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Tune Them Up Now!



Tom Castronovo/Photo

Early bird customers having their snow blowers serviced early, which helps beat the winter rush and avoids long repair delays when the first storm is forecast.

By Tom Castronovo
Executive Editor/Publisher
Gardener News

I just serviced my snow blower. I encourage you to spend an hour or so now to get your snow blower ready for winter, even if the first big snowstorm of the season might be

weeks away where you live.

Fuel is important. In the spring I always run my snow blower engine out of fuel. It has been drilled into my head that regular gasoline gets "stale" over time. I am a huge fan of canned fuel, which is available from local hardware stores or power equipment dealers. This type of fuel does not absorb moisture or degrade over time like pump gasoline. Make

sure it has an octane rating of 87 or higher. I've also been told to only purchase gasoline that I expect to use within 30 days from a gas station. If I do that, I always add a stabilizer into my red gas can.

Need be, I tend to wait until the fall weather season arrives before purchasing gasoline for my snow blower. Gasoline is re-blended to suit the season, and although the

difference isn't as great as it once was, winter-grade gas will make cold weather starts easier.

No matter what type of snow blower you have, changing the engine oil is important. Before you change it, check the dipstick, then run the engine for five minutes. This warms the oil so it drains more easily. I like to use a piece of cardboard under (Cont. on Page 12)



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National Wildlife Federation Outlines How to 'Leave the Leaves' in Ways that Work for You, Your Requirements, and the Environment

Fallen leaves help sustain healthy ecosystems, provide food and habitat for wildlife, and return valuable nutrients to the soil. However, the fourth annual National Wildlife Federation 'Leave the Leaves' survey found 52% of respondents are required to remove fall leaves by an HOA and/or city or municipality ordinance, a 12% increase from 2025. The most common method to comply with these requirements includes disposing of leaves in the trash, with 36% throwing away an average of six or more garbage bags per year.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, leaves and other yard debris account for 7.2% of the nation's municipal solid waste with more than 10 million tons of yard waste buried in the landfill every year. Despite this, many respondents are helping to keep leaves out of landfills by participating in city leaf pickup programs, using leaves as mulch in garden beds, composting, or mowing over fall leaves rather than throwing them away.

"Leave the Leaves can mean different things to different people, it's about finding a method that works for you while still helping wildlife and the environment," said David Mizejewski, naturalist for the National Wildlife Federation. "We want to provide people with practical options for managing fall leaves that meet them where they are and can be adapted to fit individual needs. The important thing is to keep leaves out of the landfill and reduce the environmental impacts that exacerbate climate change."

'Leave the Leaves' comes in many forms, choose what's best for you

While the most natural way to enhance and preserve the ecosystem created by fall leaves is to leave them alone, HOA or local requirements may prevent homeowners from doing this. The next best solution is to rake leaves directly into garden beds to create a natural mulch layer that preserves soil moisture, suppresses weeds and naturally composts, returning nutrients directly to plant roots.

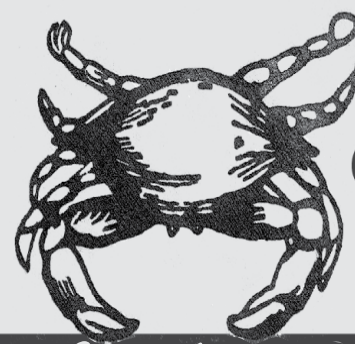
Homeowners can also add them to a compost pile and let them decompose over the course of the year. That resulting

compost can be applied to lawns or garden beds for added spring nutrients. If those options still don't work, mowers can chop leaves in place and return them to the soil to keep leaves out of the landfill.

The 2026 Leave the Leaves Month survey interviewed 1,854 people between the ages of 18 and over 65 living across the United States. Survey findings include:

- 52% are required to rake their leaves by either a homeowner's association, a city or municipality ordinance, or a combination of both
- 14% of respondents leave their leaves where they fall
- 39% participate in city leaf pickup programs
- 31% are using collected leaves as mulch in their garden beds
- 26% move them to a compost pile, compost tumbler, or leaf pile on their property
- 29% mow over fall leaves
- 41% dispose of them in the garbage for trash pickup
- 13% of those surveyed dispose of more than 10 bags of leaves per year in the trash, with 23% disposing of between six to 10 per year, and 38% disposing of between one and five bags
- 40% are worried about fall leaves smothering or ruining their lawn
- 17% said they don't have space to keep a pile of leaves or to compost them
- 14% said they didn't know what else to do with leaves other than throw them away in the trash

The National Wildlife Federation, America's largest and most trusted conservation organization, works across the country to unite Americans from all walks of life in giving wildlife a voice. We've been on the front lines for wildlife since 1936, fighting for the conservation values that are woven into the fabric of our nation's collective heritage.



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When you mention October, people immediately think of ghosts and goblins and trick-or-treating.

But in our agricultural world, there's a lot more to October than just Halloween.

We've previously covered the fun this month brings. It is, of course, a month where farmers really show off their "agri-tourism" chops, from apple- and pumpkin-picking with hayrides to corn mazes and apple cider.

We've mentioned selecting beautiful mums from garden centers and decorating your home with straw bales, cornstalks, and Indian corn. We've talked about all the great fall crops, including cranberries, hard squashes, broccoli and cauliflower, spinach and much more.

These are all great agricultural contributions to the first full month of autumn, but there are some interesting days in October outside of the 31st.

For example, October 1 is International Coffee Day and World Vegetarian Day. Now, we don't grow any coffee in New Jersey, and I've been caffeine-free since 1988. But I sure like meat on my plate. I was raised with meat and potatoes and perhaps



NJ Dept. of Agriculture

By Joe Atchison III
Assistant Secretary of Agriculture

October is More Than Halloween

a canned or frozen vegetable for dinner most nights.

New Jersey has some great beef, pork, and chicken producers, so I encourage you to source your proteins from them. However, if you like steak like I like steak, I would ask you to consider, just for one day, eating vegetarian.

Salads, of course, leap to mind. But that doesn't mean you have to go that route (even if it's a biiiiig salad). However, other options include butternut squash soup, roasted spaghetti squash with sauce, and fall fruits for dessert, all of which can make up your menu on October 1. Trust me, you'll live and you can support Garden State growers, too. Then you can go back to your regular favorites the next day if you like.

October 14 is National

Dessert Day, which immediately brings to mind all-American apple pie and that all-time fall favorite, pumpkin pie. Two of my favorite desserts. But there's also apple walnut bread, cranberry shortbread crumble, pumpkin cookies, and pumpkin cheesecake (National Pumpkin Cheesecake Day is October 21, by the way) just to name a few.

