Plants* when discussing options with them. These will provide you with plants best suited for the soils and conditions of our state.

Now here’s a new concept that, despite my open mind, still has me shaking my fist at the clouds. Using artificial intelligence (AI) to help design and plan your garden. I mean, has no one seen Terminator? Is this how the machines begin the takeover?

Seriously though, artificial intelligence can be used in very simple or in more complex

ways to help make you a better gardener and optimize your garden space. You’ve probably already used a simple version of AI to help you identify an unknown plant in your yard or even out in the wild. You snap a photo and the app searches and names the plant and offers details about its growing conditions and other physical characteristics.

Artificial Intelligence can also help with: Identifying what’s wrong with plants that aren’t growing well; determining which types of plants can grow in your zone; informing you which plants can grow in certain areas; and determining the best time to plant new plants or sow seeds (indoors or outdoors).

On the more complex side,

you can submit a photo of the garden area and ask for recommendations to fill the space. Whichever AI system you are using will process the information and generate responses based on your input.

The important thing to remember is that generative AI is still developing and is only as good as the input it receives and what is available on the internet to draw from in developing suggestions and answers. I’ve seen more than one image with people with six fingers on each hand. So, when you ask AI to develop something for you, be as detailed as possible. List your USDA Planting Zone, your soil type, the grade of the land and of course the size of the area to be gardened.

I wish you a Happy New Year and a Happy New Garden!

**Editor’s Note: Joe Atchison III is the New Jersey Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. Atchison is also the Director of the Division of Marketing and Development for the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. He can be reached at (609) 292-3976.**

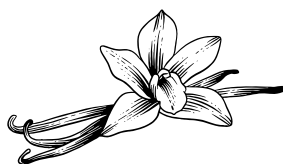
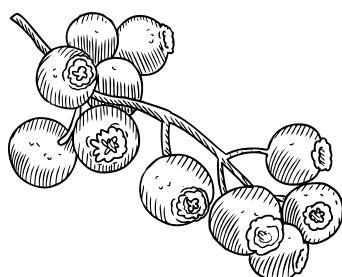
# Jersey Tastes!

A Year-Round Celebration of the Garden State's Fruits and Vegetables

## INGREDIENTS

FAMILY SIZE, SERVES 10  
PORTION SIZE: 5oz.

- 1 cup white sugar
- ½ cup salted butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 Tbsp. vanilla extract
- 1 cup milk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 2 cups NJ frozen blueberries



### FUN FACT!

The Jersey Blueberry, also known as *Vaccinium corymbosum*, is one of the oldest blueberries in the U.S. It was invented in 1916 by a group of breeders in New Jersey and released to the public in 1928. Jersey is often thought of as one of the gold standards of blueberry shrubs, and modern plants are often compared to it.

## Blueberry Bread



## DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9×4 inch loaf pan and set aside. Keep frozen blueberries in the freezer until ready to use (no need to thaw).
- 2 Make the batter. Cream butter and sugar in a standard mixer until fluffy. Add eggs and vanilla, mix well. In a separate bowl, whisk flour and baking powder.
- 3 Toss frozen blueberries with ¼ cup of the flour mixture. Add remaining flour and milk to the wet ingredients, mix until combined. Gently fold in the floured frozen blueberries.
- 4 Pour batter into the pan. Bake for 55–60 minutes or until a toothpick comes out mostly clean. Cool in the pan or on a wire rack. Enjoy!



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From the Director's Desk  
*Rutgers Outreach*  
Provided by Brian Schilling  
Director

# Looking Toward the Future in a Time of AI

Since 1914, Cooperative Extension has brought land-grant university research to farmers, families, business owners, and communities—to individuals who use that knowledge every day. Naturally, how we do this work has changed. Extension personnel of the early 1900s, who relied on train stops as key locations for demonstrations and educational programs, would never have envisioned the use of cell phones and Zoom meetings to share information.

It is safe to say that remarkable advancements in technology continue to drive how Cooperative Extension does its work, and we are amid one of the most transformative periods in our history. Consider, for example, how digital agriculture is reshaping how food is grown or, even more ubiquitously, how artificial intelligence (AI) is impacting the way people access and use information. These quickly establishing realities often lead people to ask me, “*Will technology replace the need for Cooperative Extension?*”

I do not believe so.

For home gardeners, the arrival of AI is likely to magnify—not diminish—the value of Cooperative Extension. Much like farmers who have long benefited from technological innovation, gardeners will increasingly find themselves surrounded by digital tools offering pest and disease diagnostics, automated reminders for seasonal tasks, and personalized recommendations tailored to their gardens. Yet these tools raise important questions about reliability, data quality, and whether the information truly reflects local conditions. This is where Extension continues to play a crucial role, translating research-backed knowledge into context-specific guidance for plant selection, landscape planning, and management of pests and plant problems.

Many of the same technologies reshaping commercial agriculture can be applied to backyards and community gardens. Home irrigation systems may soon rely on AI-driven controllers that respond dynamically to soil moisture and weather forecasts. Smartphone apps can already scan leaves for diseases or nutrient issues, though their accuracy varies widely, which is why a visit to your local Extension office is often still a smart option. Affordable, pocket-sized sensors may soon help gardeners monitor soil moisture, temperature, and nutrient levels in real time, turning ordinary raised beds into miniature data-collection stations. For gardeners, such tools may reduce guesswork, improve plant health, and help conserve resources like water and fertilizer, leaving more time to enjoy their landscapes.

But as any gardener knows, planning desired landscapes and growing healthy plants can be tricky. Conditions may vary dramatically from one yard—or even one corner of a yard—to another. Soil type, drainage, tree canopy, microclimate, pest pressure, and plant selection all interact in ways that AI tools cannot always detect or predict. The models behind these tools are only as good as the data used to “train” them. AI models may not be optimally trained on datasets that reflect local climate, common pests, regionally appropriate plant varieties, or hyperlocal conditions that affect gardening outcomes. While AI tools are rapidly improving, misdiagnoses and off-base recommendations may occur. Extension professionals can help gardeners interpret AI-generated guidance and evaluate whether recommendations align with local research and on-the-ground realities.

I am particularly fascinated with the emergence of “digital AI assistants” that may be designed to help with routine garden tasks.

As these tools advance, gardeners may rely on assistants that create planting calendars, send pruning alerts, or predict pest emergence. These tools can be useful and convenient, but they cannot replace trained horticulture agents, Master Gardeners, and community educators who understand local soils, invasive species, microclimates, and environmentally responsible gardening practices. Extension experts bring context, experience, and hands-on insight—qualities that AI cannot fully replicate.

And then there is the human side of gardening, which remains at its heart a personal and social activity that technology can augment but not replace. Gardeners turn to Extension programs not only for research-based information but also to connect with others and enjoy the camaraderie that comes from shared learning, trading stories, and highlighting successes (or “lessons learned” from unforeseen setbacks). I like to think that this is evidenced by the commitment of hundreds of thousands of hours of volunteer time toward Rutgers Cooperative Extension programs, including Rutgers Master Gardeners. AI may be able to analyze a photo, but it cannot yet walk a garden path with someone, understand their aspirations, or appreciate their pride in a thriving vegetable patch or a newly established pollinator bed.

Looking ahead, Cooperative Extension will remain a bridge between cutting-edge technology and practical horticultural experience. As AI tools proliferate, Extension educators will help gardeners interpret digital information, assess credibility, and select tools that are evidence-based, secure, affordable, and suited to their goals. In short, Cooperative Extension will continue doing what we do: offering place-based, trusted, human-centered support that helps gardeners grow healthier plants and build more resilient landscapes.

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**Editor's Note:** Brian J. Schilling, Ph.D., is Director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension and Senior Associate Director of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station.

# LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY NEWS

## Michelle Infante-Casella Named “Woman of the Year” By NJ Farm Bureau

Michelle Infante-Casella, agricultural agent and department head, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Gloucester County, was recognized as a “Woman of the Year” by the New Jersey Farm Bureau (NJFB) Women’s Leadership Committee on November 17. Infante-Casella was also recognized with a New Jersey Legislative Joint Commendation from Senator John Burzichelli, Assemblyman David Bailey, and Assemblywoman

Heather Simmons at the annual NJFB event.

Each year, the committee accepts nominations for its “Women of the Year Award” from county Boards of Agriculture, New Jersey commodity groups and individuals.

