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September 2026

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No. 281

Are You Digging or Planning to Dig?

By Tom Castronovo
Executive Editor/Publisher
Gardener News

Did you know that many utilities are buried just a few inches below ground? You can easily hit a line when digging for simple gardening projects, like planting flowers or small shrubs.

Digging can be a dangerous activity. Everyone must take steps to protect underground utilities and avoid interruption of vital services, property damage, and possible injury. Take the following steps every time you dig to avoid damages and prevent expensive repairs, project delays, and costly fines.

New Jersey Law requires anyone digging to call at least three full business days (excluding weekends and holidays) prior to beginning work. This includes contractors as well as property and home owners. Contact New Jersey One Call at 811 or 800-272-1000 any time, day or night.

Installing light posts, mailboxes, and fences are examples of projects that absolutely require a call to know what's below before digging.

Erosion and root system growth can alter the depth or location of buried lines, or your utility companies may have completed work on their lines since the last time you dug — so you must call before you dig each and every time.

If you are only planning to dig in a small portion of your yard, you can outline the area in white paint or white flags available at home improvement stores to ensure that only the utilities (Cont. on Page 20)

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Around The Garden

By Tom Castronovo
Gardener News

Congratulations! And a Seasonal Review

First and foremost, I congratulate featured columnist Joe Atchison III for being elected President of the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials (NAAMO). Joe is New Jersey's Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and Director of the Division of Marketing and Development for the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

NAAMO is an international organization of the state and provincial government agricultural marketing officials who provide both domestic and international marketing services to the agricultural and food industries in their states and provinces.

The purpose of NAAMO is to provide its members with a forum to network, collaborate, and share insights to enhance the development, marketing, and promotion of North American food and agricultural products. It is an affiliate of the National Association of State Department of Agriculture, which represents the leadership of the individual state departments of agriculture.

April in the northeast almost always brings the challenges of frost damage. The beginning of the 2026 growing season was definitely frosty.

The April 19-22 cold snap, with temperatures dipping into the low 20s, came after a heat wave that drove many perennial crops to flower earlier than usual. The four day freeze devastated Garden State farmers and home gardeners who grow tree fruits, strawberries, blueberries, and other early bloomers, reporting catastrophic losses.

I really missed cherries this year. The local pick-your-own strawberries were small and in short supply. I'm really missing white peaches. I was able to get some really tasty blueberries.

This year peonies, among other plants, took a big hit in the garden as well. The damage was first visible through wilting stems in the morning and plants bouncing back later in the day. Generally, temperatures which fall below 25 F may cause lasting damage. I hope you removed the dead stems and foliage to protect them from secondary infections from fungal diseases. I also hope you kept frost-damaged peonies on the dry side and didn't water them too heavily this summer. I have heard conflicting theories on mulching around peonies. The no-mulch theory states that the drier you can keep the area around your plant, the less likely *Botrytis cinerea* is to be able to survive in the soil.

Botrytis has the capacity to affect essentially every above ground part of the infected plant when conditions are favorable for disease development and preventative measures are not taken. Gray mold is often found on leaves in the densest part of the canopy. It may also be found sporulating on dead flowers or other senescent tissue. *Botrytis* development primarily occurs on unhealthy, wounded, stressed, or inactive plants, as they are the most susceptible to infection.

Powdery mildew, root rot, and leaf spot can creep

in overnight and do real damage before you even notice that something is wrong.

It was really weird to see the majestic oak trees and redbud trees behind my firehouse almost bare until late spring.

As I drove around the Garden State in early May, really paying attention to the landscape, I kept noticing winter-related problems and delayed or incomplete bloom on forsythia, magnolias, and dogwoods. Douglas fir and dwarf Alberta spruce suffered severe dieback and significant winter burn injury. Boxwoods got clobbered.

Spring 2026 will go down in the history books as an educational season on the farm, garden, and landscape. I hope this doesn't happen again during my lifetime. Going forward, I will make sure to hydrate my trees and shrubs really well before the ground freezes in the fall to help prevent winter injury, and hydrate them as well if an early freeze is forecasted in the spring to prevent the buds from freezing.

Please support your local farmer this fall by attending an agritourism event on their farm. Please also support your local garden center and greenhouse grower by purchasing fall asters, celosia, mums, and pumpkins.

As the extreme heat of summer peaked in July and early August, I watched annual flowers stress out. Did you know that once prolonged temperatures go above 90 degrees, plants stop flower production and the heat can cause buds to drop?

Let's jump back to the disease topic quickly. As we all know, humidity is a killer for annuals as well.

Nighttime watering is especially dangerous for stressed or weakened plants. At night, wet soil takes much longer to dry out. Once the sun goes down, plants stop photosynthesizing—so they're not actively pulling moisture from the soil. This slow evaporation creates an ideal environment for mold and fungal diseases. I usually water my flowers and herbs around 7 a.m. I also water the soil and I'm careful not to wet the foliage.

There is a lot of green grass around as I type my column. It's usually pretty brown this time of the year. This month I'm going to have my soil tested at my local Cooperative Extension office before I apply my fall fertilization. I'll also have the lawn core aerated and over-seeded with endophyte-enhanced seed. Endophytes are living organisms that live within and form symbiotic relationships with other living organisms. Endophyte-enhanced grasses are grasses that have beneficial fungi living within them. These fungi help the grasses store and use water more efficiently, withstand extreme heat and drought better, and resist certain insects and fungal diseases. I learned about endophytes from the Rutgers Turfgrass program.

PS. Keep an eye out for frost warnings at the end of this month into the beginning of October. Be sure to bring your tropical plants in before nighttime temperature dip below 45 degrees.

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.

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Visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SCN2Z6T> to celebrate horticultural excellence by nominating a special person.

If you have any questions about the awards criteria or nomination process, please contact us at programs@ahsgardening.org.

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When I was young, school always started the day after Labor Day, in early September. Sure, some schools head back in August these days, but most are still in the first week of the ninth month. We've talked in previous articles about including Jersey Fresh goodies in your students' lunches, but September has many other interesting days to consider beyond "the returning to the learning."

National Food Bank Day is September 4. If your garden has a bountiful harvest of fruits and vegetables, perhaps donate a basket to your local food bank. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture works closely with food banks and emergency feeding operations around the state. We encourage food banks to source from local farmers so their clients have access to healthy, nutritious foods instead of overly processed foods high in fats and sodium.

People still are struggling with food security and they appreciate the assistance offered by New Jersey's food banks. Food banks, in return, appreciate the assistance offered by residents who can provide monetary or food donations, or volunteer



NJ Dept. of Agriculture

By Joe Atchison III
Assistant Secretary of Agriculture

School Days and More Days in September

support.

Another gardening/ag-related special day in September is September 7. That is "National Acorn Squash Day." While acorn squash may not be something everyone has enough room for in their garden (vining types need about three-foot distances between each other) it can replace some of the heavily produced zucchini among our gardeners.

Acorn squash can be halved and then filled with everything from rice to sausage and then can be covered in melted cheese for a hearty meal. Instead of a "one-pot" meal, each dinner guest gets a "one-squash meal." More popular acorn squash recipes can be found at: <https://www.allrecipes.com/article/best-acorn-squash-recipes/>

They're a crop that must be

planted in late spring, so keep these in mind when planning your garden next year. Their national day in September coincides with when they're typically ready to harvest.

And speaking of "harvest," September will see the rise of a "harvest moon," the closest full moon to the autumnal equinox. Starting September 26, and running for about three nights, you'll be able to see the big, low-hanging, often pink- or reddish-tinted moons that rise early and thus got their name from adding light to a farmer's day.

Also, September 26 is National Johnny Appleseed Day. John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, was an American pioneer nurseryman who introduced trees grown with apple seeds (as opposed

to trees grown with grafting) to large parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and the Canadian province of Ontario, as well as the northern counties of West Virginia. He became an American icon while still alive, due to his kind, generous ways, his leadership in conservation, and the symbolic importance that he attributed to apples. He is recognized as an American folk hero.

In the Garden State, farmers are our heroes. They provide sustenance to keep us healthy and vibrant even though they face increasing challenges. This past spring, fruit growers throughout the state faced a devastating freeze in April. This snap ruined about 90 percent of the peach crop and caused significant loss in the expected apple harvest.

But many farms still have some varieties of apples depending on the orchard location and how far along their crop was when the freeze hit. A farm in Cape May County has a full pick-your-own crop because of a unique microclimate. A large orchard in Central Jersey lost all their fruit. In the northern part of the state, it was hit or miss.

Now, more than ever, our farmers need your support. They need you to visit their markets and farm stands to purchase products that they do have, whether they are apples or other farm favorites. As always, you can check www.findjerseyfresh.com to find a market or orchard near you, but we encourage you to call before you go or check with them to see what crops they have available.

Soon enough, the calendar will be turning over and bringing us new and interesting days.