Finally, if you're looking for a wider array of meal favorites being celebrated, you can't go wrong with October 16, which is World Food Day. World Food Day also has a social component, as a global observance dedicated to tackling hunger and ensuring healthy diets for all. It draws attention to the millions still facing food insecurity, urging collective action to build resilient, sustainable agrifood systems

and reduce food waste. The day was created by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1979, commemorating the FAO's founding in 1945 after World War II to confront hunger and malnutrition worldwide.

At the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), we take the cause of fighting hunger seriously. Our Division of Food & Nutrition works closely with statewide food banks. These operations are most often the first point of contact for people experiencing food insecurity. Last autumn, when SNAP ("food stamp") benefits were interrupted, food banks stepped up big time, and we were fortunate to have state funding to put additional foods into those community helpers.

The Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) reports directly to the Governor but is housed within the NJDA. The agency is responsible for ensuring New Jersey residents have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food through statewide collaboration, policy guidance, and community-driven initiatives.

We all can take food for granted. We're hungry and we go to the refrigerator or pantry and pull out ingredients and whip up a meal or snack. Or maybe some leftovers. But for too many, this is not an option. People work a job or two or three and still have to decide between paying rent and utilities or feeding their children.

Whichever of the days in October you choose to celebrate, keep these neighbors and their needs in mind as you enjoy the many fun times October brings.

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!

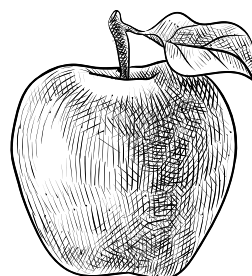
A Year-Round Celebration of the Garden State's Fruits and Vegetables

NUTRITION FACTS:

If you eat two small apples, you will fulfill your fruit requirement for the day! Which is typically 1-2 cups of fruit.

HOW DOES IT GROW:

Apples grow on deciduous trees that are usually grafted for consistent fruit quality. In spring, the trees produce a pinkish-white blossoms that require cross-pollination by bees to set fruit. After fertilization, the flower's ovary swells into an apple (a pome), with the fleshy part developing from the flower base while seeds form in the core. The fruit grows through the summer, ripening in fall as it fills with sugars.



Jersey Fresh Harvest of the Month: Apple

ALL ABOUT NEW JERSEY:

Apples are in season in New Jersey from July until December. Apples grow on trees and can be red, green, or yellow. There are over thirty varieties of apples grown in New Jersey.

FUN FACT:

A study, conducted at Cornell University, found that kids were 70% more likely to eat apples if they are sliced.



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

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We are all living in Vinland (Grape-Vine-Land), which was Leif Ericsson's 11th century name for North America. The plant that Ericsson saw was probably fox grape *Vitis labrusca*, which is the most common of the five wild, native grape species found in NJ. Why we don't speak Icelandic today in NJ is a great lesson of history which unfortunately doesn't fit in *Gardener News*.

Fox grape probably got its name from the unique "foxy" flavor which is described as being like cotton candy, "grapey", raspberry, or strawberry. Some people think this grape makes wines that sometimes have a musky flavor. However, many cultivars/hybrids of fox grape are very popular such as Concord, Catawba, Delaware, Isabella, and Niagara. In addition, this species has contributed genes to many other popular grape varieties such as Swenson Red, Edelweiss, and Brianna, as well as the world's most popular grape Kyoho!

Americans have long had a love affair with flavorful Concord grapes which are generally recognized here as the 'standard' grape for use in juice,



The Native Plant Society of New Jersey

By Hubert Ling
Horticulture Chair

Living in Vinland

candy, jelly, and soda. However, as expected, our native wild fox grape has a small (1/2-3/4 inch) bluish-black fruit, which is variable in flavor, often quite tart, and has skins which are very thick and bitter and usually not eaten. Wild fox grapes are not a reliable heavy fruit producer. However, depending on the individual plant and the growing conditions of any particular year, you can find the occasional bumper crop of sweet, flavorful, native fox grapes just waiting for the wild fruit enthusiast to come along. Grapes need a warm sunny location to ripen well.

Fox grapes are characterized by fruit balls which easily slip out of their skins when the skins are cut. This of course makes them a great sticky toy missile to shoot at another young boy also

so armed. You can also shoot them into your mouth, but that is quickly boring and a bit messy. Fox grapes also produce tendrils at almost every node, and the leaf undersides are populated with brown-gray hairs. The plants are adapted to very cold winters, tolerate hot, humid summers, and are somewhat resistant to many damaging grape diseases including phylloxera.

The vines can grow from 4 feet to over 75 feet tall depending on the height of the support. Overall, it is a tough vigorous vine and is considered by some people to be weedy and invasive. The vines grow best in full or partial sun in moderate to damp soil. They are commonly found in disturbed areas, along the edges of forests, in woodlands, and fields. Propagation is by

seed; cold stratification increases seed germination. Hardwood cuttings have also been used to reproduce treasured strains.

Fox grapes and other wild grapes are very important to wildlife. Bumblebees and honeybees collect the pollen, but grape flowers lack nectar. However, later in the season ants, wasps, and hornets are strongly attracted the sweet sugar found in damaged grapes. A wide range of insects such as beetles and leafhoppers feed on the foliage or suck sap from grape vines. In addition, grapes support the large caterpillars of the spectacular sphinx and owl moths.

Many insect species feed on fox grape including beetles, aphids, leafhoppers, and walkingsticks. However, the

plants are well adapted for occasional foragers, and wild grapes are overall healthy and vigorous. Also, many wild birds such as gamebirds, orioles, tanagers, warblers, woodpeckers, and vireos eagerly seek out the ripe fruit. The large leaves provide dense cover which is used as nesting areas for birds.

Mammals from deer and fox to skunk and squirrel, including humans, love fox and other grapes. Native Americans made good use of the fruits; the Cherokee used it as a drink and to make dumplings. The leaves are sometimes used today to wrap up baked or boiled food and impart a pleasant flavor.

Although you could use fox grape in your garden on a trellis for shade, you would probably be better off to use a named variety of table or wine grape. However, if you have the space, wild grape is an important plant for wildlife.

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.

The interest in growing native plants is perhaps at an all-time high. Many home gardeners are conscious of the need for everyone to “do their part” in creating habitats by making changes to their garden that enhance ecological functions.