Infante-Casella is the first woman at Rutgers to achieve the title of County Agent I, equivalent to Full Professor in the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources

(ANR), and only one of five faculty members currently in ANR to achieve this rank.

She has also been recognized by professional organizations for her extension programs and has received 27 national, 10 regional and 22 state awards for her work. In 2024, the Gloucester County Women’s Commission awarded Infante-Casella with its “Women of Achievement Award.”

## A New Jersey Senate Resolution Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Chrysler Herbarium at Rutgers University

Sponsored by:  
Senator Bob Smith

Co-Sponsored by:  
Senator Diegnan

SR139

**Synopsis:** Celebrates 100th anniversary of Chrysler Herbarium at Rutgers University.

Whereas, A herbarium is a collection of preserved plant specimens, which can serve as a kind of botanical “library,” facilitating research, education, and conservation efforts; and

Whereas, The Chrysler Herbarium, located at the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers, the State University, was established in 1925 and is named after one of its founders, Dr. Mintin A. Chrysler, a botany professor at Rutgers; and

Whereas, The Chrysler Herbarium is the largest internationally recognized herbarium in the State; and

Whereas, The herbarium contains nearly 200,000 botanical specimens of plants, algae, and fungi, covering a vast range of botanical biodiversity; and

Whereas, The herbarium focuses on the flora of New Jersey and the surrounding states within the Mid-Atlantic region, including specimens collected from the 1800s to the current day; and

Whereas, The herbarium’s collection has been used in various

research projects, including sampling for DNA or chemical defenses, rediscovering rare and endangered species, and determining the dates of species’ introduction to the New World through the analysis of ship ballast; and

Whereas, Rutgers undergraduate researchers have also looked at the herbarium’s collection to study species range shifts, herbivory trends, and to assist in rediscovering species over 100 years since their last known collection in the State; and

Whereas, Today, the herbarium is nearly 100 percent digitized, and specimens can be viewed by the public online through large data aggregators such as Integrated Digitized Biocollections, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, and the Mid-Atlantic Herbaria Consortium; and

Whereas, The herbarium serves as an example of the excellence of the State’s academic and other research institutions; now, therefore,

Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of New Jersey:

1. The Senate celebrates the 100th anniversary of the Chrysler Herbarium at Rutgers University and the significant work the herbarium has done to facilitate biological and other research.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of the State, shall be transmitted by the Senate Secretary to the President of Rutgers, The State University, and the Director of the Chrysler Herbarium.

## Plant Biology Graduate Students Win Awards at Annual Meeting of National Societies

Leaders in agronomy, crops and soil sciences gathered at CANVAS 2025 from November 9-12 in Salt Lake City, Utah, to host the premier gathering of ideas, solutions and innovation from across the field of environmental sciences. CANVAS, formerly the ASA, CSSA, SSSA International Annual Meeting, provides a platform for emerging learners and leaders from industry, government agencies, and academic institutions to explore advances in agronomic, crop and soil sciences.

Under the theme, “40 Years into the Future,” CANVAS 2025 offered scientific sessions, workshops, poster sessions, an exhibit Hall, and student-focused programming that ensured numerous opportunities for students pursuing studies in these fields.

Among the emerging leaders were three graduate students in the Department of Plant Biology at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, who won awards for their poster presentations.

Ryan Earp won first place in the Turfgrass Breeding, Genomics, Physiology and Molecular Biology poster session for “Determining DNA Content and Ploidy Variation in Kentucky Bluegrass Cultivars and Accessions Using Flow Cytometry,” which he coauthored with Chris Tkach, Christine Kubik, Jennifer Vaiciunas, Mark LaBarge and Stacy Bonos.

“This year, my poster focused on developing a high-throughput flow cytometry method to accurately determine ploidy levels in Kentucky bluegrass. Because this species is highly polyploid and extremely variable, reliable ploidy estimates are essential for fully understanding the genetic analyses for my overall project,” said Earp.

“Receiving the award was truly an honor. This project required a lot of trial-and-error, so it was very rewarding to see that effort recognized. It also reinforced the importance of building strong foundational methods, not just focusing on the final results,” he added.

Earp is no stranger to this national industry event.

“As a repeat presenter and previous award recipient, it has been exciting to show how my research is progressing from year to year. Last year’s project centered on building the bioinformatics pipeline for SNP discovery in Kentucky bluegrass, and this year’s work adds the cytogenetic framework needed to interpret those data. Presenting again allowed me to demonstrate how these pieces connect and how each step moves the overall project forward. I’m grateful for the continued support and motivated to keep advancing this research.”

Devan Gladden won second place in the Turfgrass Water Conservation poster session for “High Throughput Phentotyping of Stay-Green Traits for Kentucky Bluegrass Under Variable Irrigation,” which he coauthored with Stephanie Rossi and Bingru Huang.

“The research I presented is a comparison of using drone imaging versus more manual techniques like sampling, imaging, and rating each sample plot of turfgrass in response to watering that simulates varying levels of drought. The division I competed in was turfgrass water conservation and this research utilizes newer technology to help reduce labor and costs associated with breeding drought tolerant plants with reduced irrigation requirements, helping conserve water. I was pretty excited and surprised to have placed as this was my first time going to a research conference let alone presenting in two student competitions,” said Gladden.

Emmanuel Nwachukwu won third place in the Golf Turf Management and Remote Sensing poster session for “Influence of Soil pH Gradient on an Annual Bluegrass Putting Green,” which he coauthored with James Murphy and Matthew Elmore.

“Our research revealed that during stressful summer times, turf quality of *Poa annua* putting green did not decline in mat layer acidic pH when supplemented with gypsum and nitrogen. I feel happy to assist golf course superintendents in their fertility programs,” said Nwachukwu.



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Sussex County, New Jersey



## In the Chef's Corner

By Andy Lagana  
Chef

# Classic American Dish – Yankee Pot Roast

Hello and happy new year *Gardener News* readers. We welcome 2026 with exciting possibilities! This year has many noteworthy dates including the 250th anniversary of the United States' Declaration of Independence. Fun fact: No one signed this document on July 4, 1776, as the formal copy was not ready until August 2 of that year. 56 delegates eventually signed, and the rest is history.

In keeping with this patriotic theme, I am sharing a hearty and wholesome classic American dish – a Yankee pot roast. This traditional meal features a tender, slow-braised beef chuck roast cooked in one pot with root vegetables and a rich gravy.

Yankee pot roast originated in New England from the thrifty and resourceful culinary traditions of its early settlers, inspired by European braising techniques and adapted to local, seasonal ingredients. The dish is an American variation of the French dish “boeuf a la mode,” introduced by French immigrants, which became known as “Yankee pot roast” due to its prevalence in the region. Its defining characteristics are simplicity, one-pot cooking, and the use of tough cuts of beef with common vegetables.

For the roast and braise, you will need 1 (3 to 4-pound) boneless beef chuck roast, Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste, 2 tbsp. olive oil, 1 large yellow onion – chopped, 3 cloves garlic – minced, 2 tbsp. tomato paste, 1/4 cup all-purpose flour, 1 cup dry

red wine (Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon recommended), 2 cups beef stock or broth, 2 bay leaves, 2 sprigs fresh thyme or 1 tsp. dried, 2 sprigs fresh rosemary or 1 tsp. dried.

For the vegetables, which will be added later, gather 1 ½ lbs. small potatoes (red or Yukon gold) - halved or quartered, 1 lb. carrots - peeled and cut into large chunks, and 3 celery stalks - cut into large pieces.

To start, season and sear the beef. Preheat your oven to 325°F (163°C). Pat the beef roast dry with paper towels and season generously on all sides with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Sear the roast until well-browned on all sides (which will be about 5-6 minutes per side), and then remove it to a plate.

Next, reduce the heat to medium. Add the chopped onion, celery and garlic to the pot and cook, stirring, until the onions are softened, about 5-6 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for one minute. Add the flour and cook for another minute, stirring constantly. Pour in the red wine, scraping up all the browned bits from the bottom of the pot, and let it reduce slightly.

Return the beef to the pot, along with any accumulated juices. Add the beef stock, bay leaves, thyme, and rosemary. The liquid should come about halfway up the meat. Bring the mixture to a simmer on the stovetop. Then, cover the pot tightly with a lid (or use aluminum foil under the lid for a tighter seal) and transfer it to the preheated oven. Cook for

approximately 2 to 3 hours, or until the meat is almost fork tender.