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!

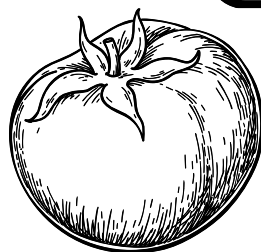
A Year-Round Celebration of the Garden State's Fruits and Vegetables

NUTRITION FACTS:

Tomatoes are rich in lycopene, an antioxidant that is good for the heart, reduces inflammation, and has potential cancer-protective effects. Tomatoes are naturally low in sodium and cholesterol free.

HOW DOES IT GROW:

NJ tomatoes are primarily grown as warm-season annuals in the state's Inner Coastal Plain (southern counties like Gloucester, Cumberland, and Salem), where well-drained sandy loam soils, moderate climate, and favorable humidity support great harvests.



Jersey Fresh Harvest of the Month: Tomato

ALL ABOUT NEW JERSEY:

New Jersey is famous for its tomatoes because of their flavor, tenderness, and juiciness. Tomatoes are in season in New Jersey during the summer months, from June through September. The New Jersey Pine Barrens has ideal growing conditions for growing tomatoes with its sandy and acidic soil. Tomatoes are delicate plants that do not like the cold. Be sure to plant yours after any danger of frost which in NJ or Zone 7 is using around Mother's Day or May 15.

FUN FACT:

The tomato is the official state vegetable of New Jersey. In Arkansas the tomato is the official state fruit and state vegetable.



<https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/farmtoschool>

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Jersey Fresh is a program of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture | Mikie Sherrill, Governor | Edward D. Wengryn, Secretary of Agriculture

Crafting a garden with autumn interest in dry shade is a true challenge. Most dry shade options are spring ephemerals that go dormant by late June and offer little interest come autumn. However, there are exceptions!

One such exception is the Ivy Leaved Cyclamen, botanically known as *Cyclamen hederifolium*. With an ironclad constitution for tolerating dry shade, it bears surprisingly delicate, ruby pink or white flowers in autumn with beautiful evergreen foliage worth venturing outdoors to see on a cold winter's day!

Cyclamen is a member of the Primrose Family or Primulaceae and consists of around 25 species native from Europe south to Iran and Somalia. *Cyclamen* grow from a modified stem called a tuber. Similar to bulbs and corms, tubers store carbohydrates under favorable conditions that allow plants to endure periods of dormancy during difficult and unfavorable conditions. The circular shape of the tuber inspired the Swedish physician and botanist, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1788) to coin the name *Cyclamen* in 1753. The name comes from the old Greek *Kýklos* (or *Kylos*) meaning circular! *Cyclamen*



Morris County Park Commission

By Bruce Crawford
Horticultural Manager

Cyclamen: Tough Yet Delicate

hederifolium not only has a circular tuber, but also one of the largest with tubers reaching upwards of 10 inches in diameter! Native to France, Southern Switzerland, Italy, the Balkans and south into Greece and Western Turkey, this species was described in 1789 by the Scottish Botanist and Director of the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew, William Aiton (1731-1793).

In the wild, the plant is found growing in deciduous woodlands and shrublands at elevations from sea level to around 4,000 ft. The soils are typically rocky and well-drained, with minimal rainfall from June through September. In order to survive, this species becomes dormant during June with no apparent signs of life until September when the flowers unfurl. The foliage appears several weeks later and bears a strong

resemblance to English Ivy, (*Hedra helix*) which led Aiton to craft the species name.

The numerous, 1 inch diameter white or pink flowers appear through late October and are perched atop delicate, 1-2 mm wide stems rising to 5-6 inches tall. As the buds open, the stem below the flower develops a crook, orienting the flower groundward while the five twisting petals orient themselves skyward, looking like miniature butterflies in flight! Following bloom, the floral stems tightly coil back on themselves like a spring, bringing the ½ inch diameter seed capsule 'to rest' on the soil above the tuber. These reddish-brown capsules remain throughout the winter and finally split open the following June as the plants enter dormancy. The seeds are also reddish-brown and

have a sticky, sugary coating called an elaiosome. The elaiosome attracts ants who enjoy dining on the coating and in the process, unknowingly move the unharmed seed to new locations!

Hardy in zones 5-9, Ivy Leaved Cyclamen is typically purchased as tubers in late summer or early fall and planted while dormant. The tubers are usually rounded beneath with a flat top featuring a slight depression in the middle. Plant the tuber such that 1-2 inches of soil can cover the tuber, although I have seen plants happily growing for years with a portion of the tuber exposed. I also orient the tuber at a slight angle when planting to prevent water from accumulating in the central depression which, no doubt is its purpose in its native, rain-starved regions.

Locate these plants in well-

drained soils with protection from afternoon sun, such as beneath a narrow evergreen or adjacent to a wall. Mulching with 1 inch of fine gravel would prove beneficial, although 1-2 inches of leaf litter or shredded bark works equally as well. Neighboring plants should expand at a glacial pace so as not to outcompete the Cyclamens! Great companions include any of the silvery foliaged Pussytoe species (such as *Antennaria neglecta*) and Silver Gem Violet (*Viola walteri* 'Silver Gem').

Cyclamen hederifolium is rather special to me since it was the first article I wrote for the Gardener News 249 articles ago. I thought it fitting to showcase the plant again for the 250th article in the hopes the beautiful flowers and foliage of this tough plant will soon grace more gardens in dry shade!

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

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Actually, you or a neighbor may already have a bed of them! *Conoclinium coelestinum* is the scientific name for the blue mistflower.

The genus name *Conoclinium* is from *cônos*, Greek for cone and *kliníon* for little bed. These terms refer to the small, cone-shaped base (receptacle) which supports 60 -100 very small flowers in each head of the blue mist plant. The species name *coelestinum* is from the Latin *coelestris*, which means heavenly, and refers to the soft, heavenly-blue color of mistflowers.

The plant was first recorded as *Eupatorium coelestinum* by Linnaeus but recent nucleic acid research has shown that it is more closely related to other plants such as *Ageratum* and thus it was given the new genus name *Conoclinium*, which is only found in Central and North America.

Blue mistflower is a composite but is lacking the conspicuous ray flowers of, for example, a daisy. Instead, each ¼ inch flower head is arranged in a flat-topped cluster (panicle) with 15 – 100 heads. The stamens are blue and extend way past the small petals. This



The Native Plant Society of New Jersey

By Hubert Ling
Horticulture Chair

Plant a Heavenly, Little Cone Bed Flower?

gives the panicle a soft, unusual, finely fringed, fuzzy, blue mist appearance. These striking panicles are sky blue, lavender, or purple and occasionally white.

Blue mistflower plants are 1-2.5 feet tall and do well in moist, fertile soil with at least 4 hours of full sun. They tolerate heavy clay soils but do poorly in dry, sandy, nutrient-poor soils. Their native habitat is wet meadows, ditches, stream banks, and wood margins. If grown under favorable conditions the plants may become overly aggressive, but they struggle in shady yards like mine. Mistflowers are native from NJ to Florida and west from Illinois to Texas. In NJ it was historically a rare plant in the wild and limited to a few southern and coastal counties; however, there are many current

reports of it escaping cultivation since it is a popular garden plant.

Since blue mistflower is basically a southern US plant it emerges rather late in spring. However, flowering in NJ begins in August and extends until the first heavy frost in October or November. The flowers are an important source of nectar and pollen for numerous species of bees, butterflies, and skippers. This is especially important for late migrating populations of monarch butterflies. The plant is also the host for several moth species, and the seeds are utilized by goldfinch and various sparrows. Dense, bushy green colonies of this plant provide good cover and sites for ground nesting birds and small mammals.

Historically blue mistflowers

were used medicinally by various native peoples primarily as a leaf tea to treat fevers, colds, and the flu. Its use was also passed along to Colonial America where it was used to treat fever, malaria, and a host of general ailments. However, I would strongly discourage experimentation since we have much better and safer medicines now. My theory is that native peoples used any unusual plant for medicine on the belief that striking or pretty plants must have been provided by the gods to keep us healthy; although I am well aware that many of our current medicines, such as aspirin, have a botanical origin.

Propagation is by seed, root division, or cuttings taken in late spring. Seeds must be vernalized for three months or

simply planted in the fall for a damp, cold treatment. Since the plant is potentially aggressive in full sun, plants should be located with some thought. Large rain gardens, wetland borders, or moist meadows would be good sites since this plant may overwhelm small beds. The plant tolerates heat well and is somewhat resistant to deer.

Blue mistflower was introduced into European gardens in the 1800's and became quite popular there. Only recently has blue mist flower become widely available in the USA. This repeats a trend where our native plants, such as goldenrods are recognized in Europe, long before they become popular here in the States.

If you have a good location, you might give our blue mistflower a try; you will be rewarded with heavenly blue clouds floating in your garden.