Also, very popular in home gardens are growing fruit trees. Backyard fruit growing can be done on relatively small properties in Philadelphia and the suburbs. The Philadelphia Orchard Project is a great advocate for fruit growing.

One of the most popular native fruits is the paw paw, *Asimina triloba*. This medium-sized tree is an understory plant often found in low areas in native deciduous woods across most of the Eastern United States. It grows stoloniferously (underground stems) often forming large colonies. In cultivation, it will thrive in full sun and will flower and fruit better. In the spring, curious flowers emerge with six overlapping burgundy petals. The flower is pendant and bell-shaped. The flowers have evolved to have the color of rotting flesh and therefore also attract flies which facilitate pollination. More than one cultivar or genetic selection are needed for cross-pollination. Short banana-like fruits form in June-August. Some exceptional cultivars include



Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

By Andrew Bunting
Vice President of Horticulture

Native Trees and Shrubs with Edible Fruits

‘Potomac’ with sweet fruits; ‘Shenandoah’ has a banana-like flavor and ‘PA Golden’ is a good yielding cultivar.

In some markets and grocery stores you can find the orange fruited Asian persimmon, *Diospyros kaki*. These fruits are either egg shaped or look like a small version of a pumpkin. They are noted for their sweetness and can be used for making cakes, cookies, and ice cream. The common persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana* is a native tree that grows from Pennsylvania south to Florida and west to east Texas and north into Kansas and Missouri. Over time this deciduous tree can reach over 50 feet tall. For fruiting to occur there needs to be both a male and a female tree in proximity to each other. The fruits of the native persimmon are approximately the size of a gumball and ripen in late fall. The fruits need to get frosted multiple times to remove the astringency from

the fruit otherwise your lips will literally pucker up upon your first bite.

Blooming before the leaves emerge with an abundance of five petaled white flowers are the shadbush, shadblow, serviceberry, juneberry, or Sakatoon, *Amelanchier*. There are about 20 species of serviceberries native to the United States. Many of them have exceptional spring flowers and edible fruits in early summer, hence the common name, Juneberry, followed by exceptional fall color. Many of the large shrubs or small flowering trees have smooth grey to silver stems that provide good winter interest. There are several notable species including, Allegheny serviceberry, *Amelanchier laevis*; Canada serviceberry, *Amelanchier canadensis*, and a naturally occurring hybrid, *Amelanchier x grandiflora* which is a hybrid between *Amelanchier arborea* and *A. laevis*. ‘Autumn Brilliance’

is a popular cultivar. Serviceberries attract early season bees, and then when the fruit are ripe, they are an excellent food source for both humans and songbirds.

The wild American plum, *Prunus americana*, is a multi-stemmed large shrub or tree that can reach 15-25 feet tall at maturity. Over time it can form a thicket. In the spring it is covered in an abundance of white flowers. In late summer it produces plum-like fruits that can be used for jams, jellies, and preserves. From an ecological perspective it is considered to be one of the keystone species, which are the most important genera for supporting a large diversity of native insects. The foliage supports the larvae of many species of moths and butterflies. The flowers are an early spring food source for bee species, and the fruits support many native animals including foxes and turkeys. The thicket-like aspect of this shrub provides great habitat

and protection for songbirds.

The common persimmon, paw paw, serviceberries, and American plum make nice ornamental additions to the garden. The persimmon matures as a picturesque medium-sized tree. The paw paw has a nearly tropical effect in the garden with large, bold leaves, while the serviceberries and plum are stalwart shrubs in the garden.

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>

Spotted Lanternfly Research and Development Act

A Bill to amend the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 to include spotted lanternfly control research and development as a high-priority research and extension initiative, and for other purposes.

U.S. Senators John Fetterman (D-PA) and Dave McCormick (R-PA), joined by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), introduced the Spotted Lanternfly Research and Development Act on August 3, 2026 to designate the Spotted Lanternfly, an invasive species that poses a significant threat to our nation’s agricultural economy, as a high-priority research initiative for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

“Spotted lanternflies have ravaged crops that are critical to Pennsylvania’s economy including grapevines, apples, peaches, hops, and more,” said Senator Fetterman. “For over a decade, they have cost the Commonwealth

millions of dollars and thousands of jobs. I’m proud to lead this bipartisan bill to combat this invasive species and protect our farmers.”

“Pennsylvania’s farmers work hard to produce some of the best agricultural products in the world, and it’s concerning that their hard work is at risk of being eaten away by pests,” said Senator McCormick. “By investing in research to combat spotted lanternflies, this bill will help protect our farms, strengthen our agricultural economy, and better control this invasive species.”

Spotted lanternflies were first detected in Pennsylvania in 2014. They have since spread throughout the Commonwealth and are currently found in 51 counties. Studies estimate that the species could cost the state \$324 million annually if not contained because of the significant damage they cause many pieces of critical agriculture.

When Does the Time Change?

Clocks are scheduled to fall back an hour for standard time on the first Sunday in November (Nov. 1 in 2026), shifting more daylight hours into the morning and away from the afternoon. DST will restart Sunday, March 14, 2027.

We will have to wait and see if the Sunshine Protection Act becomes law for doing away with the twice yearly time change.

LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY NEWS

Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Days Showcase Innovation and Industry Collaboration

Turf professionals from across the United States and abroad gathered this summer for the 2026 Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Days, where they explored the latest advances in turfgrass science and management while engaging directly with Rutgers researchers, faculty, staff, and students.

The annual educational outreach events highlighted cutting-edge research and practical solutions for golf courses, sports fields, lawns, and landscapes, reinforcing Rutgers' longstanding leadership in turfgrass research and extension.

The Golf and Fine Turf Field Day, held July 28 at Rutgers NJAES Hort Farm No. 2 in North Brunswick, welcomed 249 attendees, along with 35 volunteers and 74 Rutgers faculty, staff, and students. The following day, the Lawn, Landscape, and Sports Turf Field Day drew 248 attendees, 31 volunteers, and 47 Rutgers personnel to the Rutgers NJAES Plant Science Research and Extension Farm near Adelphia. That evening, members of the Cultivated Sod Association toured the Adelphia research plots before holding their summer business meeting at the farm.

Participants traveled from New Jersey, 20 other states, and three countries—Canada, Ireland, and Spain—to learn about the latest Rutgers research and discuss emerging challenges facing the turfgrass industry.

Hosted by the Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science, the field day tours featured research on technologies

for remotely sensing and assessing turfgrass health and persistence, breeding improved varieties of Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, bentgrasses, perennial ryegrass, and fine fescues, and developing best management practices for turf diseases, weeds, insects, and abiotic stress tolerance.