Remove the pot from the oven. Nestle the potatoes, carrots, and celery around the pot roast. Season the vegetables with a pinch of salt and pepper. Re-cover the pot and return it to the oven. Continue cooking for another 45 minutes to an hour, until both the vegetables and the beef are completely tender and the meat pulls apart easily.

Remove the pot roast and vegetables to a large serving platter. Tent loosely with foil and let the meat rest for approximately 10-15 minutes before slicing or shredding it against the grain. Skim any excess fat from the pan juices, and serve the roast and vegetables with the rich gravy spooned over the top. On a cold winter's day, there is no better comfort food than this!

In my opinion, the best wines to serve with Yankee pot roast are bold, full-bodied red wines like Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel or a Bordeaux blend that can complement the flavors of the rich beef. Alternatively, you may want to consider earthy options such as a Barolo or a Tempranillo. For those who prefer a white wine, a full-bodied Chardonnay can also work well.

And for dessert, some appealing options with this dish include an apple crumble with custard, sticky toffee pudding, carrot cake, or my personal favorite - a warm brownie topped with caramel, pecans and ice cream which makes for a decadent finale. Enjoy!

## Smart Drones Could One Day Improve Crop Yields in South Jersey's Cranberry Bogs

The Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey are home to the state's largest producers of cranberries, a native fruit that thrives in the region's sandy, acidic soil. So, too, does a perennial weed called the Carolina redroot, another native plant whose flowering crowns of seedheads can quickly spread through a healthy cranberry bog, devastating crop yields.

With support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, researchers at Rowan University spent two years working with Rutgers Philip E. Marucci Center for Blueberry and Cranberry Research to develop “intelligent” drones to seek out and spray affected areas for treatment.

“Currently, the farmers have to use a plane to spray the whole field,” said Thanh Nguyen, Ph.D., an associate professor of mathematics in the College of Science & Mathematics and the project's principal investigator. “We want to develop an AI and an autonomous drone system that can detect and do the spot spraying autonomously.”

Using commercially available agricultural drones to capture images of the fields, the team mapped out specific locations of Carolina redroot to identify areas in need of treatment. Next, the researchers aim to integrate detection software in a spray drone, allowing it to detect and spray weeds on its own.

Precision spraying could reduce the amount of pesticides required to control the weed, as well as costs and labor, said Hieu Nguyen, Ph.D., a Rowan University mathematics professor and the project's co-principal investigator.

The team recently received additional funding from the USDA for similar research involving smart weed detection and management in specialty row crops like corn and squash.

Funding for “Early Detection and Mapping of Carolina Redroot in Cranberry Bogs using AI and Autonomous Drones” was made possible by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service through grant 23DCBPNJ1201-00. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.

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I have always enjoyed studying the winter branch structure of deciduous trees. Some folks find winter to be lackluster due to the absence of foliage, but I find the leaf-bare silhouettes fun to study against the blue winter sky. Albeit rare in temperate regions, coarse textured trees add a wonderful contrast to their finely textured cohorts. Kentucky Coffeetree, botanically named *Gymnocladus dioica* is one of the best for adding that touch of thick and bold texture that makes the winter treeline an interesting study.

*Gymnocladus* is a member of the Fabaceae, commonly known as the Pea Family and contains five species with four found in Asia. Native from Western Tennessee to Oklahoma and stretching north to Iowa and Ontario, it's native range obviously includes Kentucky! The tree was originally and mistakenly described as *Guilandina dioica* in 1753 by the Swedish naturalist and botanist Carl Linnaeus (1717-1778). To his credit, the species epithet did properly describe the dioecious nature of the tree, explaining how some plants bear only female flowers while others only male. The genus name of *Gymnocladus* was created in 1785 by the French biologist Jean Baptiste Antoine



## Morris County Park Commission

By Bruce Crawford  
Horticultural Manager

# Bold Living Sculptures

Pierre De Monet De Lamarck (1744-1829). The name comes from the Greek *Gumnós* meaning naked or bare and *Klados* for branch, referring to how the plant is often bare of foliage for six months. Unfortunately, Lamarck altered the species, naming the plant *Gymnocladus canadensis*. The name finally found closure in 1869 when the German botanist Karl Henrich Emil Koch (1809-1879) renamed the plant *Gymnocladus dioica*.

Kentucky Coffeetree is a large tree, growing 60-100 feet tall by 40-60 feet wide. It has many unique qualities, with its magical ability to transition from a finely textured plant of summer to coarsely textured come winter probably being its most notable. The secret to this transition lies in the seemingly complex, twice-compound foliage.

Varying from 1-3 feet long by 1½-2 feet wide, the leaf of *Gymnocladus* has a central stem called a rachis, from which 5-9 secondary stems called rachilla branch forth. It is along these rachilla that the 1½-3½ inches long by ¾-1½ inches wide egg-shaped leaflets appear. As complex as it may sound, twice compound leaves have numerous advantages. The sheer quantity of leaflets increases the overall surface area, thereby increasing the plants' ability to produce carbohydrates. The small leaflets reduce the amount of water lost to transpiration and the more open canopy is far less likely to impede gusty winds, resulting in less limb breakage. Amazing!

The presence – or absence – of seed pods is another notable quality. As mentioned, the plants are dioecious, with specific trees

bearing only female or male flowers. The female blossoms transition into 3-6 inches long by 1½-2 inches wide pea-shaped pods which can be ornamental or annoying, depending on their location! When ripe, the pods turn a dark reddish brown. Opening the ripe pods reveals 3-6 round and slightly flattened, dark brown seeds measuring ½-inch in diameter. The seeds also contain hydrocyanic acid, making them poisonous if eaten raw, but when roasted for three hours at 150°F it is rendered harmless. Native Americans, followed by the early colonists living in the Kentucky region were known to roast and grind the seeds for brewing a coffee-like beverage. Although uncaffeinated, this beverage was the incentive for the common name!

Interestingly, the seed coat is too dense for most insect and animal

teeth to penetrate. It is thought the American Mastodon, now extinct for 11,000 years once ate the pods and seeds. The action of the Mastodon's intestine softened the seed coat, providing better germination and a fertilizer source! If a fruitless male form is preferred, the cultivar Espresso™ is a fine selection with a slightly arching habit. Plants prefer well-drained soils, although they are tolerant of moister soils and are hardy in zones 3-8.

The change from a fine textured tree to coarse may initially be startling but I find its seasonal change to be a great reason for planting Kentucky Coffeetree. Its coarse winter outline, especially with a dusting of snow creates a bold living sculpture, hopefully inspiring more gardeners to study the beautiful structures of leaf-bare trees this winter!

**Editor's Note:** Bruce Crawford is a lover of plants since birth, is the Manager of Horticulture for the Morris County Parks Commission, and a Past President of the Garden State Gardens Consortium. He can be reached at [BCrawford@morrisparks.net](mailto:BCrawford@morrisparks.net)

In January, Mikie Sherrill will be sworn in for a four-year term as the Governor of New Jersey. And regardless of how any of us may have voted in the general election back in November, she will be serving for four years as the leader of our State.

Because there is only a little more than two months between the election and her inauguration, she has a lot to do in a very short amount of time in regard to getting ready to be the Governor. Not only does she have to pick areas and issues on which to focus, but she also has to vet and select a staff to implement those ideas. She and her staff will have a tremendous amount of work to do in just researching and familiarizing themselves with the ways in which our government operates. And this must happen very quickly if her new administration has any chance of hitting the ground running, as they say.

I know that all candidates run on certain issues and have different areas that they would like to focus on. And I also realize that because they may have made certain pledges or



## The Town Farmer

By Peter Melick  
Agricultural Producer

# Time For a New Governor

promises during their campaign, they feel that they have an obligation to their constituents to address some of these focal points as soon as they take office. After all, these are the issues that garnered all the headlines during the campaign and may have been the reasons that they were elected. But these are not the issues that cause new administrations to falter. What gives new administrations trouble is a lack of paying attention to the details of establishing and then running an efficient government that serves the residents and taxpayers of the State of New Jersey.

Many New Jerseyans probably voted for Mikie Sherrill because she promised to cap everyone's electric bills.

And if she does or does not do this, it will more than likely have very little effect on her popularity. But if residents can't get their driver's license renewed because of long lines at the DMV, they will be infuriated, whether they voted for her or not. And they will forget all about the Governor's stance on propping up the teachers' pension fund if, on their way to work, they hit a pothole on Rt. 78 and are forced to purchase a new tire and wheel and need to get their car's alignment adjusted.