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.

Celebrating American Horticulture at 55th Fleuroselect Convention

Fleuroselect's 55th Annual Convention brought the international horticultural community together in Philadelphia, USA, from 14-16 July for three days of inspiration, recognition and collaboration.

Hosted in partnership with Burpee in honour of its 150th anniversary, the convention combined visits to outstanding American horticultural sites with the presentation of the 2027 Gold Medals, the organisation's first-ever Member of Merit award, the welcome of four new members and countless networking opportunities, including a joint event with the American Home Garden Seed Association.

Recognising breeding excellence and dedication to the industry: The recent Gold Medal laureates were honoured with their awards in the beautiful, heritage-rich setting of Andalusia Historic House & Gardens. Prices were handed over from Fleuroselect President Marc Driessen and Secretary General Ann Jennen to Scott Roskuszka and Martijn Baijens (PanAmerican Seed), Matthias Redlefsen (Benary) and Geert-Jan Aaldering (Sakata) for their outstanding breeding breakthroughs entered into the Fleuroselect Annual Trial.

Additionally, in recognition of more than two

decades of outstanding service as a trial judge and dedicated member of Fleuroselect's Trial and FleuroStar Committees, Gerard Werink was honoured with the first-ever distinction of Member of Merit.

Celebrating American horticulture with Burpee and Lucas Greenhouses: The convention featured visits to some of America's most historic horticultural sites, including Burpee's Fordhook Farm where owner George Ball, CEO Jamie Mattikow and team welcomed the delegation and gave insights into their horticultural legacy with the farm having birthed many breakthrough varieties over the years. Presentations were followed by guided tours through the impressive gardens and the Fleuroselect Annual Trial, grown in honour of the convention.

Another highlight was a visit to Lucas Greenhouses, one of the largest growers on the American East-Coast. As an established family-owned business, the company showcased impressively innovative greenhouses and shining trial fields with hundreds of blooming varieties to be explored, including numerous Fleuroselect member varieties and several award winners.

Strengthening international collaboration: Within the framework of the Annual Convention, Fleuroselect proudly welcomed four new members to reinforce its international network and expand the represented product range: Meilland International from France, SonnenSaat from Germany as well as Edens Plants & Creations and Schneider Youngplants under new leadership from the Netherlands.

International collaboration remained a central theme throughout the convention. A joint event with the American Home Garden Seed Association, including a visit to Chanticleer Gardens and a roundtable discussion moderated by Diane Blazek from All-America Selections, brought together representatives from both organisations. Discussions focused on shared opportunities and challenges, from sustainability and climate adaptation to engaging future generations and navigating an increasingly complex global market, reaffirming the value of strong international partnerships across the industry.

In 2027, the Fleuroselect Annual Convention will be hosted from August 23rd to 25th in Belgium together with member company Rudy Raes.

LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY NEWS

Rutgers New Jersey 4-H Golden Egg Contest Gives Youth a Taste of the Poultry Industry

Following New Jersey's strong showing at the 2025 National 4-H Avian Bowl, youth participating in the 4-H Youth Development Program, part of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, are finding new opportunities to build knowledge and leadership in poultry science.

In the spring, the Department of 4-H Youth Development at Rutgers partnered with the Atlantic County 4-H Livestock and Poultry Club to launch the inaugural New Jersey 4-H Golden Egg Contest, introducing young people to the science behind commercial egg production and the rigorous standards used to evaluate eggs in today's marketplace.

Open to registered New Jersey 4-H members, the contest challenged participants to produce, select and present a uniform half-dozen market eggs that met industry expectations for quality and consistency. Entries were judged using official USDA egg grading standards and the National 4-H Poultry Judging Manual—the same principles used throughout the commercial egg industry.

"The contest gives youth an opportunity to look beyond simply raising chickens," said Suzanna Vaino, Atlantic County 4-H poultry project leader and co-developer of the contest. "They learn how eggs are evaluated for quality, gain valuable judging skills and begin to understand the many career opportunities available within the poultry industry."

Vaino developed the competition with Amelia Valente, 4-H agent of Monmouth County. The contest was modeled after successful 4-H egg judging competitions in states with established commercial egg industries, including Alabama,

North Carolina and South Carolina.

To help prepare participants, Vaino led a six-session Short-Term Exploratory Program (STEP) conducted virtually throughout the spring. The sessions introduced youth to commercial egg production, USDA egg grading standards, poultry judging, oral reasons and career pathways in the egg industry.

The educational series featured guest speakers from the USDA Livestock and Poultry Program, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the University of Missouri Extension 4-H Youth Development Program. Grace Kreft, an Ocean County 4-H alumna and Rutgers Animal Science graduate, also spoke about opportunities available through Rutgers' Animal Science bachelor's degree program.

The inaugural contest attracted 19 youth from nine New Jersey counties, who submitted 42 entries. Six RCE county offices served as collection sites before entries were transported to Atlantic County for judging.

To ensure fairness, entries were evaluated anonymously by participant number and age division—Cloverbud, Junior and Senior. Judges assessed egg size, shell quality, shell thickness, shape, air cell size, albumen quality and other characteristics that determine market quality, including Haugh Units, the industry standard for measuring egg protein quality.

Top honors were awarded to:

Senior Champion: Megan C., Cape May County

Senior Reserve Champion: Danika C., Cape May County

Senior Honorable Mention: Joel S., Atlantic County

Junior Champion: Janelle S., Atlantic County

Junior Reserve Champion: Ethan G., Cape May County

Junior Honorable Mention: Zoe-Bella C., Essex County

The contest also highlighted the collaborative nature of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, with six county offices assisting in collecting entries from participants across the state.

Vaino credited the success of the inaugural event to the many volunteers, educators and partners who supported the effort, including Erin Sharpe, co-leader of the Atlantic County 4-H Livestock and Poultry Club, and Micky Hall, professor emeritus and small poultry flock specialist with Clemson University 4-H Youth Development, whose guidance helped shape the competition.

Organizers are already planning to expand the contest in spring 2027 with new challenges for returning participants.

Meanwhile, New Jersey 4-H's momentum in poultry science continues. Members of the newly formed Senior New Jersey 4-H Poultry Judging Team will attend Poultry Judging Camp this summer at the Department of Poultry Science at Texas A&M University before representing the state at the National 4-H Poultry Judging Competition in Louisville, Kentucky, this fall.

For more information about the New Jersey 4-H Golden Egg Contest or New Jersey 4-H poultry projects, contact Suzanna Vaino at Starla4270@hotmail.com or Amelia Valente at amelia.valente@rutgers.edu.

Introducing New Faculty Leadership of Our Core Facilities

Announcement by Dr. Josh Kohut, SEBS Dean of Research and NJAES Director of Research.

I am pleased to announce that Dr. Jim Simon, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Plant Biology, has been appointed Faculty Director of SEBS/NJAES Core Facilities, effective July 1.

In this role, Dr. Simon will provide strategic oversight and coordination across our shared core facility's research infrastructure, working closely with each facility's scientific directors

to strengthen and expand the core facilities as a shared resource for the school and university. Under his leadership, SEBS/NJAES aims to position its core facilities as a central hub for scientific and research innovation, connecting faculty, students, and industry partners with the advanced instrumentation and expertise needed to advance research and extension across the school and beyond.

Dr. Simon, who was recently elected to the

National Academy of Inventors, brings decades of experience leading large, multi-institutional research programs. His appointment reflects SEBS's and NJAES' continued investment in our research infrastructure, partnerships and team building, and training opportunities that support faculty, students and increase public trust in science.

Please join me in welcoming Jim to this new role!



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

Play Nice in the Sandbox: Gardening and Landscaping on the Jersey Shore

As we approach the end of summer, people have flocked to the Jersey Shore to enjoy its many sandy beaches. But any Jersey Shore gardener knows there are unique challenges to gardening along the coast that differ significantly from other parts of the Garden State. And they don't stop being challenging simply because the summer ends.

Coastal regions—from barrier islands to bayside neighborhoods—know that gardening near the ocean brings rewards, but also a mixture of environmental stressors. Understanding local coastal conditions is the first step toward creating healthier soils, stronger plants, and more resilient landscapes that can thrive year after year.

One of the defining features of coastal soils is their high sand content. While sandy soils warm quickly in spring and are easy to work, they come with three major drawbacks: 1) low nutrient-holding capacity, 2) rapid drainage leading to poor water retention, and 3) little organic matter to support biological activity. These limitations affect everything from plant growth and flowering to overall landscape health. Fortunately, gardeners who understand these challenges can take steps to improve their soil and create landscapes that learn to play nicely in this coastal sandbox.

The low nutrient-holding capacity and little organic matter mean that soil fertility declines quickly unless gardeners replenish organic matter frequently. Nutrients applied through fertilizers can easily leach through sandy soils before plants have an opportunity to absorb them. Organic matter, such as compost, shredded leaves, pine bark, and wood chips, is an essential tool for enhancing soil structure, increasing moisture retention, and improving soil fertility over time.