A highlight of the Adelphia event was the presentation of the New Jersey Turfgrass Association Recognition Award to George Zieminski, supervisor of the Adelphia research farm.

The award recognizes his many years of dedicated service to the turfgrass industry and his commitment to sharing his expertise with researchers, students, and industry professionals. Stacy Bonos, associate director of the Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science and professor in the Department of Plant Biology, presented the award during the luncheon following the field day program.

The success of both field days reflected a collaborative effort among Rutgers faculty, staff, students, volunteers, and industry partners. Organizers expressed their appreciation to the New Jersey Turfgrass Association and the Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey for their continued partnership in coordinating the events, as well as to the many volunteers, industry professionals, and Rutgers personnel whose support helped make the field days a valuable educational experience for the turfgrass community.

How Do Detention Basins Impact Flooding?

This summer, the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program began examining detention basins in Hillsborough, Somerset County to quantify how well these systems work to reduce downstream flooding. Detention basins were introduced as a method of reducing increased stormwater flowrate resulting from new development and increased impervious surfaces. The basins fill during a storm and slowly discharge over time, which reduces the stress placed on local streams. However, this management practice is outdated. Even if the peak flow rate is reduced, the new development introduces a larger volume of runoff compared to pre-development. It has been hypothesized that 75-85% of the post-development runoff volumes exit the basin before the 24-hour storm ends, which is far too short of a period.

Five detention basins in Hillsborough were selected for this study, along with three downstream locations. Water level sensors and data loggers were placed on the outlet structure of the basin and in the bottom of the streams. Student interns Holly Monroe, Gavin Beyers, and Logan Pouliot assisted with basin surveying, sensor installation, and data collection. We hope to compare the intensity and timing of the flowrate of water leaving the basin to the timing and intensity of stream level rise. Ultimately, we want to answer the question: Do we need to bolster detention basins with retrofit strategies (like upstream green infrastructure)? Stay tuned as our study continues into the fall!

Rutgers 4-H Program Builds STEM Confidence in New Jersey Youth

Twenty-two middle school students from the Trenton area concluded five weeks of discovery, innovation, and hands-on learning by showcasing their summer projects during the closing celebration of the sixth annual Rutgers 4-H STEM Pathfinders Summer Academy.

Held from July 13 through August 13 at Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Mercer County, the academy immersed youth in weekly explorations of public health, cybersecurity, engineering, robotics, and agriculture while introducing them to the people, places, and possibilities that make up New Jersey's STEM community. The program was led by Yaa Owusu-Mensah, 4-H program associate.

The final showcase featured student presentations highlighting projects completed throughout the summer and the skills they developed along the way. Among those attending was Dr. Francine Conway, chancellor of Rutgers–New Brunswick, who met with participants and learned firsthand about their experiences and aspirations.

More than a summer enrichment program, STEM Pathfinders is designed to help young people envision themselves in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. By combining hands-on learning with mentorship and real-world experiences, the program helps middle school students build confidence, strengthen

problem-solving skills, and develop a lasting interest in STEM fields during a pivotal stage of their education.

Throughout the academy, participants worked alongside Rutgers faculty and staff, 4-H volunteers and teen mentors, and collaborators from industry, government agencies, and partner universities. These interactions allowed students to engage directly with STEM professionals while exploring how classroom concepts translate into real-world careers.

Field experiences have long been a hallmark of the program. Over the years, participants have visited the New Jersey Department of Health's Public Health and Environmental Laboratories, New Jersey's Regional Operations Intelligence Center, The Watershed Institute, and research laboratories at Rutgers University, Princeton University, and The College of New Jersey. These experiences provide students with opportunities to explore advanced research environments and connect with professionals whose work addresses challenges in health, technology, environmental science, and engineering.

Established in 2021, the STEM Pathfinders Summer Academy serves as the critical middle school link in Mercer County 4-H's STEM education pipeline. It bridges two longstanding programs: Tomorrow's

Innovators Science Saturday, launched in 2013 through a collaboration between Rutgers 4-H and Bristol Myers Squibb volunteers, and the Rutgers 4-H STEM Ambassadors program for high school students, established in 2009.

The impact of this continuum is already evident. Several students who have progressed through all three programs credit their 4-H experiences with helping them identify future academic interests and career pathways, demonstrating how sustained engagement and mentoring can shape educational and professional aspirations.

The Rutgers 4-H STEM Pathfinders Summer Academy is supported through the Mercer County Extension budget and Intern Program and the Mercer County One-Stop Career Center, which provide funding for transportation, intern stipends, and STEM instructional materials. Additional technology support is provided through the Apple Community Education Initiative.

By connecting young learners with mentors, meaningful experiences, and a supportive community of educators and STEM professionals, the Rutgers 4-H STEM Pathfinders Summer Academy continues to cultivate the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers, and leaders.



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

Winterizing Your Lawn

Fall is a key season, and beyond preparing your lawn for winter, best practices set it up for next spring and summer. Proper care in the fall ensures a healthier, more durable turf that withstands cold weather and resumes healthy growth when temperatures warm in the spring. Consider these fall turf tips to improve your lawn and the soil that sustains it.

Mowing: Maintain a regular mowing schedule, removing only one-third of the leaf height per mowing until the grass stops growing. This helps maintain a neat appearance and prevents excessive buildup of fallen leaves and debris. Cool-season grass (Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, and fine fescues) should be mowed at a height of 2.5 to 3 inches. If you have not already, raise the mower setting to this cutting height. A taller lawn captures more sunlight (for photosynthesis), protects its growing point (crown), and promotes root growth. For the last mowing of the season, lower the mower height to 2.0 to 2.5 inches; this prepares the lawn for winter and reduces the risk of snow mold (a winter disease).

Fertilization: Apply a slow-release N fertilizer containing potassium to strengthen the turf's root system and ensure winter hardiness in the grass plants. Apply fertilizer about 4-6 weeks before the first expected frost to allow time for the nutrients to be absorbed and growth responses to occur. Avoid over-fertilizing. NJ law requires that retail fertilizer products and instructions for use must meet best management practices. By following the application rates described on the fertilizer package, you will avoid excessive growth, potential disease problems, and

risks to water quality.