One of the common criticisms of the Murphy administration was for its inability to make timely appointments to critical positions in state government. I know that COVID did not

help matters, but for a time, there was such a shortage of judges in New Jersey that there was as much as a two year wait for a civil trial in many jurisdictions. TWO YEARS!!! We have all heard the saying, "Justice delayed is justice denied," but that was ridiculous! And take the New Jersey Highlands Council for example. There are so many vacancies on the Council that they have had to cancel meetings due to not having enough members to have a quorum. Now, that might not seem like a big deal, but if you have an application before the Council, and it takes them an extra two months to process it solely because the Governor's Office can't find the time to appoint someone to a

volunteer position, you can see why people would get upset.

It's relatively small issues like these that can make or break any administration. Most of the issues that arise on a daily basis have nothing to do with political parties or politics or any of the rhetoric we were all subjected to during the campaign. These problems will need to be addressed with a combination of common sense, hard work, and attention to detail. And it will be up to our incoming Governor to effectively manage and solve these types of problems as they arise. Best of luck to Governor Sherrill!

**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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SLF prefer to lay egg masses in protected areas such as the undersides of tree limbs, picnic tables, and other outdoor surfaces that are horizontal or angled toward the ground.



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I miss my herb garden. Deep in the heart of winter it sits, dormant and waiting. But cooking must go on! So, what's an herb lover to do? Like centuries of cooks before me, I rely on my Spice Box! Box, cabinet, shelf or wherever you keep your spices, they tell a story about you.

The terms herb and spice are often used interchangeably, but they are two different types of seasonings, made from different sections of plants and processed in different ways. In short and generally: herbs come from the leafy, green parts of herbaceous (non-woody) plants, while spices come from other parts of the plant, i.e., the root, stem, bark, seed, fruit, or flower.

The Spice Box has a long history, and every culture has its individual pantheon of flavorings – these three have influenced my own Spice Box.

Ancient wealthy Romans were known for their elaborate feasts and culinary sophistication. Because they were so valued, spices were stored in ornate, beautifully decorated boxes made of wood, metal, or ceramic. The popular Roman 5<sup>th</sup> century cookbook, "Excerpts of Vinidarius," was a compendium of the best recipes in the classic Roman cookbook "Apicius, De re Culinarian." This is like comparing Betty Crocker to Julia Child. But even so, it begins



## The Garden Historian

By Lesley Parness  
Garden Educator

# "Spice Things Up"

with these instructions:

BREUIS PIMENTORÚ· Q: IN DOMO ESSE DEBEANT UT CONDIMENTIS NIHIL DESIT meaning "Summary of spices which should be in the house so that nothing is lacking in seasoning."

These included: Silphium, from what is now Libya, as valuable as silver, perfect with flamingo tongue, and harvested until extinction; Asafoetida, the dried latex from Central Asia rhizomes, uber stinky, and essential for the Roman fish sauce, garum; Sesame from North Africa – pounded into a paste for a powerful energy drink; and Spikenard, the oil derived from a Himalayan honeysuckle used for flavoring wine. We can trace the rise and fall of the Roman Empire by reading Spice Box ingredients. The oldest cookbook in history is Roman and online at [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org), search "Apicius."

An Indian Spice box is known

as a Masala Dabba. An intrinsic part of Indian cooking, they are traditionally handed down from generation to generation. Often, they would be given by a mother as a wedding gift to her daughter. I gave one to my son when he left for college so that he could recreate favorite family recipes. Masala Dabba are stored next to the stove, so that spices are ready when the oil is hot.

There are seven essential spices found in most dishes, although in different forms: whole, chopped, ground, roasted, sautéed, fried, and sprinkled on top. These are Chili, Cloves, Cumin, Cassia, Coriander, Turmeric, and Cardamom. But the Indian subcontinent contains many regional cuisines each featuring different spices. For example, mustard seeds are popular in Northern Indian cooking where crushed or tempered in oil, they add a smoky flavor. The term "Garam masala" means "a blend of spices," the combination of which can vary

from region to region. So, Masala Dabba are highly personalized. Modern Masala Dabba are made of stainless steel with airtight lids. An outstanding collection of antique Masala Dabba is on view at [artsandculture.google.com](http://artsandculture.google.com), search "spice boxes."

The final Spice Box inspiration comes from the American Colonial Era. Colonial housewives lacked little in the way of spices. The shipping routes between America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean ensured the spice trade prospered.

Built-in cupboards and pantries became common in homes in the 1700-1800's. These included designated spaces for spices, indicating their integral role in cooking and food preservation. Freestanding "Spice Cabinets" exemplified the finest American cabinet making skills. These were popular in New Jersey and Pennsylvania Quaker communities, where they emphasized the owner's wealth

and status and were prominently displayed. Martha Washington's own cookbook includes a recipe for a highly spiced mulled wine called Hippocras. Email me for the recipe. The first American cookbook, "American Cookery," written in 1796 by Amelia Simmons can be found at <https://d.lib.msu.edu/fa/1>, features the first pumpkin pie and lots of spices.

This winter, perhaps you will curate your own personal spice chest or make one as a gift to a family member. Be sure to include spices that reflect your individual culinary tastes, family heritage, and favorite recipes!

**Editor's Note:** Lesley Parness offers a variety of presentations and workshops for garden clubs, plant societies, and horticultural gatherings. Recently retired from her position as Superintendent of Horticultural Education at the Morris County Park Commission, and with four decades of teaching environmental science and garden education, her focus now is garden history. A complete listing of her talks can be seen at [lesleyparness.com](http://lesleyparness.com) and she can be reached at [parness@verizon.net](mailto:parness@verizon.net). This column will appear in the paper every other month.

# 2025 Person of the Year

(Continued from page 1)

president, and currently chairs several committees, including Certification, Education, Landscape Licensing, and By-Laws. He can also be found at almost every event as an advocate for the NJLCA, such as their two annual trade shows, annual golf outing, monthly member meetings, annual bowling night, and pizza night. This commitment to industry growth and excellence exemplifies Joe's leadership and passion for advancing the landscape professional profession.

He is also an Adjunct Professor of Irrigation Technologies at Bergen Community College where Joe demonstrates his commitment to education and sharing his industry insights. His passion for teaching extends well beyond the classroom.

Joe's extensive career includes leadership positions at prominent landscape and irrigation product distribution companies in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. His experience spans various aspects of the industry, including sales, management, and account procurement and retention, showcasing his versatility and comprehensive understanding of the field.

As a two-time Volunteer of the Year award winner for the NJLCA, Joe's expertise extends to sustainable practices, as shown by his past role as education coordinator for the Rutgers Veterans Environmental and Technology Solutions Program. This initiative trains U.S. military veterans in sustainable landscaping, stormwater management,

and aquaponics, highlighting Joe's dedication to both environmental stewardship and supporting veterans.

With a strong belief in teamwork and continuous improvement, Joe approaches his work with a detail-oriented mindset and a focus on building and maintaining customer relationships. His diverse background, which includes experience in computer programming, provides him with a unique perspective on integrating technology into landscape and irrigation solutions.

Joe's commitment to his community is further demonstrated through his volunteer work, including his past role as Vice President of the Paramus Chapter of Unico National, the largest Italian American Service

Organization in the U.S.

Joe currently brings his wealth of knowledge and expertise serving as a customer service representative for the Storr Tractor Company.

This paper now wholeheartedly salutes Joe Bolognese Jr. for his outstanding ability and passion, and how his spirited contributions continue to shape the future of the outdoor industry, inspiring professionals and novices alike to strive for excellence and innovation in their profession.

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, environmental, horticultural, and landscaping 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, horticulture 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, environmental, horticultural, and landscaping communities through this newspaper and GardenerNews.com.

New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association



# A Year of Standout Talent: Meet

The New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA) is thrilled to announce the winners of the 2025 Landscape Achievement Awards! Each year, this program shines a spotlight on the incredible talent, creativity, and craftsmanship of landscape professionals across the state—and this year's entries took things to a whole new level.

By supporting this awards program, the NJLCA proudly champions the best of the best in landscaping, elevating projects that highlight top-tier materials, skilled execution, and inspired design. To keep the competition fair and focused solely on the work, all entries are judged completely anonymously—no names, no companies, just pure craftsmanship.