Adding organic material annually can make a difference in the survivability of both ornamental plants and vegetable gardens. For more information on adding nutrients to your soil at home, check out the *Home Composting* (<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs811/>) and *Why Leave the Leaves and How to Do It* (<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/FS1369/>) fact sheets from Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE).

Fast-draining sandy soils do not hold much water, causing stress to vegetation growing in them, particularly during hot and windy summer conditions. Coastal landscapes often experience extended dry periods even when inland communities receive adequate rainfall. Plants that naturally occur in sandy soils have developed a variety of adaptations that help them survive under these demanding conditions. Some produce deep taproots that seek moisture far below the soil surface. Others develop broad, shallow root systems that quickly capture rainfall before it drains away. Many coastal plants also possess small, waxy, or leathery leaves that reduce water loss through evaporation. These adaptations allow native species to thrive where less-adapted plants may struggle.

Fortunately, coastal New Jersey is home to a wide variety of native plants that naturally tolerate sandy soils and drier conditions. These species contribute to soil health by stabilizing loose soils with their extensive root systems. They generally require fewer chemical fertilizers, fewer soil amendments, and less supplemental irrigation once established. Native plants also provide valuable habitat and food sources for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife that are important parts of local ecosystems. Incorporating native vegetation into your yard helps restore soil function while creating attractive,

resilient, and low-maintenance landscapes that are well suited to life at the Jersey Shore.

The RCE fact sheet *Incorporating Native Plants in Your Residential Landscape* (<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1140/>) outlines the steps you'll need to take to plan a native plant landscape. The fact sheet also includes recommendations for native trees, shrubs, and flowering perennials for New Jersey.

The Jersey-Friendly Yards Plant Database (www.jerseyyards.org/plant/) allows you to search for native plants based on your site conditions and lets you filter by your landscape preferences (bloom color and timing, trees vs. shrubs, etc.). After you complete your search, you can create plant lists for your yard to take with you to a nursery when selecting plants. Also, the website (www.jerseyyards.org) has information on where to buy native plants that lists several nurseries organized by county.

The Native Plant Society of New Jersey (<https://npsnj.org/>) has many lists of native plants that are arranged by type of trees and shrubs, by New Jersey county, and by type of garden. They also list gardens, arboretums, and nature centers throughout the state where you can see native plants and get inspiration for your own yard.

Creating a successful coastal landscape begins with understanding the unique characteristics of Jersey Shore soils and working with, rather than against, these natural conditions. By improving soil organic matter, conserving moisture, and selecting native plants adapted to local environments, homeowners can create landscapes that are both beautiful and sustainable. Don't bury your head in the sand. Plant native vegetation instead and create vibrant, resilient gardens that can thrive along the Jersey Shore for years to come.



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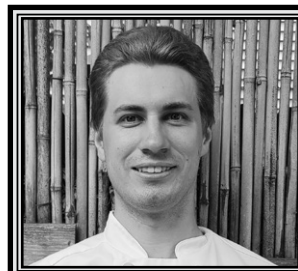
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Editor's Note: This article was written by Steve Yergeau, Rutgers Cooperative Extension agent, Ocean and Atlantic counties.

As September brings our potato crop into full bloom, there's no better time to highlight a farm stand favorite: traditional Sicilian potato salad. Unlike typical creamy potato salads, this version relies on bright, vibrant Mediterranean ingredients and high-quality olive oil to let the natural flavors of the harvest shine.

It's light, refreshing, and packed with bold textures—combining tender potatoes, crisp blanched green beans, sweet cherry tomatoes, sharp red onion, and salty green olives. Tied together with a simple oregano-infused red wine vinegar dressing, every bite offers a wonderful balance of richness, acidity, and savory bite.

One of the highlights of this salad is how seamlessly the flavors come together while maintaining distinct textures. Boiling the potatoes just until tender ensures they hold their shape, while blanching the green beans briefly and cooling them immediately keeps them vibrant green and satisfyingly crunchy. As the warm potatoes absorb the tangy dressing, they pick up all the subtle herb



Culinary Experiences from the Farm

By Andrew Melick
Executive Farm Chef

Sicilian Potato Salad

notes, while the juicy tomatoes and briny olives add bursts of flavor throughout the dish.

The dressing keeps things minimalist yet punchy, letting the fresh produce take center stage. Extra virgin olive oil creates a smooth base, balanced by the bright snap of red wine vinegar and the warm, aromatic flavor of dried oregano. A pinch of salt and black pepper completes the dressing, binding the dish together cleanly. Allowing the salad to sit for just a few minutes after tossing gives the ingredients time to marinate, making the overall flavor profile even richer and more cohesive.

Serve this Sicilian potato salad chilled or at room

temperature alongside grilled meats, roasted fish, or as part of a summer spread. It's a versatile side dish that highlights simple, fresh ingredients, making it a popular product at our farmstand throughout the season.

Sicilian Potato Salad

Yield: 6 servings (4 oz per serving)

Ingredients

For the Salad:

- **10 oz** Red or Yukon Gold potatoes, cooked and diced (about 2 medium potatoes)
- **4 oz** Green beans, trimmed and blanched (about 1 cup)
- **3 oz** Cherry tomatoes, halved (about 1/2 cup)
- **1.5 oz** Red onion, thinly sliced (about 1/4 cup)
- **1.5 oz** Green olives, pitted

and halved (about 1/4 cup)

For the Dressing:

- **2 tbsp** Extra virgin olive oil (approx. 1 oz)
- **1.5 tbsp** Red wine vinegar (approx. 0.75 oz)
- **1 tsp** Dried oregano
- **0.5 tsp** Salt (or to taste)
- **0.25 tsp** Freshly ground black pepper (or to taste)

Instructions

Prepare the Vegetables:

Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Add diced potatoes and cook until tender (about 10–12 minutes). Drain and let cool slightly. In a separate pot of boiling water, blanch green beans for 3 minutes until tender-crisp, then transfer immediately to an ice bath to lock in color; drain and cut into 1-inch pieces.

Make the Dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together the extra virgin olive oil, red wine vinegar, dried oregano, salt, and pepper until well emulsified.

Assemble: In a large mixing bowl, combine the cooked potatoes, blanched green beans, halved cherry tomatoes, sliced red onion, and green olives.

Toss & Serve: Pour the dressing over the salad and gently toss until evenly coated. Allow the salad to sit for 10–15 minutes before serving to let the flavors absorb. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

***Editor's Note:** Andrew Melick is an eleventh-generation farmer from Oldwick, New Jersey. A graduate of Johnson & Wales University with a culinary arts degree, he manages the commercial kitchen operations for Melick's Town Farm. In this role, Andrew specializes in leveraging home grown ingredients to develop and craft a diverse lineup of farm to table products featured at the farm market.*

Last April will not be forgotten any time soon by anyone in the fruit industry here in New Jersey. If you can remember, we had an extremely warm week of weather during early April. I can remember a couple of nights when the temperature did not go much below 70 degrees overnight!

This onslaught of hot weather would not have been so bad by itself, as long as temperatures had remained around freezing or above for the remainder of the spring. But as we vividly remember, this did not happen. Fruit trees had been awakened earlier than normal last spring and adding mid-summer temperatures in April was like throwing gasoline on a fire. Fruit buds started to swell and grow at rates that were exponentially faster than they would normally grow during that time of the year. And once they start growing there is no going back.

As fruit blossoms start to swell and eventually open, they become less and less tolerant of freezing temperatures and become more and more susceptible to frost and freeze injury. Last April, those fruit



The Town Farmer

By Peter Melick
Agricultural Producer

Bouncing Back

buds could have handled temperatures in the low twenties without much damage before the week of unseasonably warm temperatures. But after the week of hot weather, many of the blossoms were open and at peak susceptibility to any temperatures below freezing. And on the night of April 20-21, temperatures dropped down to the mid and even low twenties in many parts of the state.

In all of my years as a fruit grower, I have never experienced a freeze event of this magnitude. During the first week or so after the freeze, as we were trying to assess how much damage we had incurred, things looked pretty bleak. Our hardest hit crops were the ones that bloomed the

earliest. Our plums and cherries took it the worst, and we had next to no production of those crops for the entire season. Our peaches fared somewhat better, especially where we were able to employ some frost-protection measures to help keep the temperatures slightly higher within the orchard. These measures included using a wind machine to keep air moving and bringing in helicopters to fly over our orchards to move some slightly warmer air down to where the fruit blossoms were located. All in all, we were able to salvage some of our peach crop, especially in areas that were at a higher elevation and had better air drainage.

Fortunately, our apples fared quite a bit better.