Aeration: When soil is compacted, core aerate your lawn to improve air and water penetration and enhance rooting. The inability to readily dig into the soil with a shovel or readily push a long-shanked screwdriver 4 to 6 inches deep into the soil indicates the soil is compacted. Once air temperatures are frequently below 85°F, late summer and fall are the ideal time for aeration; the soil is still warm enough to encourage rapid recovery and growth of the grass. If the soil structure and fertility are poor (one can confirm this with soil testing), consider applying a thin layer of compost or topsoil (topdressing) before aerating. Topdressing and core aeration will gradually improve soil structure and provide important essential nutrients for the grass.

Seeding and Overseeding: Reseed any bare or thin spots to ensure full grass cover of the soil in the spring. Overseeding an entire lawn can improve its density and crowd out weeds. Use a seed blend or mixture appropriate for your grass type, climate, soil, and exposure. Tall fescue is one of the most durable and widely adapted lawn grasses in New Jersey. Blends (two or more varieties) as well as species mixtures containing 50% or more tall fescue by weight are recommended when Kentucky bluegrass or perennial ryegrass lawns do not persist through New Jersey summers. Seeding with 30% or more fine fescue is recommended for lawn areas growing under shade stress (limited sunlight exposure).

Watering: Reduce the watering schedule (frequency) as temperatures drop. Lawns will use less water as temperatures cool and

day lengths shorten during the fall. Including rainfall, a lawn will need, at most, 1 inch of water per week. Over-watering encourages weeds, disease, and runoff. Early morning watering minimizes evaporation losses and wind effects on water distribution. Avoid watering in the evening before sunset; doing so can prolong leaf wetness, which may promote leaf diseases. Drain and blow out hoses, pipes, and sprinklers, and turn off the irrigation system before winter to protect from freezing temperatures.

Leaf Management: Use a mulching mower to chop leaves into small pieces, which filter into the lawn, decompose, and recycle nutrients. Routinely remove fallen tree leaves and other debris that are too much for a mower to mulch back into the lawn; this will prevent them from smothering the grass.

Weed Control: Remove weeds to reduce competition and ensure lawn persistence. Hand removal can be effective if all growing points are removed, but only practical if the weed population is small. If necessary, apply postemergence herbicide to control established weeds or a preemergence herbicide to prevent winter annual weeds. Follow the label instructions to use the product safely and achieve the desired results. This is best done in early fall.

Winter Preparation: Clear debris, branches, or objects from the lawn. Avoid heavy traffic (foot or vehicle) on the lawn during winter to prevent compaction and damage to dormant grass. Clean and maintain your mowers, trimmers, and other equipment before storing. Sharpen mower blades after the last mowing to ensure a clean cut when mowing resumes in the spring.

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Editor's Note: This article was written by James A. Murphy, Director of the Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science and Extension Specialist in Turfgrass Management within Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

Having worked at several Public Gardens over my career, one obvious and enjoyable perk has been the access to a broad array of interesting plants. These plants vary from the bold and dramatic to those with a quieter and more supportive demeanor who aid in unifying the garden. Such is the character of Japanese Yellow Sage. Botanically named *Salvia koyamae*, I observed this plant for several years before its garden contributions suddenly grew obvious!

Salvia is a member of the Lamiaceae or Mint Family and contains over 900 species ranging from woody shrubs to herbaceous perennials and annuals. *Salvia koyamae* is native to Honshu, the largest of Japan's four main islands. It is found on shady woodland slopes, although never in large quantities. The genus is from the Latin of the same name, which evolved from the Latin *Salvēre*, meaning to feel healthy and to heal. The genus was officially described in 1753 by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), and this species was described in 1922 by the Japanese botanist Tomitaro Makino (1862-1957). Makino



Morris County Park Commission

By Bruce Crawford
Horticultural Manager

Sage Advice from a *Salvia*

became known as the Father of Japanese Botany and each year his botanical achievements are celebrated on Botany Day, which coincides with his birthday on April 24th! The species name of Koyamae honors his friend and fellow botanist Mitsuo Koyama (1885–1935), who held a strong interest in the study of forests.

Japanese Yellow Sage differs from most members of this genus owing to its preference for shade! Typical to shade dwellers, the foliage is large with the sagittate or arrowhead-shaped leaves reaching up to 6 inches long by 5 inches wide. The bold foliage bears an attractive light green color with a puckered, quilted appearance and contrasting, deeply defined veins. The thick, ¼-inch diameter stems are square in cross-section and typically become decumbent,

whereby they stretch along the ground before the tip turns skyward. This spreading nature ultimately forms a plant measuring 2 feet or greater in diameter by 12-18 feet tall. Its spreading nature also allows it to be used as a tidy yet coarse-leaved groundcover!

The flower display starts in mid-August as floral stems appear from the terminal buds and stretch skywards to 12 inches above the foliage. They are lined with ½-inch long, pubescent flower buds that open into large, pale-yellow flowers measuring 1 inch tall and long. The flowers develop a tubular base containing the nectaries with a smaller lower lip and a large overarching upper lip, concealing the male stamens and the female style and stigma. Typical to the genus, the flowers feature an ingenious staminal lever;

when pollinators land on the lower lip they push down on one end of the lever, causing the anthers at the other end to lower and dust the back of the pollinator with pollen! The flowers appear along the stem in a verticillaster formation, whereby several oppositely arranged buds are closely spaced and appear as if they are in a whirl. These floral whirls are spaced 1-2 inches apart along the stem.

Although many a passing visitor may never realize the intricacies of this flower, they will appreciate its beauty as well as the attractive bold foliage! Naturally, bold foliage always makes a great statement when combined with more delicate foliage and *Salvia koyamae* is no exception. Consider pairing it with taller ferns such as Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) or with the delicate foliage of Astilbe and

the shrub-like Goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*).

Although a woodland dweller, Japanese Yellow Sage is tolerant of some sun, especially in the northern regions of its 5-9 hardiness range. Soils should be rich in organic matter and well-drained but otherwise, little care is required. After growing for over 25 years at the Willowood Arboretum, the plants have also proven to be well-behaved and have not self-seeded!

I must admit, *Salvia koyamae* was initially a plant I only recognized during those 4-6 weeks of bloom time. In time I finally realized the adjacent ferns and lacy Astilbe looked all the more amazing thanks to the bold backdrop of the Sage foliage. You might say this plant provided me with some 'sage advice' on improving a garden's design!

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

Florida's Outdoor Living Industry Celebrates \$41.9 Billion Economic Impact at Trade Show

The Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) brought together more than 7,500 professionals from Florida's landscape and nursery industry for the 2026 Landscape Show at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando.