And let's talk about this year's competition: wow. The caliber of submissions was so impressive that several categories sparked spirited debate among the judges. In many cases, the final decisions came down to mere details—illustrating just how exceptional the entries truly were.

Before revealing the project winners, the NJLCA honored the outstanding individuals and companies who elevate our industry every day. Congratulations to:

- Contractor of the Year: Mark Milidantri (B & B Sustainable Landscape and Irrigation)
- Associate of the Year: Liberty Sod Farms (Brian Meserlian)
- Legislative Champion: Pieter van Westervelt (Premium Aquascapes)
- Budding Contractor Award: Visionscape Design
- Nursery of the Year: Barton Nurseries
- Volunteer of the Year: Rob Gaydos (Yellow Wagon Landscaping)
- Educator of the Year: Dr. Steve Fischer (Bergen Community College)
- Customer Service Award: Tim DeBlock (NY-NJ Trailer Supply)
- MVP Award: Daniel Trujillo (Kodiak Landscape & Design)
- Team Player Award: Guillermo Benitez (Cedarwood Landscaping Inc.)
- Making a Difference Award: Mark Borst (Borst Landscape & Design)
- Spotlight Award: Gail Atkinson (Cedarwood Landscaping, Inc.)

## 2025 NJLCA Landscape Achievement Award Winners:

American Beauty Landscape Design, Inc. won the Award of Distinction for "Sports Pavillion Grounds Renovation", designed by Greg Carpenter, in the Installation: School category.

Battinelli Enterprises won the Award of Distinction for "Lakeside Retreat" in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category. Battinelli also won the Award of Distinction for "Kinnelon Estate", design in the same category.

Blue Mountain Landscaping and Hardscaping LLC won the Award of Merit for "Serve & Sizzle", designed by Jeffrey & Felix Escobar, in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category.

Canete Landscape won the Award of Merit for "Bay 151 Enhancement Project", designed by Joe Porta, in the Installation without Pool: Up to \$25,000 category. Canete also won the Award of Distinction for "Marbella 7th Floor Amenity Deck Restoration" in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category. Finally, Canete Landscape won the Award of Merit for "Journal

Square 8th Floor Plantings", designed by Kelly Tuttle, in the Installation without Pool: \$25,000-50,000 category.

CLC Landscape Design won several awards for their projects this year. They won the Award of Excellence for "Franklin Lakes Sanctuary", designed by Frank H. Thropp, in the Installation with Pool: \$250,000-500,000 category; the Award of Excellence for "Saddle River Renovation", designed by Tim Fox, in the Installation with Pool: \$100,000-250,000 category; the Award of Excellence for "Simple Elegance in Summit", designed by Frank H. Thropp, in the Installation without Pool: \$50,000-\$100,000 category; the Award of Excellence for "Vintage Courtyard Restoration", designed by Lisa Mierop, in the Installation without Pool: \$50,000-\$100,000 category; the Award of Excellence for "Intimate Water Garden", designed by Richard Cording Jr., in the Installation: Ponds/Waterfeatures category; the Award of Merit for "Hidden Gem", overseen by Arnie Casamenti, in the Maintenance: Residential category; the Award of Merit for "The Art of Ongoing Care", overseen by Arnie Casamenti, in the Maintenance: Residential category; the Award of Excellence for "Love Won't Wait - Delivering a Dream Venue Against the Odds", designed by Sean Sweeney, in the Installation: Commercial/Industrial category; the Award of Excellence for "Visions of Things to Come", designed by Frank H. Thropp & Ariel Payamps, in the Landscape Design category; the Award of Merit for "Front Yard Elegance", designed by Richard Cording Jr., in the Installation without Pool: Up to \$25,000 category; the Award of Excellence for "We Literally Move Mountains!", designed by Brad Meumann/Richard Cording Jr., in the Installation with Pool: Over \$500,000 category; the Award of Distinction for "Who Needs a Shore House?", designed by Tim Fox, in the Installation with Pool: \$250,000-500,000 category; the Award of Merit for "Welcome Home", designed by Sean Sweeney, in the Installation without Pool: \$25,000-50,000 category; the Award of Distinction for "North Caldwell Sanctuary", designed by David Robbins, in the Installation with Pool: \$100,000-250,000 category; the Award of Merit for "Elegant Montclair Makeover", designed by Joe Deshayes/Richard Cording Jr./Gary Fernbacher, in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category; and finally, the Award of Merit for "Sunset Dreamscape", designed by Bobby Trifome, in the Installation with Pool: \$250,000-500,000 category.

Exclusive Stoneworks won the Award of Excellence for "Bates Retreat", designed by Richard Andreu, in the Installation with Pool: \$100,000-250,000 category and the Award of Distinction for "Navajo Trail" in the Installation with Pool: Over \$500,000 category.

Farmside Landscape and Design won the Award of Excellence for "The Grandcrest House", designed by Barbara Agata, in the Installation with Pool: Over \$500,000 category.

Greenleaf Outdoor Living won the Award of Distinction for "Newtown Outdoor Living Project", designed by Russell Klockner, in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category and the Award of Merit for "Robbinsville Plunge Pool Project", designed by Tom Pennacchio, in the Installation with Pool: Up to \$100,000 category.

# New Jersey Landscape

## The NJLCA Today

By Gail Woolcott  
Executive Director

New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association



# the 2025 NJLCA Award Winners

Let It Grow, Inc. won the Award of Excellence for “Terminal Warehouse” in the Installation: Commercial/Industrial category.

Paps Landscape Design & Construction won the Award of Distinction for “Showstopper at Allendale”, designed by Greg Imhoff (Visionscape Design), in the Installation with Pool: Over \$500,000 category.

Parker Landscape Design won the Award of Merit for “Front Yard Transformation”, designed by Scott Parker, in the Installation: Foundation Planting/Small Garden category; the Award of Merit for “Elegant Retreat - “A True Backyard Playland!””, designed by Scott Parker, in the Installation with Pool: \$250,000-500,000 category; the Award of Merit for “Front Yard Landscape and Hardscape Makeover”, designed by Scott Parker, in the Installation without Pool: \$50,000-\$100,000 category; the Award of Excellence for “A Nighttime Display of Beauty”, designed by Scott Parker, in the Installation: Landscape Lighting category; and the Award of Merit for “Front Yard Transformation”, designed by Scott Parker, in the Installation without Pool: \$25,000-50,000 category.

Premium Aquascapes won the Award of Excellence for “Sanctuary Pond of Amber Fields”, designed by Pieter van Westervelt, in the Installation: Ponds/Waterfeatures category.

Scenic Landscaping won the Award of Excellence for “Elegant Englewood Estate”, designed by Mitch Knapp & Rick Zimmer, in the Installation with Pool: Over \$500,000 category; the Award of Excellence for “Wayne NJ Property Maintenance”, overseen by Matt Schielke, in the Maintenance: Residential category; the Award of Distinction for “Waterfall Pool & Spa - Franklin Lakes, NJ”, designed by Matthew Jones, in the Installation with Pool: \$250,000-500,000 category; and the Award of Distinction for “Garden Westchester Estate”, designed by Matthew Jones, in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category.

Smitty’s Landscaping & Irrigation won the Award of Merit for “Summer Wonderland”, designed by Alexandra Duro, in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category.

Sponzilli Landscape Group won the Award of Distinction for “Denville Dreamscape”, designed by Andrew Lastella, in the Installation with Pool: Over \$500,000 category; the Award of Merit for “Verdant Nook”, designed by Andrew Lastella, in the Installation without Pool: Up to \$25,000 category; the Award of Distinction for “Washington Retreat”, designed by Andrew Lastella, in the Installation with Pool: \$250,000-500,000 category; the Award of Excellence for “Montclair After Dark”, designed by Jason Sponzilli, in the Installation: Landscape Lighting category; and the Award of Distinction for “A Culinary Escape in Montclair”, designed by Andrew Lastella, in the Installation without Pool: \$25,000-50,000 category.

Tode Landscape won the Award of Distinction for “1st Tee Grand Transformation”, designed by Thomas Pedrazzo, in the Installation: Commercial/Industrial category; the Award of Distinction for “Whole Yard Transformation and Childhood Memories”, designed by Thomas Pedrazzo, in the Installation without Pool: Over \$100,000 category; and the Award of Merit



for “Neat, Clean and Tidy”, overseen by Mario Gomez, in the Maintenance: Residential category.