Because apples bloom slightly later than peaches and cherries, and because their bloom period is spread out over a longer period of time, while they still suffered damage, we have quite a few varieties where we will have a decent crop this season. And now, as the apples are starting to reach their full size, our apple crop is starting to look like it is a lot better than we originally thought. In fact, we actually had to thin a few varieties because there were too many apples on the trees! This is something that we have to do in years with a normal crop, but it was not something that I had expected to have to do back in April.

While part of this year's apple crop can be attributed to

measures, we took to minimize damage, the trees themselves took it upon themselves to produce a crop as well. In most years, the first blossoms to open and pollinate are the ones that produce the biggest and best quality fruit. Many of the blossoms that open later might fall off (or be removed by us to ensure adequate sizing). But this year, the trees were able to sense the absence of this early fruit and set a crop with the later blooming buds. So, while we will not have a record-breaking crop of apples this fall, we will have a decent crop. Here's to a successful 2026 apple harvest!

***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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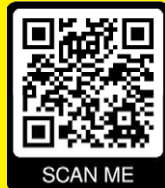
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NJLCA Creates Moving Cargo Trailer Billboard

The New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA) recently purchased a new cargo trailer from Rawn Leegwater at NY-NJ Trailer Supply in Butler, Morris County, NJ. NY-NJ Trailer Supply is an associate member of the association.

The newly lettered cargo trailer billboard made its grand debut at the association's 6th annual New Jersey Contractors Showcase Expo Demo Day (NJCSDD) on August 5, 2026 at the County College of Morris' Landscape and Horticultural Technology Building in Randolph, NJ.

NJCSDD provided owners, supervisory and decision makers with the ability to not only see, but test drive new equipment, set eyes on the newest developments in materials and try out the latest technology for the green and outdoor living industry. The trade show supports the NJLCA Educational Fund, which provides scholarships to students of higher education in the green and outdoor living industry.

The trailer was purchased from funds earned by the trade show over 6 years.



Tom Castronovo/Photo

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When you join the NJLCA you will become part of a professional organization that supports and protects your rights as a small business owner. As a member you will receive valuable information and benefits that are indispensable to the ongoing success of your business and the landscape industry itself. With a full time staff, we are ready, willing and able to help you with all of your green industry needs.

New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association

Exciting things are happening at the NJLCA this month! We are moving and shaking here in Elmwood Park and all over the state. We have moved to a larger office in order to be able to serve our members in a greater capacity.

In addition to providing us with more space, it will provide the association with another office for the potential new employee we are looking to hire! Serving our members and the industry are our number one goal and we feel we are more equipped now to be able to offer more services with more employees. NJLCA will also now have a large Board Room where we can offer meeting space and educational and certification classes on our premises. We are remaining in the same building but have moved to a larger suite.

We are full speed ahead on the Northeast Green Industry Showcase for September 28-29 at the Hunterdon County Fairgrounds, with additional vendors signing up every day! The latest vendors include SiteOne Landscape Supply, Empire Supplies, Arborjet, T-Mobile, Ransome Attachments, OSHA and more! We believe this year's show will blow away last year's event and encourage you to register online. Food



The NJLCA Today

By Gail Woolcott
Executive Director

The Universe is Expanding and so is NJLCA!

trucks will include a Korean BBQ, Italian and Greek Food, along with a dessert truck! Posters are all over the state in a variety of landscape and hardscape supply yards and houses. As an exclusive offer to *Gardener News* readers, you can register to attend at no cost using the promo code NGIS-GN22 at www.ngis-nj.com, but you must register online for this offer.

NJLCA is also planning a sustainable landscape certification program to be held at Alstede Farms in mid-September. Working with allied associations, this event will have classroom and hands-on portions to learn about battery-powered equipment, sustainable practices, and how to be successful and profitable doing so! At the end of the day, attendees will receive

their AGZA certification plus pesticide recertification credits (pending). More information about this event can be found on our website.

Last month I participated in an especially important meeting regarding our health insurance program. Association Member Trust oversees the NJLCA Trust Benefits program, which provides our members with group insurance rates, regardless of the size of their companies. During the call we discussed the increase in insurance rates across all carriers. Because of the backup during COVID-19, many people did not seek regular treatment. Once the pandemic slowed down, many of these people needed more extensive testing and treatment because of untreated issues. This hit the insurance carriers hard

and therefore is the reason everyone (no matter which insurance provider you have) will start to see increases in your premiums. The key is to look at your insurance plan and review other plans that may offer different services more tailored to your needs and may even save you money.

Finally, we are excited to announce that the NJLCA's 22nd Annual Golf Classic will be held at Crystal Springs Golf Resort. Each year, outdoor living industry contractors and suppliers meet up and spend an enjoyable day on the links. We host a \$10,000 putt-off contest and a \$1,000,000 hole-in-one contest at the outing. This year, we will have a special appearance by our honorary member and good friend, Kelsey Grammer, and will be enjoying Kelsey's three

varieties of Faith American beer throughout the day, and at the awards dinner. Speaking of awards, at the end of the day, golfers have an opportunity to win awards for Closest to the Pin, Longest Drive and Straightest Drive, 1st Place Team, 2nd Place Team, and Most Honest Team. Plus, door prizes, grand prizes and more. Add this to a fun day with friends and colleagues and our Golf Classic will be another sensational day.

We love getting together with our members and friends and this fall is set to be a great one with events and meetings, education and fun. Until next month, have a great rest of your summer everyone!

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.

Bobcat Announces North America Leadership Transition; President Mike Ballweber to Retire, CEO Scott Park Named Interim Leader

Bobcat Company announced the upcoming retirement of Mike Ballweber, president of Doosan Bobcat North America, Inc., effective July 31, following a distinguished career spanning nearly 30 years with the company.

With Ballweber's retirement, Scott Park, CEO and vice chairman of Doosan Bobcat Inc., will serve as interim president of the North America region, working closely with the regional leadership team to maintain continuity until a successor is named. In this capacity, Park will help ensure continued execution of Bobcat's strategic priorities and long-range growth plans, while maintaining continuity for employees, dealers and

customers. Bobcat remains focused on serving customers, supporting its dealer network and continuing priorities already underway across product innovation, manufacturing and long-term growth.

"Mike's impact on this business has been significant—not just in the results he helped deliver, but in the way he led," said Park. "He brought a deep commitment to our employees, dealers and customers, and he helped position Bobcat for continued success. We are grateful for his leadership and lasting contributions and are confident in our continued momentum moving forward."

Ballweber joined Bobcat in 1998 and was appointed president in 2019. During his tenure, he helped strengthen

Bobcat's dealer network, expand the company's product portfolio and advance manufacturing and innovation initiatives. He guided the business through some of its most complex operating environments in its history, including the COVID-19 pandemic and global supply chain challenges, while supporting a period of accelerated growth and expansion. Throughout, he maintained a strong focus on customers, dealers and employees.

"I'm sincerely grateful to have led this organization and worked alongside such talented colleagues, dealers and customers," Ballweber said. "This is a bittersweet moment, as Bobcat has been such an important part of my life. My retirement comes with great pride in

what we've accomplished together and with confidence in the strength of our team, our strategy and the future ahead."

Ballweber remained actively involved through July 31, working alongside leadership to ensure continuity and a smooth transition. Park will serve in the interim role until a successor is named.

With its North American headquarters in West Fargo, North Dakota, Bobcat leads the industry with its innovative offerings designed to transform how the world works, builds cities and supports communities for a more sustainable future. The Bobcat brand is owned by Doosan Bobcat Inc., a company within Doosan Group.

To learn more about Bobcat, visit bobcat.com.

NORTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF STATE

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.

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

2026 Vermont Maple Season Production Once Again Leads the Nation

The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has reported that the 2026 Vermont maple syrup production totaled 3.091 million gallons, once again leading the nation in this category producing more than 50% of the nation's maple. This follows 2 years of similar output in 2024 and 2025.

Vermont continues to top the nation in maple syrup production. Vermont maple syrup producers deployed 8.2 million maple taps in 2026, and the yield per tap is estimated to be 0.377 gallons, bettering the output of the 2025 season. Many maple producers experienced traditional winter conditions from New Year's Day through mid-March. Large snowstorms were few, but temperatures remained fairly consistent, allowing snowpacks to build up in the sugar woods. Mid-March through April temperatures permitted many sap runs that started and stopped with some cold days, but on the whole were more consistent than recent years.

"We are proud of Vermont's maple producers and all they do to produce a world-class product. Their commitment, innovation, and hard work continue to set the standard for excellence. Once again, Vermont leads the nation in maple production, and we thank our producers for their dedication to this iconic industry," said Vermont Agriculture Secretary Anson Tebbetts.

Vermont has led the U.S. in the number of maple taps every year since 1916 and was only out produced in 1926 and 1918. In 2003 Vermont had 2.12 million taps and has steadily increased that number to 8.4 million in 2024. Annual production prior to 1935 was typically between 1 million and 1.4 million gallons. This dropped to around 200,000 to 300,000 gallons in the 1970's. Since 2003 Vermont's maple syrup production has increased from around 500,000 gallons to 3.108 million gallons in 2024.