As Florida's state industry association for the nursery and landscape industry, FNGLA produced the three-day event, which concluded August 21 and featured a 250,000-square-foot trade show floor with exhibitors from across the southeast and beyond showcasing a variety of trees, plants, equipment and tools.

Attendees connected with industry leaders, explored new

products, attended educational sessions and gained insights into the trends shaping the future of the landscape and nursery profession.

The show also welcomed members of the Florida Legislature, Florida Senators Keith Truenow and Kristen Arrington, and Florida Representative Hilary Holley. Legislators toured the trade show floor and connected directly with industry professionals whose businesses contribute to the more than 279,000 jobs supported by Florida's landscape and nursery industry.

The Landscape Show's Knowledge College featured 35 educational sessions tailored to a range of roles and experience

levels across the industry, providing attendees with real-world tools and industry insights to bring back to their businesses.

The Certification Showcase gave professionals the opportunity to earn industry-recognized certifications, demonstrating their proficiency in areas like best management practices, landscape design and horticultural knowledge.

Through educational and professional development opportunities like the Knowledge College and Certification Showcase, FNGLA continues to foster a community that supports the growth and success of its members.

"This industry generates \$41.9 billion for Florida's economy, but

numbers only tell part of the story," said Tal Coley, chief executive officer of FNGLA. "The real value is in the people, the growers, landscapers and business owners who showed up ready to learn, connect and push their businesses forward."

The Landscape Show is produced by the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) for the benefit of industry.

The 2027 Landscape Show will take place August 23 - 25 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida.

For more details on this ultimate industry trade event for the landscape and nursery industry, visit www.TheLandscapeShow.org.

Premier Business-First Horticulture Trade Show Returns to Baltimore January 13–15, 2027

Registration is now open for the 2027 Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show (MANTS), taking place January 13–15, 2027, at the Baltimore Convention Center.

Coming off a sold-out 2026 trade show floor, MANTS will once again bring together thousands of industry colleagues for three focused days of sourcing products, meeting customers and suppliers, strengthening business relationships, and writing orders for the season ahead.

The 2026 show welcomed more than 10,800 horticulture professionals and more than 890 exhibiting companies. Eighty-four percent of attendees authorized or influenced their company's purchasing decisions, and nearly 3,200 non-exhibiting buying companies participated.

"MANTS is where the industry starts the year by getting down to business," said Vanessa A. Finney, Executive Vice President of MANTS. "Buyers come ready to make decisions, and exhibitors come prepared to meet with customers, introduce products, and build relationships that carry into the season ahead. That face-to-face access is what continues to bring the industry back to Baltimore each January."

MANTS provides a business-first show where attendees can connect directly with suppliers and see plant material, nursery stock, equipment, growing inputs, containers, tools, and other products and innovations serving the horticulture industry.

Throughout the show, industry knowledge is exchanged peer-to-peer through product

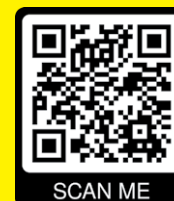
demonstrations, conversations with suppliers and customers, and direct interaction across the trade show floor.

Registration for MANTS 2027 begins at \$20 per person for Early Bird registration through midnight on December 4, 2026. The rate will increase to \$30 per person for advance and on-site registration available from December 5 through January 15.

Attendee and exhibitor housing reservations are also now available through the official Visit Baltimore Housing Bureau at ten downtown hotels. Each MANTS hotel is within walking distance of the Convention Center.

For more information and to register, visit <https://www.mants.com>

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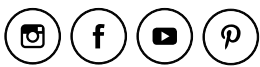
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Tune Them Up Now!

(Continued from page 1)

the machine in case of spills. This makes cleaning up a lot easier. My go to oil is 5W-30.

I then swapped out the spark plug for a new one. The spark plug starts the engine, so it's important to keep it fresh.

Next, I inspected the rotor blades for wear. When a rotor blade edge has worn down to the wear indicator hole, both rotor blades and the scraper should be replaced.

I also inspected the drive belt for fraying, cracking, or signs of stretching. I always have an extra belt on hand in the event the belt breaks while I'm operating the snow blower. When I plowed snow, I always had spare parts.

Fasteners, nuts, and bolts tend to loosen because of the snow blower's vibration during operation. I did a thorough once-over to make sure they didn't come loose throughout the season.

I then checked the tire pressure. My snow blower has pneumatic tires. I always double-check the owner's manual for specific air filling instructions.

Finally, I wiped down the entire snow blower to help prevent corrosion. I then sprayed all the metal parts with a preventive rust spray.

I made sure the fuel shut-off was in the off position, so I had no leaks, because I wanted to protect the carburetor from flooding for an easy start when the snow flies.

Power equipment dealers will always tell you not to store equipment wet: Wipe off moisture before putting it away.

Remember, salt can damage your snow blower the same way it corrodes a car's exterior. Give it a good wash on a sunny day when

(Cont. on Page 14)





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Tune Them Up Now!

(Continued from page 12)

the weather goes above freezing. Again, dry it well before storing it.

If you are not able to perform these tasks yourself, make an appointment with your local power equipment dealer sooner rather than later for a shorter wait time.

I'm told servicing a battery-operated snow blower is simple and requires far less work than a gas model, focusing mainly on battery care, cleaning, and inspecting wear parts. If you have one, I would read the owner's manual closely.

My work gloves that protected my hands while I performed my tune-up are back on the shelf and my insulated snow gloves are next to my snow blower waiting for the flakes to fly.

What will the Super El Niño bring the New Jersey metropolitan area this winter season is the big weather question.

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.

Read the Gardener News online at GardenerNews.com

As the days keep getting shorter and the temperatures start to drop, it is time to start preparing for the upcoming winter. While there is still a good month to month and a half (hopefully) of some good growing season left before winter really kicks in, the writing is on the wall. It is time to start preparing your crops and fields for what lies ahead.

First of all, that means taking care of and maximizing yields of your crops that are still in the field. Sometimes it can be easy to get sidetracked and lose focus during the busy harvest season, but it is important to keep crops watered and to maintain good insecticide and fungicide coverage. Disease pressure can be a real issue at this time of year, especially given the heavy dews that frequently occur during the overnight and morning hours. Plus, this is also the time of year when tropical systems can start hammering New Jersey with high winds and torrential rains, and because the days are so much shorter, once the ground gets wet, it tends to stay that way.