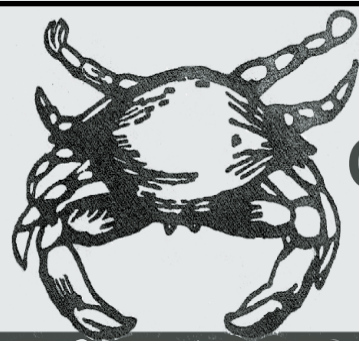
Vander Sluys Landscape Development LLC won the Award of Distinction for “Columbia Bank Headquarters” in the Maintenance: Commercial/Industrial category.

Visionscape Design won the Award of Merit for “Luxe at Livingston”, designed by Greg Imhoff, in the Landscape Design category.

A huge round of applause to all our winners—your passion, dedication, and excellence continue to elevate New Jersey’s Green Industry year after year!

**Editor’s Note:** Gail Woolcott is the Executive Director for the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. Gail was presented with a community service award from the Borough of Fairview, New Jersey for her assistance in leading the 9-11 Memorial Park project and the Legislative Champion of the Year award from the Federation of Employers and Workers of America. She can be reached at 201-703-3600 or by emailing [gwoolcott@njlca.org](mailto:gwoolcott@njlca.org).

# Contractors Association



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## The U.S. Department of Agriculture Launches New World Screwworm Website

This dynamic new site centralizes New World Screwworm (NWS) information available across the federal government and reflects our whole-of-government effort to fight this pest through implementation of U.S. Secretary Rollins' comprehensive five-pronged plan.

"The Trump Administration is leading a whole of government effort to protect our nation's cattle industry from the New World Screwworm. To ensure timely and effective communications, this new unified website will be a one stop shop for all screwworm related information and will help our stakeholders be better informed as new information comes available," said Secretary Brooke Rollins. "We are grateful for the robust interagency collaboration, and we continue to work every day with our state and industry partners to implement our screwworm plan. This is a national security priority and it has the full attention of our team."

Screwworm.gov has targeted resources for a wide range of stakeholders including livestock producers, veterinarians, animal health officials, wildlife professionals, healthcare providers, pet owners, researchers, drug manufacturers, and the general public. It also has the latest United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-verified information on cases and response

activities in Mexico and U.S. preparedness efforts.

Under the decisive leadership of U.S. Secretary Rollins, USDA is leading an aggressive, whole-of-government response to protect the Nation's livestock, wildlife, and public health from NWS. The U.S. One Health Coordination Unit for NWS, co-led by USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Department of the Interior, is actively working to ensure the United States is prepared, should NWS be detected here.

Screwworm.gov includes information from these partner agencies as well as the following collaborating agencies: the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Energy, the Department of Homeland Security, the Environmental Protection Agency, and Department of State.

This new site was built with customers in mind and will help all visitors to the Screwworm.gov website, whether they are protecting their herds, traveling internationally with or without pets, endorsing health certificates, conducting research, seeking answers to questions, or looking for other ways to help. USDA will continue to work with our partners to update and enhance this site to ensure it has the latest information and updates.

## A Penny for Your Thoughts!

Florists, garden centers, landscape supply yards, and nurseries, as well as, most if not all retailers, are experiencing penny shortages since the U.S. Treasury officially stopped minting pennies in June 2025.

New Jersey, like a number of states, has a law that requires retailers to allow consumers to pay with cash at the point of sale. Retailers may not require that a consumer pay with credit.

There is no federal guidance yet as of the *Gardener News* January 2026 publication date, on how the outdoor industry and retailers should handle rounding transactions.

The New Jersey Division of Taxation has relayed that they expect to issue limited guidance clarifying that sales tax is owed on the sale price, regardless of whether a cash charge is rounded up or down to the nearest nickel.

Will the outdoor industry and retailers lose or make money with rounding? Please be patient until this penny process flushes out.

After much research, *Gardener News* found that only Utah has issued official guidance specific to rounding as of December 2025.

<https://dcp.utah.gov/2025/11/10/national-penny-shortage-the-business-guide-to-cash-rounding>.

*\*Please note that the above Utah link only provides guidance.*

With many of the last leaves falling from the trees, we approach the winter months. In many parts of the country temperatures will drop below freezing. While ornamental interest in the garden will decrease there are many plants that can add winter interest, including those plants that have an abundance of flowers during the winter months.

Winter flowering plants are those plants that have their peak flowering from mid-December to Mid-March. These plants, in combination with plants with other winter interest such as evergreen foliage, winter stems, and trees with vivid bark, can truly make a winter garden come alive. In the Mid-Atlantic garden, USDA zones 5-7 there are many choices of winter flowering trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs.

In early January, the small flowering tree or large shrub Chinese witch hazel, *Hamamelis mollis* starts flowering. 'Early Bright' can start as early as the second week of January. In addition to its bright yellow spider-like flowers it has excellent fragrance.

Blooming from February to March are many cultivars of *Hamamelis x intermedia*. I love 'Jelena' for its copper to maroon flowers and good fragrance. 'Primavera' has an upright vase-shaped habit, and



## Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

By Andrew Bunting  
Vice President of Horticulture

### Winter Flowering Trees and Shrubs

'Strawberries and Cream' has a suffusion of pink-, orange- and cream-colored flowers. *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Jelena' has narrow, spider-leg-like petals. Somewhat crinkled when fully extended on sunny winter days, on cold winter nights they curl up and retract. 'Jelena' has stunning tri-colored flowers of orange, burgundy, and yellow. At maturity, this witch hazel can either be trained as a vase-shaped small tree reaching 15 feet or be grown as a multi-stemmed large shrub as wide as it is tall. There are many outstanding golden-yellow witch hazel selections. Exceptional yellow-flowering selections include 'Primavera' and 'Wisley Supreme.'

The Japanese apricot, *Prunus mume* which thrives in USDA zone 6 or higher blooms along the stems with white, pink, red single or double flowers that are intensely fragrant from January to March. 15 to 25 feet tall at maturity, flowers will emerge when there is

a warmer period during the winter, and if it gets cold, they will cease flowering only to start again during milder winter periods. 'Peggy Clarke' has deep pink flowers. 'Kobai' has semi-double, pinkish-red flowers with a cinnamon fragrance, and 'Bonita' has rose-red flowers.

Mahonias are grown for their stout stems and very prickly holly-like leaves, and the deer tend to leave them alone. *Mahonia japonica*, Japanese Mahonia will reach about five feet tall with an equal spread and is covered with spikes of fragrant yellow flowers in late winter to early spring. Many cultivars can bloom any time from late fall and through the winter depending on winter temperatures. In cold winters they are more likely to bloom in late winter heading into the spring. These cultivars include 'Charity', 'Winter Sun' and 'Marvel.'

*Edgeworthia chrysantha* over the decades has become

increasingly hardy in our area due to warmer winters. In my home garden, today it regularly puts on an unequaled late winter floral display. This relative of the daphnes has robust clusters of silvery-white, velvety clusters of flowers that are set in the fall and are ornamental in their own right all winter long. In late winter, each cluster has dozens of pendant tubular flowers with a sweet fragrance. This fairly compact shrub can reach seven feet tall with an equal spread. In the summer it has strap-like leaves which does add a tropical effect to the garden. Hardy from USDA zones 7-9 it will thrive best in full sun and a well-drained soil.

An often-overlooked flowering shrub is the wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox*. The botanical Latin, "praecox" means precocious. This upright shrub has a somewhat tall and gawky stature. In early January, the rounded buds open revealing

pendant, yellow-cream, bell shaped flowers with a sweet fragrance. 'Luteus' is a coveted form with bright golden flowers.

Thinking and designing for the winter garden can bridge the aesthetic gap between the blazing colors of autumnal fall color and the overabundance of flowering plants in the spring.

**Editor's Note:** Andrew Bunting is Vice President of Horticulture for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. He is one of the most recognized horticulturists in the Philadelphia, Pa., region and a highly regarded colleague in the world of professional horticulture. Bunting has amassed a plethora of awards, including the American Public Gardens Association Professional Citation, Chanticleer Scholarship in Professional Development, Delaware Center for Horticulture's Marion Marsh Award, and the Certificate of Merit from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. In addition, Bunting has lectured extensively throughout North America and Europe, and participated in plant expeditions throughout Asia and Africa. Learn more at <https://phsonline.org/team/andrew-bunting>

## Ten Beginning Farmers Recognized Through Farmers on the Rise Program

Horizon Farm Credit recently awarded \$100,000 in prizes to ten beginning farmers through their Farmers on the Rise program. Each recipient received \$10,000 to help their operations grow and honor their outstanding achievements in agriculture.