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

New Jersey Tomato Scores Bigtime in Baseball

On August 6, the Jersey Shore Blue Claws suited up as the Jersey Tomatoes — celebrating Jersey Fresh tomatoes grown right here in the Garden State!

Secretary Wengryn kicked things off with the first pitch, and our Food & Nutrition Division Director, Rose Chamberlain, gave a fantastic performance of the national anthem. Huge thank you to our Jersey Fresh

team, and the growers that make Jersey Fresh tomatoes a success, and the Jersey Shore Blue Claws for honoring the Garden State!

A special shout out to the Rutgers Cooperative Extension staff for joining in and throwing out some first pitches as well. Truly a team effort showcasing the best of Jersey agriculture!

NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Eligible Farmers Can Apply for Reimbursement for Overtime Paid Since January 1, 2026

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (AGM) today announced that eligible farm employers can now apply for the Farm Employer Overtime Credit Advance program and receive reimbursement for eligible overtime paid to employees since January 1, 2026. Now in its third year, the Farm Employer Overtime Credit Advance program is a part of Governor Hochul's plan to support New York's farmers through a series of new and increased tax credits and other initiatives and helps to ensure that farm employers can continue to support their workers while reducing their tax burden.

State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball said, "The agricultural industry is unique in that our farmers and farm workers don't necessarily work traditional hours. That's why it's important that we support our agricultural community and ensure that they have the resources they need so that they can continue providing food for our families. The Overtime Tax Credit helps provide farmers across our state with timely relief to maintain their workforce and keep our food supply moving. I encourage all eligible farmers to

apply and take advantage of this program."

The Farm Employer Overtime Credit is a refundable tax credit available for eligible farm employers who pay overtime wages, based on the gradual phase-in of the overtime threshold in New York State. Farm employers may submit an application to AGM for a certificate of advance payment of eligible overtime paid between January 1 and July 31, 2026, so they can receive reimbursement from the Department of Taxation and Finance (DTF).

Applications must be submitted to AGM by September 30. After eligibility review, AGM will issue a certificate of advance payment to each approved farm employer. With a certificate of advance payment, the approved farmer or business owners (for example, partners or shareholders) can then request their share of the payment from the Department of Taxation and Finance (DTF). This request must be made no later than November 1, using the online services account at DTF's website.

Learn more at <https://agriculture.ny.gov/farming/farm-employer-overtime-credit-advance>

DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE NEWS

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Bicentennial Farm, and Twelve New Century Farms

Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding honored twelve Centennial Farms for having been in the same family for 100 years. He also named a Centre County farm a Bicentennial farm, honoring the Stine family, who have passed down their farm within the family since 1813.

Since the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture started the Century Farm Program in 1977 and the Bicentennial Farm Program in 2004, more than 2,300 farms have earned recognition. Pennsylvania recognized its second Tricentennial Farm during the PA Farm Show in January 2024. At the 2026 Farm Show, eleven farms were added to the program.

The program's goal is to emphasize the importance of economic and rural heritage and traditions in Pennsylvania. The recognition ceremony was held at Penn State's Ag Progress Days, an annual agriculture exposition that draws tens of thousands of visitors to learn about the latest agriculture research, technology, equipment, and innovation driving Pennsylvania forward.

Farms owned by the same family for at least 100 consecutive years are eligible to be named a Pennsylvania Century Farm. A family member must live on the farm, and the property must include at least 10 acres of the original farm or earn more than \$1,000 annually from sales of farm products. Thirteen farms that met or exceeded this standard were recognized today.

Cambria County

William and Kimberly Simanski, Washington Township

Daniel and Rosanne Carney established the family farm in 1852 as a dairy operation. Today, William and Kimberly Simanski continue the family's agricultural legacy by boarding horses and maintaining several original buildings, including a home believed to date to the 1800s.

Cambria County is home to 34 century farms.

Centre County

Barron and Lynn Stine, Halfmoon Township

Jonas Stine purchased the family farm in 1813, creating a legacy that has endured for more than two centuries. Today, Barron and Lynn Stine grow crops, raise beef cattle on original acreage, and preserve historic farm buildings, along with rare land warrants that have remained in the family since the early 1800s.

Centre County is home to 44 century and three bicentennial farms.

Fayette County

John and Seth Dorazio and Joseph Augustine, Redstone Township

Philip Dorazio purchased the family farm in 1915, and successive generations have kept it in the family ever since. Today, John and

Seth Dorazio and Joseph Augustine grow crops and raise cattle on all 72 original acres while maintaining the historic 1887 farmhouse and original barn.

Fayette County is home to 26 century and four bicentennial farms.

Indiana County

Lynne, Scott, Randy, and Shirley Marshall, South Mahoning Township

Merle and Madalene Marshall established the Marshall family farm in 1925. The family has continuously farmed all 106 original acres since then. Today, Scott and Lynne Marshall, together with Randy and Shirley Marshall, grow market vegetables and live in the original farmhouse.

Joseph and Laura Skamai, West Mahoning Township

Herbert and Virginia Barrett purchased the family farm in 1909 and built a farming legacy that has endured for five generations. Today, Joseph and Laura Skamai, alongside Laura's father and uncle, raise beef cattle and grow hay, corn, and oats while preparing the next generation to continue the family tradition.

Indiana County is home to 58 century and three bicentennial farms.

Lehigh County

Timothy and Deborah Geiger, North Whitehall Township

Benjamin and Mary Geiger purchased the family farm in 1919 and established a tradition of potato farming that continues today. Timothy and Deborah Geiger now farm all 106 original acres and carry on the family's century-long commitment to potato production.

Lehigh County is home to 22 century and six bicentennial farms.

Lycoming County

Marlene Warn, Moreland Township

Albert T. Warn purchased the family farm in 1921 and established a farming tradition that has continued for more than a century. Today, Marlene Warn farms all 99 original acres and maintains the property's original farmhouse, barn, and shed.

Lycoming County is home to two bicentennial and 74 century farms.

Montour County

Messersmith Family Irrevocable Trust, Liberty Township

Jesse B. Messersmith purchased the family farm in 1909 and began a farming tradition that continues today. The Messersmith family now manages the property through a family trust, grows crops on the original farmland, and preserves the 1792 farmhouse and historic bank barn.

Montour County is home to 17 century farms.

Perry County

Jean and Dennis Reisinger and Joelle Reisinger Bond, Centre Township

Jacob Ard Kretzing purchased the family farm in 1925 and built a legacy that now spans four generations. Today, Jean and Dennis Reisinger and Joelle Reisinger Bond operate the original 126-acre property as a grain and poultry farm, while preserving the original farmhouse.

Logan Miles Bower, Jackson Township

The Bower family has farmed in Jackson Township since 1816, with Luther Miles and Benjamin B. Bower purchasing the family farm in 1925. Four generations later, the farm remains in the family, with many historic structures, including a 1766 log cabin and 1770 barn, still in use. What began as a small dairy with 10 cows has grown into a modern operation with more than 600 milking cows, carrying the Bower family's agricultural legacy into the future.

Perry County is home to 41 century and eight bicentennial farms.

Potter County

Heather Klimek, Allegany Township

Horace Nelson established the family farm in 1882, combining farming and timber production while helping bring the railroad through the property to support his sawmill. Today, Heather Klimek cares for the remaining original acreage and preserves the historic Woodville Town Cemetery located on the farm.

Potter County is home to 28 century farms.

Somerset County

Daniel and Heather Ream, Upper Turkeyfoot Township

Fred and Alice Ream established the family farm in 1912 and passed it through four generations. Today, Daniel and Heather Ream operate a crop and livestock farm, while preserving the property's historic home, summer house, and century-old barn.

Somerset County is home to 67 century and nine bicentennial farms.

Westmoreland County

Thomas and Belinda Derr, Sewickley Township

John and Della Derr purchased the family farm in 1919, and four generations have continued its agricultural legacy. Today, Thomas and Belinda Derr raise beef cattle and grain, preserve more than 82 acres of the original property, and care for a home that dates to the 1700s.

Westmoreland County is home to 40 century and 11 bicentennial farms.

To learn more about Pennsylvania's Farmland Preservation Program and investments in a secure, sustainable future for Pennsylvania, visit agriculture.pa.gov.

Emergency Relief Legislation for N.J. Farmers Devastated by April Freeze

Senator Parker Space, Assemblywoman Dawn Fantasia, and Assemblyman Michael Inganamort (all R-Morris, Sussex, Warren) are introducing legislation to provide direct financial assistance to New Jersey farmers devastated by the historic April 2026 freeze.