It is also important to



The Town Farmer

By Peter Melick
Agricultural Producer

Finishing Strong

take measures to protect any sensitive crops from a killing frost. In many instances, we can get one or two cold nights, which are then followed by a couple of more weeks of milder temperatures. So, if there are still plants that are actively growing and producing, it might behoove you to cover them up in order to keep them alive and producing for a few more weeks. Many commercially available plant and row covers will provide four to eight degrees of temperature protection on calm cold nights, so if these nights occur in early or mid-October when the plants have a lot of growing left to do, they might be well worth the investment.

As crops reach their

optimum state of maturity, it is important to harvest them in a timely manner. Nice mild and dry days can sometimes be few and far between during late October, and it is important to “make hay while the sun shines,” as they say. Remember, it does not matter how nice a crop is before it is harvested, that is why there must be such a sense of urgency in regard to the timely harvesting of crops. I once knew a grain grower who had a nice crop of mature soybeans to harvest in early November. Everything should have been great, except for the fact that they had a cruise scheduled. As you can guess, the weather was great at home while they were on the cruise, but when they returned,

the weather turned against them, they ended up losing the majority of the crop and filed a disaster claim with their crop insurance company. I’m not sure if they got paid for their claim or not.

Once the crops are harvested, it is important to take steps to prepare the soil for winter. That might mean chopping up or incorporating crop residue into the soil, removing items such as tomato stakes, plastic mulch, and irrigation tubing, or planting a cover crop. These are all steps that can be taken but depending on the prior crop as well as what crop will be grown next year, these processes may vary. Fall is also an excellent time to take soil samples so that nutrient and PH levels can

be adjusted for the following growing season. While it might be prudent to wait until spring to apply any nitrogen due to its leachability, Phosphorous and Potassium can be applied to the soil months in advance. And when it comes to raising or lowering the soil’s PH, because liming materials sometimes take months to work, the fall can be the optimal time to apply these products.

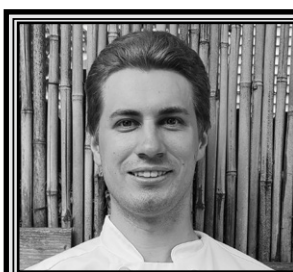
So, if there is a nice window of weather and soil conditions, take advantage of it. There will be plenty of opportunities to kick back and sit by the fire in January!

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.

As the air turns crisp and the orchards heavy with fruit signal the shift into autumn, there is one annual tradition that immediately transports me back to my childhood: making homemade applesauce.

Long before farm stands, pre-packaged jars, or commercial processors existed, my grandmother mastered the art of transforming simple orchard harvests into something extraordinarily comforting. Her kitchen in October was always filled with the sweet, intoxicating perfume of warm fruit, aromatic cinnamon, and melting butter. Passing down her recipe has allowed us to keep that memory alive, bringing a genuine piece of family heritage straight to the table every fall.

What made my grandmother’s applesauce so memorable wasn’t a complex series of secret steps or hard-to-find ingredients, but rather her deep appreciation for simple, honest preparation. She believed that the true magic of applesauce comes from relying on a blend of different apple varieties rather than sticking to just one. By combining sweet, tart, firm, and soft apples—such as McIntosh, Cortland, Fuji, and Honeycrisp—you create a rich depth of flavor and a naturally complex texture that a single variety simply cannot achieve on its own. As the fruit slowly cooks down in a heavy



Culinary Experiences from the Farm

By Andrew Melick
Executive Farm Chef

Homemade Applesauce

kettle, the natural sugars caramelize, softening the apples into a smooth, comforting side dish that feels both timeless and deeply satisfying.

Her recipe was designed with balance and versatility in mind. She always started with just a tiny splash of water to gently steam the fruit without diluting its natural essence. Once the apples cooked down until soft and tender, she would stir in the sugar, a generous knob of fresh butter to add a silky richness, and plenty of ground cinnamon. Depending on the specific batch of apples or what was available in her pantry, she would often invite us to customize the kettle to taste—adding a subtle pinch of salt to highlight the sweetness, a drizzle of maple syrup for earthy depth, or a pinch of nutmeg for a warm holiday spice finish. To this day, it remains my brother’s absolute favorite food, he’ll happily sit down and eat an entire batch all by himself.

It is an adaptable foundation that welcomes personal touches while remaining rooted in classic farm tradition.

Whether served warm straight off the stovetop on a chilly afternoon, paired alongside savory roast pork and potato dishes, or enjoyed chilled as a simple everyday treat, this applesauce is a celebration of the autumn harvest. It proves that a few quality ingredients, prepared with care and patience, can connect generations through flavor. I am proud to share my grandmother’s recipe with you, hoping it brings the exact same warmth, nostalgia, and comfort to your family’s home as it has to ours for decades.

Grandmother’s Classic Applesauce

Yield: 6 servings (approx. 4–6 oz per serving)

Ingredients

Base Ingredients:

- 3 lbs Assorted fresh apples (peeled, cored, and cut into chunks)
 - 1/4 cup Water (plus a little extra if needed during cooking)
 - 1/3 to 1/2 cup Granulated sugar (adjusted to sweetness of apples)
 - 1 tbsp Unsalted butter
 - 2 tsp Ground cinnamon
- Optional Extra Additives (To Taste):**
- 1 pinch Salt
 - 1/4 cup Light brown sugar
 - 2 tsp Pure maple syrup
 - 1 pinch Ground nutmeg

Method of Preparation

1. Prepare the Fruit: Wash, peel, core, and cut the 3 pounds of assorted apples into uniform bite-sized pieces.

2. Cook Until Tender: Add 1/4 cup of water to a heavy kettle or large pot, then add the prepared apples. Place

over medium heat, cover, and cook until the apples become soft and tender. Stir frequently throughout cooking to prevent scorching, adding a small additional splash of water if the kettle begins to dry out.

3. Season and Finish: Once the apples are fully tender and softened, stir in the granulated sugar, butter, ground cinnamon, and any optional additives (salt, brown sugar, maple syrup, or nutmeg) according to your personal taste. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until all ingredients are thoroughly combined and well mixed.

4. Cool and Serve: Remove the kettle from the heat source and allow the applesauce to cool before serving. Serve warm or chilled.

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.

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PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Historic \$1.2 Billion Investment from Chobani to Establish its First Dairy Operation in Pennsylvania and Create 900 Jobs, the Largest Single Investment in Agriculture in Commonwealth History

Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, Department of Agriculture (PDA) Secretary Russell Redding, Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Secretary Rick Siger, and Department of Revenue Secretary Pat Browne announced the Commonwealth has secured a historic \$1.2 billion investment from Chobani to establish its first dairy product manufacturing operation in Pennsylvania. This major project — the largest ever private investment in Pennsylvania's agriculture industry — will create 900 full-time jobs over the next five years in the Lehigh Valley and greatly expand markets and opportunities for more than 4,000 dairy farmers in Pennsylvania.