The 2025 awardees represent a range of agricultural operations across Farm Credit's 100-county footprint. The following agriculturalists received this year's honor:

Zachary and Jane Blough of Federalsburg, Maryland; Noah and Breann Detwiler of Telford, Pennsylvania; Saj Dillard of Baltimore, Maryland; Bobby and Sara Hricko of Elysburg, Pennsylvania; Larry and Ashley Latta of Petersburg, Pennsylvania; Wes and Jackie Nell of Lebanon, Pennsylvania; Brittany Reardon of Dover, Pennsylvania; Daniel and Lauren Reynolds of Mount Jackson, Virginia; Rachel Ross of Stevensville, Maryland; and Brooke

Fuller and Alan Zeiders of Newport, Pennsylvania

"The dedication these individuals display in pursuing their dreams is truly inspiring," said Tom Truitt, Chief Executive Officer of Horizon Farm Credit. "Farmers on the Rise celebrates those who are making outstanding contributions to agriculture and to their communities, and we're proud to support them on their journeys. With their tenacity, resilience, and accomplishments, the future of agriculture is undeniably bright."

During the award ceremony, Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding honored the Farmers on the Rise finalists, applauding their passion, dedication, and the diversity of operations they represent. In his remarks, Secretary Redding emphasized the importance of building and sustaining a legacy for future generations of agriculturalists, underscoring that today's innovation and commitment lay the foundation for

tomorrow's thriving farms.

The Farmers on the Rise program was established in 2021 to honor beginning farmers with three to ten years of experience from diverse agricultural communities. Recipients are selected based on their efforts in agriculture, financial character, leadership and community involvement, and environmental stewardship. To learn more about the program, visit [horizonfc.com/rise](https://horizonfc.com/rise).

Horizon Farm Credit is a member-owned agricultural lending cooperative, providing consistent and reliable financing and related services to full- and part-time farmers, agricultural-related businesses, and rural landowners. The Association serves 100 counties across Delaware, Pennsylvania, and parts of Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Association has more than 23,000 members and over \$7.6 billion in loans outstanding. Learn more at [horizonfc.com](https://horizonfc.com).

# State of New Jersey Under Drought Warning Designation

An Administrative Order, was signed on December 5, 2025 by the Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner, authorizing a Drought Warning designation, which is the next stage of drought status after a Drought Watch and a step below a Drought Emergency, which could call for mandatory water-use restrictions. The state had been under a Drought Watch since Oct. 1 of last year.

The last statewide Drought Warning was issued in November 2024. The warning was lifted in June of this year, following record rainfall in May, although the Coastal South region of the state remained in a watch. Overall, though, the state has experienced below-average precipitation for more than a year, leading to the issuance of a Drought Watch in October and today's issuance of a Drought Warning.

Over the past 15 months, we've seen a significant deficit in precipitation, with only two months exceeding average levels," said State Climatologist Dave Robinson. "While May 2025 brought much-needed relief as a 'drought buster,' it wasn't sufficient to completely alleviate the ongoing drought conditions."

## Drought Warning Explained

In consideration and preparation for Drought Warning status, DEP has been consulting with water suppliers to assess conditions, ensure that they are fully aware of the situation, and that they are able to work cooperatively with the DEP. The Administrative Order designating Drought Warning status comes a day after the DEP held a virtual public hearing to update water suppliers and the public on water supply conditions, receive their input, and assess all available water supply management options.

The goal of a Drought Warning is to preserve and balance available water supplies to avert more serious water shortages in the future. The Administrative Order establishes a formal process for the DEP to work with water suppliers in affected regions to ensure no single water supplier or region faces a significant shortfall if dry weather and high customer demand continue.

A Drought Warning enables the DEP to more closely manage water systems by directing water transfers among systems, controlling releases from reservoirs, and modifying the permitted rate of flow in streams and rivers downstream of reservoirs to balance ecological protection and needs of water suppliers.

## Types of Droughts and Drought Indicators

There are different types of droughts. Meteorological drought refers to periods of low precipitation and high heat. A hydrological or water supply drought refers to reductions in water supplies, such as reservoirs, streams, and groundwater. New Jersey's Warning status is for a water supply drought.

DEP is responsible for monitoring and managing water supplies in collaboration with public and private water providers. A water supply drought determination is based upon a lack of precipitation, rapidly declining storage in the combined capacity of major surface water supply reservoirs, and/or severely depleted groundwater levels and stream flows.

The DEP uses specific indicators to gauge the impacts that significantly reduced precipitation has had on water supplies. These include reservoir levels, stream flows, and levels in shallow groundwater sources, known as unconfined aquifers, which are important in the longer-term replenishment of streams and reservoirs.

New Jersey's persistent drought conditions have resulted in observable stress across all specific indicators that DEP monitors in its assessment of water supply conditions. Current precipitation totals, stream flows and shallow groundwater levels in nearly all regions of the state are classified as being severely or extremely dry.

Reservoir systems are at low levels statewide. In the critical Northeast

region, they are below those observed at any point during the Drought Warning period of November 2024 through June 2025.

## Drought Region Structure

The DEP organizes New Jersey into six regions in its drought monitoring program, sorting geographic parts of the state based on common water supply sources and watershed boundaries.

Historically, these regions may experience varying severity of drought, and the DEP may tailor its approach to suit each regions' needs, but in this case, conditions remain markedly dry across the state. These regions are defined using municipal boundaries and details on what municipality is in each region are described here.

Major reservoir systems are below their normal water levels for this time of year and may need transfers of water through interconnected infrastructure to balance storage. When transfers become necessary, DEP works with water systems to ensure that water quality is maintained.

## Water Supply Conditions by Region

**Northeast:** Primarily served by 12 reservoirs operated by four water suppliers in the most densely populated region of the state, reservoir levels in this region have dropped to 48 percent capacity, compared to a normal level of about 72 percent for this time of year. Specifically: The North Jersey District Water Supply Commission's two reservoirs have dropped to about 45 percent capacity, compared to a normal of about 68 percent for this time of year. The Commission serves portions of Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Passaic counties. The Veolia-NJ system consists of three reservoirs serving Bergen County that have dropped to about 50 percent total capacity, compared to a normal capacity of 63 percent for this time of year. The remaining reservoirs are operated by Newark and Jersey City and are slightly above 50 percent of capacity and are well below levels that were observed this time last year during the previous Drought Warning.

**Central:** Predominantly served by New Jersey Water Supply Authority, reservoirs in this region (which includes Middlesex, and parts of Mercer, Somerset, Union, Hunterdon, Warren and Morris counties) are at 79 percent capacity, compared to their normal storage level of 89 percent for this time of year.

**Coastal North:** Encompassing much of Monmouth County and the northern portion of Ocean County, this region is predominantly served by the combined storage in reservoirs operated by New Jersey American Water and the New Jersey Water Supply Authority. Reservoirs are at 79 percent capacity, compared to their normal level of 86 percent for this time of year.

The remaining portions of the state are not served predominantly by reservoir-backed surface water supplies but instead have a mix of river-based surface water, or groundwater wells.

**Northwest:** Encompassing primarily Sussex and Warren counties, current drought indicators for groundwater levels and precipitation are designated as severely dry and stream flows as extremely dry.

**Southwest:** Encompassing Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem counties, this region relies primarily on groundwater but is supplemented by surface water. Drought indicators for groundwater levels in this part of the state are designated as extremely dry while precipitation and stream flows are severely dry.

**Coastal South:** Made up of Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties, drought indicators for rainfall in this part of the state are designated as moderately dry, while groundwater levels and stream flows are extremely dry.

For more state water supply status information and to view the Administrative Order, visit [njdrought.org](http://njdrought.org)

# NORTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE NEWS

*The Northeastern Association of State Departments of Agriculture convenes the following 10 states: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.*

## DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Delaware Department of Agriculture Officials Meet with West Africa Trade Delegations

Delaware Department of Agriculture officials met with two trade delegations from West Africa as part of a continuous effort to expand First State agricultural opportunities to new areas.