The legislation would establish a one-time Emergency Crop Loss Relief Program within the Department of Agriculture to provide grants or reimbursements for verified crop losses resulting from the freeze. The bill includes a streamlined application process, a per-farm funding cap, and authorizes the NJ Department of Agriculture to adopt emergency regulations to expedite relief.

The bill responds to the unprecedented weather event that struck between April 19 and April 22, 2026, when unseasonably warm temperatures caused crops to bloom early before a sudden hard freeze destroyed blossoms and developing fruit across the state, causing an estimated \$300 million in agricultural losses.

"New Jersey's farmers are why we earn the nickname the 'Garden State', and they experienced catastrophic losses through no fault of their own," said Senator Space. "Many invested an entire season's worth of labor and resources only to see their crops destroyed by a single weather event. This legislation will provide the emergency assistance they need to recover and continue feeding New Jersey."

"In talking with farmers from District 24 and throughout the state, the need for direct financial assistance is crystal clear," said Assemblywoman Dawn Fantasia, a member of the Assembly Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee. "The spring freeze produced devastating agricultural production losses and the legislature needs to step in to help ensure the viability of our farms."

The April freeze placed an immediate financial burden on New Jersey farmers, who had already made their annual investments in labor, fertilizer, equipment, and irrigation expenses before their crops were destroyed. Many now face debt, property taxes, insurance premiums, and payroll costs despite having little or no harvest to sell. Although the State did successfully secure a Secretarial Disaster Designation from the US Department of Agriculture which enables impacted farmers to apply for emergency low-interest loans through the federal government, direct financial assistance from the State will help fill in the gaps.

"These are hardworking families and small businesses that had already invested heavily in this year's crop, only to watch months of work disappear in a matter of hours," said Assemblyman Michael Inganamort. "We cannot undo the freeze, but we can make sure a temporary disaster doesn't become a permanent loss for the farms and communities that depend on agriculture. This legislation is about giving New Jersey farmers a fighting chance to recover and plant again next season."

The devastating impacts from the freeze threaten an industry that generates more than \$1.5 billion in annual wholesale value and supports approximately 25,000 jobs statewide. Without prompt assistance, many otherwise viable farms could be forced to reduce operations, lay off workers, or close altogether, jeopardizing New Jersey's agricultural economy.

The legislation is modeled on a disaster relief framework employed by the State in 1999; a prolonged period of exceptionally dry weather brought severe drought conditions throughout New Jersey, resulting in a substantial loss of agricultural crops.



The Garden Historian

By Lesley Parness
Garden Educator

Herbal Vinegars from Your Kitchen

Where did the summer go? The season of glass jars is upon us. I've been saving them all year for this moment and the making of herbal vinegars - one of my favorite ways to capture the taste and fragrance of my garden herbs.

I use the vinegars all year in salads, sauces, and marinades. I use them for pickling vegetables and fish, and for refreshing drinks like shrubs (Colonial era fruit-based cocktails), switchels (Pioneer period Gatorade), and poscas (Roman refreshers). Would you like to try? OK, then sterilize some glass jars no larger than 10 ounces, with necks you can stuff herbs into and lids with coated interiors and let's get started.

Choosing your vinegar. Apple cider, white/red wine, balsamic/white balsamic, sherry, champagne, or rice wine vinegar are all good choices. But the traditional plain white vinegar doesn't play nicely with herb's delicate flavors, so I don't recommend it. Check the label for the acidity level - it must be at least 5%, and 7% is ideal.

I'll describe the process first. Cut your herbs on a sunny, dry day. Late morning is best, after the dew has dried. Yes, it matters. You will need about 4 oz of chopped herbs per 8 oz of vinegar. Select tender stems and young leaves. Wash and dry thoroughly.

Prepare the herbs by stripping the leaves from the stems and cutting them into small (under 1 inch), pieces, remove any tough midribs, or bruised or browned areas. Herb flowers may be used too. Place about 4 oz. of prepared herbs into an 8 oz. bottle. Fill the bottle with vinegar. Use a plastic funnel for this - no metal! The herbs must be completely submerged in the vinegar. This is critical to prevent them from spoiling.

You can also add taste enhancers, like garlic cloves or strips of lemon, orange, or lime peel. I pierce these onto wooden skewers, so they stay put in the jar. You can also add peppercorns, juniper berries, fennel, or other herb seeds. Use these sparingly as they can be potent. In terms of plant parts - flavor strength increases from

leaf, to pollen, to berry or unripe seed, to seed. Sometimes I use the same plant - like fennel, for example - in all its stages in a vinegar. Pollen is an exquisite addition to the making of vinegar. This kind of "layering" results in a more nuanced taste. Experimenting is your friend here.

Label the bottle with your "recipe" and the date. Seal and store somewhere dark and cool. Shake every day or so for two weeks, then taste it. You may prolong the steeping for an additional two weeks if a stronger flavor is desired. After a month, it must be decanted. Strain the herb solids from the liquid. Use cheesecloth or a plastic strainer, no metal! Label and store somewhere dark and cool. It should be used in the coming year.

Sounds so easy, right? Well, it is, but the Devil is in the details. It's the combining of the right herb with the right vinegar that makes the magic. Here are some of my favorite recipes- "Lemonicious White Balsamic Vinegar" with lemon verbena, lemon balm, lemon thyme and lemon peel zest. Fabulous with hazelnut oil on cold grilled salmon. "Dessert First Red Balsamic Vinegar" with lavender flowers, peppermint and its pollen, and stevia. Perfect on grilled pineapple with vanilla ice cream. "Asian Fusion Rice Wine Vinegar" with nasturtium flowers and leaves, Thai basil and black peppercorns. Add this to sushi rice for a blast of pepperiness. "Roots and Roasts Apple Cider Vinegar" with sage, bay leaf, garlic chive, fennel, and mustard seed. Save this one for Thanksgiving. "Tour of Europe Red Wine Vinegar" with Greek oregano, French thyme, Portuguese rosemary, and Italian parsley. The classic salad dressing vinegar.

Make small batches so that you can customize the flavors, Match the specific herbs and enhancers to the vinegar and to your cooking style. Try different vinegars - each one is unique. Think about what herbs and edible flowers you want to add to your garden for next year. If you would like some recipes for using herbal vinegars, just send me an email. Happy vinegar making!

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 and she can be reached at parness@verizon.net. This column will appear in the paper every other month.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Doug Fisher is a husband, father, and grandfather who has enjoyed distinguished careers in both the public and private sectors. A graduate of Bryant University, Fisher served as Secretary of Agriculture in the cabinets of three New Jersey governors over a span of fifteen years. His extensive public service includes roles as a New Jersey Assemblyman,

County Commissioner, and City Councilman. Throughout his career, he has held numerous state and national leadership positions and has received multiple awards recognizing his dedication to public service, business leadership, and community engagement.

In addition to his public service, Fisher spent more than thirty years as the owner and innovative operator of a successful full-service supermarket.

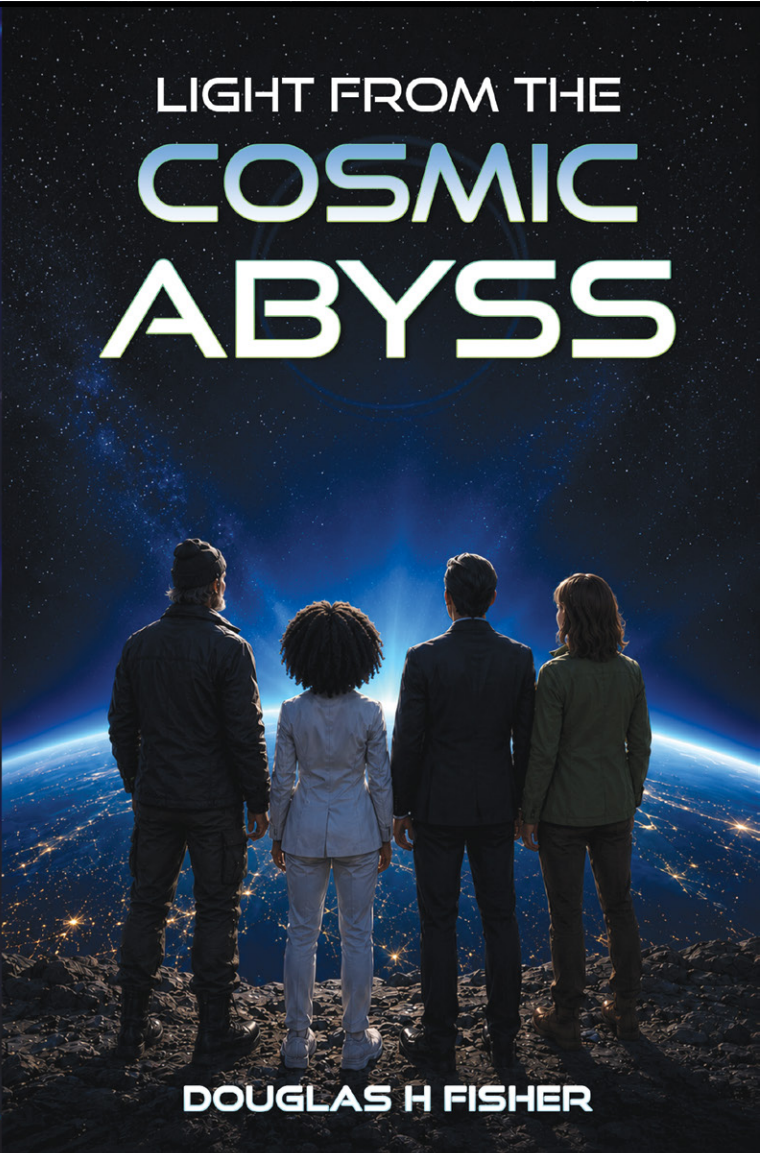
Now retired, Fisher turns his attention to a story he believes deserves thoughtful consideration.