"We are always interested in building relationships and finding new markets for our products," said Department of Agriculture Secretary Wm. Donald Clifton II. "It's important to establish productive relationships whenever possible and constantly promote what First State agriculture has to offer."

Topics of discussion included poultry and soybean exports, irrigation techniques and marketing opportunities.

Prior to the meeting at DDA, the delegation received a tour at the Port of Wilmington before making its way to Washington, D.C. Commodities and potential exports promoted by the delegation included cashews, cocoa, coffee and fertilizer.

Attendees included Moussa KONÉ from Côte d'Ivoire, the managing director of Update Consulting International which specializes in professional training, strategic consulting and institutional support for companies and organizations. KONÉ is also a Mandela Washington alumnus and the founder of the Akwaba African Diaspora Festival, an international event that fosters networking between African entrepreneurs, investors and the United States.

Along with KONÉ, the delegation's co-organizer was Eric Schneider, founder and managing director of RéseauLink LLC, a consulting and intermediation firm. Schneider is a U.S. Fulbright alumnus in Côte d'Ivoire and was formerly a program analyst at the U.S. African Development Foundation, where he managed development grants supporting youth, agriculture and entrepreneurship in West Africa.

For more information on World Trade Center Delaware visit [www.wtcd.org](http://www.wtcd.org) or call 302-656-7905.

## NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### New York State Announces \$500,000 is Available to Support New York Farmers' Markets

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball announced that \$500,000 is available to New York's farmers' markets through Part 1 of the fourth round of the Farmers' Market Resiliency Grant Program. Grant funding will help farmers' markets across the state to enhance local food system resiliency by improving market infrastructure, increasing marketing and promotion efforts, and adding delivery capability. Funding for the program was included in the New York State Budget and builds on Governor Kathy Hochul's commitment to ensure a resilient food system in New York State. Round 3 program awards were announced earlier this year.

Commissioner Ball said, "The Farmers' Market Resiliency Grant Program is a crucial component of New York's ongoing effort to strengthen our food supply chain. We learned during the pandemic that we needed to have a reliable food system right here at home and I'm happy to see that we are making great progress towards that goal. Through three rounds of this program, we've seen some great progress on projects that are helping our farmers and producers reach more consumers. I encourage all eligible markets to apply for this great opportunity."

The Farmers' Market Resiliency Grant Program was created to enhance long-term food system resiliency through New York State's farmers' markets. New in Part 1 of this round, the program requires that awardees make sub-grants available to farmers' markets and/or farmers' market vendors within their region through an open application process. In the coming months, Part 2 of this funding opportunity will offer \$200,000 in funding direct to eligible to farmers' markets, without the sub-grant required in Part 1. This structure is intended to provide more opportunities to smaller markets, or those needing lower levels of financial assistance.

Grants ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000 will be awarded to successful, eligible applicants who outline a plan to solicit and award grants to market locations. Those awardees may sub award projects that repair, replace, or enhance of market infrastructure; modernize product delivery; develop or scale up outreach efforts; and more. Eligibility criteria and more information on the program, including how to apply, can be found on the Department's website. The deadline for applications is 3:00 pm on February 4, 2026.

Learn more at <https://agriculture.ny.gov/rfp-0396-farmers-market-resiliency-grant-program-regional-sub-grant-program-round-4>.

## NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### New Jersey Department of Agriculture and New Jersey Department of State's Division of Travel and Tourism Announce The New Jersey Agritourism Grant Program

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism (NJTT) within the New Jersey Department of State, have announced a grant opportunity to support New Jersey agritourism operations in their efforts to attract, entertain, and educate visitors to the state.

A total of \$5 million is available through the New Jersey Agritourism Grant Program (NJATP) for farms, ranches, on-farm wineries, on-farm breweries and distilleries, and other agricultural businesses offering agritourism activities. Eligible applicants may request up to \$100,000 in grant funding to support the promotion, marketing, and execution of agritourism experiences.

"The New Jersey Department of State is proud to introduce the New Jersey Agritourism Grant Program, reinforcing our commitment to a rapidly growing economic driver in the travel and tourism sector," said New Jersey Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way, who oversees NJTT in her capacity as Secretary of State. "Our 123 million annual visitors are seeking the meaningful, hands-on experiences that our farms and ranches are uniquely equipped to offer. We look forward to building on this momentum with our partners at the NJDA, as we continue to elevate the Garden State's agritourism landscape in the years to come."

"The New Jersey Agritourism Grant Program is a great investment to continue to grow this important sector of New Jersey agriculture," said Ed Wengryn, New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture. "These grants are an opportunity for our farms and agritourism businesses to expand their activities and promote the opportunities for people to come visit their farms and learn about New Jersey agriculture."

Application materials and additional information are available at either of the following websites:

Division of Travel and Tourism: <https://visitnj.org/new-jersey-tourism-grant-opportunities>

Department of Agriculture: <https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/grants/>

Completed applications and all required supporting materials must be sent to [NJATP@ag.nj.gov](mailto:NJATP@ag.nj.gov) by January 30, 2026, at 5:00 PM EST. Applications received after the deadline will be considered on a rolling basis, subject to funding availability.

Applicants who do not receive a confirmation email within 24 hours of submission are encouraged to contact Billy Conners, NJDA Grants Coordinator, [william.conners@ag.nj.gov](mailto:william.conners@ag.nj.gov).

# Toro Unveils New Equipment

Toro is empowering landscape crews to take on more with the introduction of the redesigned GrandStand® MULTI FORCE® EVO and autonomous PROLINE™ AMI. Both solutions deliver serious results and give pros the power to maximize productivity, streamline workloads, and increase ROI. Built on two proven platforms, these updated machines offer a premium boost in performance backed by the reliability Toro customers have come to expect.

**GrandStand MULTI FORCE EVO**  
When customers speak, Toro listens. The latest MULTI FORCE EVO gets a powerful boost in strength thanks to the fierce Kawasaki EVO 34.5 HP engine. Plus, the included service stand attachment makes maintenance fast and easy, giving you more time on the job.  
“When you think of what it means to ‘do-it-all’, the MULTI FORCE EVO checks every box,” said Jackson Gray, product marketing associate at Toro. “Whether you’re dealing with tall grass, mounds of leaves or a foot of snow, the MULTI FORCE EVO has the power

to take on any job in any season.”  
The MULTI FORCE EVO includes the same rugged TURBO FORCE® cutting deck and seasonal versatility that operators have come to love. With a wide variety of attachments available, the machine helps landscape contractors maximize efficiency and revenue opportunities year-round, no matter the season.

**PROLINE AMI**  
When the to-do list feels like too much to tackle, the autonomous PROLINE AMI acts as extra crew. Toro’s latest autonomous mower is guided by GNSS+RTK, a high-precision positioning technology that combines satellite navigation with real-time corrections for consistent results with less overlap.  
Contractors can operate confidently with continuous system monitoring, including audio and visual alerts, remote stop, and ISO-compliant radar to aid in collision avoidance. Monitor machine status and access controls on the bright, full-color LED screen or through the mobile app.  
The new technology is built on the trusted

PROLINE platform, which runs on the 26.5 HP Kohler® Command PRO EFI engine for the extra muscle needed to tear through demanding conditions.  
“The combination of intelligence, power and convenience in the autonomous PROLINE AMI will be a huge boost for crews who never have enough time in the day,” Gray says. “The ability to complete multiple tasks at once will help save time, improve efficiency and bring in extra revenue.”  
With roots dating back to 1914, Toro is a leading worldwide provider of innovative solutions for the outdoor environment including turf and landscape maintenance, snow management, rental and construction equipment, and irrigation solutions. Through a strong network of distributors, dealers, retailers and rental stores in more than 125 countries, Toro helps customers care for golf courses, sports fields, public green spaces, commercial and residential properties, construction sites and agricultural operations.  
To see all of Toro’s offerings visit [toro.com](http://toro.com) for more information.

● **Full Moon** ○  
**January 3, 2026**

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**January 2026 Columnists**

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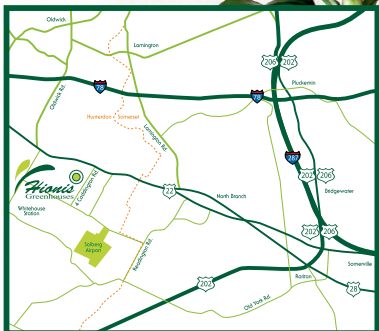


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