Humanity has always looked to the heavens in search of answers about life on Earth. As our world undergoes profound and unprecedented change, *The Cosmic Abyss* invites readers to explore what the future of humanity may truly hold. Challenging conventional wisdom and expanding the boundaries of possibility, this thought-provoking journey offers a compelling vision of tomorrow that may be far different from what today's experts predict.

LIGHT FROM THE COSMIC ABYSS

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LIGHT FROM THE COSMIC ABYSS



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Are You Digging or Planning to Dig?

(Continued from page 1)

in that part of your yard will be located and marked. Be sure to let your One Call center know about your plans and they will help ensure the proper area is marked by utility locators.

The Underground Facility Protection Act in New Jersey, better known as the "One Call Law," was signed into law in October 1994. This law requires that anyone digging must call 811 so that operators can mark out their underground utilities. Anyone digging (schools, police, public safety, public works, municipalities, and homeowners) to install, remove or replace trees, tree stumps, curbs, street and signposts, mailbox posts, fences, construct decks, additions, or create new gardens, etc. must call 811.

The person/company doing the excavation is required to call the center.

You cannot work outside the scope of work stated on your request. You must hand dig within two feet of markouts before using mechanized equipment.

Please respect the utility marks (paint, flags, or stakes). The marks

provided by utility operators are your guide for the duration of your project.

For your reference, the color code for marked utilities are: Red (electric); Yellow (gas, oil, dangerous materials, product, and steam lines); Orange (CATV communication); Blue (water); Green (sewer); White (proposed excavation).

Make the call, it's free!

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.

Gardener News

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Germinated in 2003

In the last 10-15 years there has been a lot of excitement and enthusiasm regarding creating garden spaces that contribute to local environments and biodiversity. Plants that attract pollinators, especially native plants, have skyrocketed in their popularity.

Many home gardeners have also focused on creating habitats for butterflies, or butterfly gardens to support creating food sources and habitat for local or migrating butterflies. Most home gardeners are also aware of the plight of the Monarch whose populations have drastically been impacted by pesticide use, climate change, and habitat loss. Fortunately, there are many ways the gardener can contribute to attracting and supporting butterflies in the garden.

The following are some ideas for creating an ideal location for a butterfly garden.

Select a sunny location with protection from strong winds and at least six hours of sunlight.

Plant a mix of native perennials that will flower in the spring, summer and fall so there is a constant nectar source for feeding butterflies. For the spring season, plant the Eastern redbud, *Cercis canadensis*; golden ragwort, *Packera aurea*; and wild geranium, *Geranium maculatum*. For the summer



Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

By Andrew Bunting
Vice President of Horticulture

How to Create a Butterfly Garden

there are endless choices including many species of milkweed, *Asclepias*; coneflowers, *Echinacea purpurea* and *Echinacea pallida*; and Joe-pye weed, *Eutrochium fistulosum*. In the fall, plant any of the myriad of fall blooming asters (*Symphytrichum*) and goldenrods (*Solidago*).

Host plants are also important for the eggs to be laid and as a source of food for the feeding larvae and caterpillars. For Monarchs, milkweeds (*Asclepias*) are both a site for egg laying and feeding caterpillars as well as a nectar source for the butterflies.

Habitat is also very important for butterflies. Having a pond as a water source is ideal, but shallow stones where water can puddle is a good source of water too. Surrounding the garden should be shrubs for shelter.

It is critical that no form of pesticide be used anywhere in the garden. If for example roses are being sprayed for insects, this practice needs to stop,

or the insecticides will kill both the larva, caterpillar, and butterflies. Additionally, songbirds feed on the larva and caterpillar, and insects that have ingested pesticides will also harm songbirds.

When creating a butterfly garden, it is important to avoid a few pitfalls. In addition to planting plants that have nectar rich flowers for the feeding butterflies, it is important to have host plants that will be a food source for the feed caterpillars. For flowering plants make sure there is a regular nectar source from early spring through late fall. Having a continuum of flowering plants that can feed the various species of butterflies is important. Instead of using shredded bark mulch try to have a more natural leaf litter as a mulch. And most importantly stop the use of pesticides in the garden. Learn to not only accept insects eating leaves, but take the mindset of encouraging this type of feeding.

The milkweeds, *Asclepias*, are the quintessential host

for the Monarch Butterfly. The entire plant provides the host for the lifecycle of the monarchs. The eggs are laid on the leaves. The larvae and hence the caterpillar develop and feed on the leaves. Then the chrysalis is formed, and emerging after 10-14 days is the Monarch Butterfly which also feeds on the nectar of the flowers of the milkweeds. In the Mid-Atlantic there are several common milkweed species including the common milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca* with big, bold leaves and light to dark pink flowers in June-July. For moist areas there is the swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata* and the iconic butterfly milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa* has vivid orange flowers from June through August.

Other Monarch nectar food sources include the following perennials, Joe-Pye weed, *Eutrochium fistulosum*; wild bergamot, *Monarda fistulosa*; blackeyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*; dense blazing star, *Liatris spicata*; Narrow-leaved mountainmint,

Pycnanthemum tenuifolium; New England aster, *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*; New York ironweed, *Vernonia noveboracensis*; and wreath goldenrod, *Solidago caesia*.

Excellent shrubs for Monarchs include, the buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*; Eastern Baccharis, *Baccharis halimifolia*; wild plum, *Prunus americana*; and pussy willow, *Salix discolor*.

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>

New Jersey County Offers Farm Trail Passport

The Morris County Tourism Bureau has launched the Morris County Farm Trail Passport, a new initiative inviting residents and visitors to explore the county's farms, markets, orchards, wineries, cideries, seasonal festivals and other agricultural attractions throughout the year.

The Morris County Farm Trail Passport officially launch on August 11, 2026 at Riamede Farm in Chester Township NJ, bringing together participating farms and local leaders to celebrate the new program and Morris County's agricultural community.

Developed in collaboration with Morris County's farming community, the Farm Trail Passport connects participating farms and encourages visitors to discover new destinations and support local farms and businesses. The program invites visitors to return throughout

the seasons to experience the diversity of the county's agricultural offerings, including locally grown products, family activities and seasonal events.

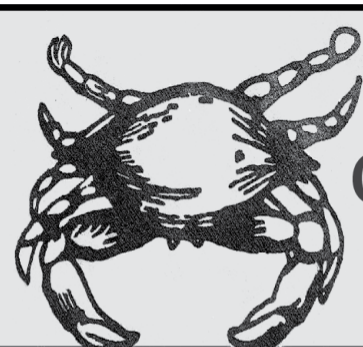
"Our farms each have their own unique story, but together we create an experience that truly showcases the diversity of agriculture in Morris County," said Ashley Asdal, owner of Riamede Farm and member of the Morris County Tourism Bureau Board of Directors. "It has been exciting to work alongside fellow farmers to create a trail that makes it easier for people to discover everything our local farms have to offer. We hope the Farm Trail Passport encourages people to visit new farms, support local agriculture, and return throughout the seasons to experience everything Morris County has to offer."

Passports are available at all participating

farms and at the Morris County Tourism Bureau, 6 Court Street, Morristown. A PDF may also be downloaded and printed from the Morris County Tourism Bureau website: <https://ow.ly/EZoJ50ZyzVt>.

Stamps are collected after visiting each destination. Visitors who collect stamps from five or more participating farms will receive a Morris County Farm Trail gift. Those who complete the entire passport will be entered into an annual Grand Prize drawing for a basket valued at approximately \$1,200, featuring products, merchandise, gift certificates and experiences donated by participating farms and partners.

For more information about participating locations, visit: <https://ow.ly/etyk50ZyA2j>



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September 2026 Columnists

Tom Castronovo	Peter Melick	Hubert Ling	Andrew Melick
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Gardener News is published monthly by
Gardener News, Inc.
16 Mount Bethel Road #123
Warren, NJ 07059

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