Chobani will assume operations of Keurig Dr Pepper's (KDP) manufacturing facility, equipment, and related infrastructure, where Chobani plans to manufacture innovative food products beyond yogurt.

The 1.5 million-square-foot facility, located at 7356 Industrial Boulevard in Upper Macungie Township, will accelerate Chobani's ability to innovate and produce the next generation of better, more wholesome foods while creating new opportunities for Pennsylvania workers, farmers, and suppliers.

When fully operational, the facility is expected to process more than three billion pounds of Pennsylvania milk annually — equivalent to approximately 30 percent of all milk currently produced in the Commonwealth — the largest increase in demand for Pennsylvania dairy in the state's history. The project will create a significant new market for the Commonwealth's family dairy farms, helping them grow and strengthen their businesses for generations to come.

"Pennsylvania is home to one of the highest number of family-owned farms in the country. When we walked into this factory, we knew it was a great fit for what we want to build for the future," said Hamdi Ulukaya, Founder & CEO of Chobani. "There were many challenges along the way, and this project would not be possible without Governor Shapiro and his team bringing people together and finding ways to move things forward. I want to thank the Governor's team, Senator McCormick, our local leaders, and most of all, the farmers who make all this possible. We're so happy to be here bringing our future innovation to life

in Allentown, made with fresh Pennsylvania milk and delivered to families across the country."

This investment by Chobani is a major step forward for Pennsylvania's dairy industry and, most importantly, for the farm families who are its foundation. Pennsylvania has the second highest number of dairy farms in the nation — and agriculture is a key pillar of Governor Shapiro's economic development plan. For years, the Commonwealth's dairy farm families have been eager for more processing and market access opportunities. This historic project brings expanded processing capacity and increased demand for Pennsylvania-produced milk, strengthens the Commonwealth's dairy supply chain, and keeps more of the economic value of Pennsylvania milk within the state.

"This announcement is the biggest change for our dairy industry in a generation and represents the culmination of a journey built on collaboration, persistence, and a shared belief in the future of Pennsylvania dairy," said Agriculture Secretary Redding. "Since day one, Governor Shapiro has been clear that our dairy producers are among the best in the world, and maintaining our leadership requires investment, innovation, and a strong processing infrastructure to create markets for the milk they produce. His commitment has been to ensure Pennsylvania is not only a great place to farm, but also a place where agricultural businesses choose to invest, grow, and add value."

The Governor's BusinessPA team worked with Chobani to build out the agricultural and public infrastructure necessary for a project of this scale. To support Chobani's investment in Pennsylvania, the Commonwealth will provide \$50 million in loans and grants through the Pennsylvania Strategic Investments to Enhance Sites (PA SITES) Program to support infrastructure and site improvements necessary for the project and broader regional economic development.

Additionally, the Commonwealth will continue to drive out \$127 million in loans and grants available directly to eligible Pennsylvania dairy farmers to meet the significant new demand for Pennsylvania milk products.

Chobani may also be able to access tax credits through the Department of Revenue's Pennsylvania Economic Development for a Growing Economy (PA EDGE) program's Pennsylvania Milk Processing (PMP) Tax Credit in the future.

For Chobani, the investment is about more than establishing a new manufacturing operation. It is about putting down roots in the Commonwealth and becoming part of the communities surrounding the facility.

Chobani will bring competitive wages and industry-leading benefits while creating opportunities for more than 900 people to build careers in advanced food manufacturing.

The company will also work alongside farmers, local governments, economic development organizations, and community partners to strengthen the infrastructure, workforce, and supply chains necessary for sustainable growth.

"Chobani's investment reinforces the faith in our dairy farmers and manufacturers, and the role they play in moving our economy forward," said Pennsylvania Department of Revenue Secretary Pat Browne. "This also demonstrates that policy and tax reform changes we have made, including the phased reduction of the corporate net income tax, have led to significant investments by businesses in the Commonwealth. We're proud to continue to partner with Governor Shapiro on initiatives that consistently position Pennsylvania as a strong, reliable market for economic growth."

Key local partners supporting the project include the Lehigh County Authority, Upper Macungie Township, Lower Macungie Township, South Whitehall Township, and the City of Allentown.

Production under Chobani is expected to begin in 2027.

With more than 48,800 farms contributing over \$132 billion a year to the economy and supporting nearly 600,000 jobs in Pennsylvania, agriculture is foundational to the Commonwealth's heritage and future. Governor Shapiro has prioritized strengthening both agriculture and food security — helping farmers, families, and communities thrive.



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DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE NEWS

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

DACF Invites Participation in the 2027 Maine Agricultural Trades Show

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) is inviting businesses, farms, agricultural organizations, educators, researchers, service providers, and others connected to Maine agriculture, food systems, and natural resources to express interest in participating in the 2027 Maine Agricultural Trades Show, scheduled for January 12-14, 2027.

The annual show brings together Maines agricultural community for three days of exhibits, education, professional development, networking, and conversations about the opportunities and challenges facing agriculture and food systems.

DACF is encouraging both returning participants and organizations that have not previously participated to explore ways to become involved.

The Agricultural Trades Show serves a diverse agricultural community, and DACF is particularly interested in broadening awareness of opportunities to participate.

Farms and producers, agricultural businesses, commodity organizations, food-system partners, educators, researchers, conservation and natural resource organizations, financial and business service providers, workforce development organizations, and others whose work supports Maine agriculture are encouraged to consider how they could contribute.

Organizations with ideas, including those that do not fit neatly into any of these categories, are encouraged to submit their interests and connect with show organizers. Questions may be directed to acfaagtradesshow@maine.gov.

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

\$10 to \$30K Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant Now Open

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) announces the availability of farm to school grants for schools and early childhood programs. The Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant helps schools and early childhood programs start or expand farm to school programming. Grants range from \$10,000-\$30,000 and can cover a wide range of allowable costs, like school garden supplies, kitchen equipment, or even personnel costs related to farm to school, such as hiring a part-time Farm to School coordinator to lead food education programming across a school district. The grant application deadline is Monday, October 21, 2026 at 1:59 PM.

“These funds give young people an opportunity to learn lifelong skills. Getting your hands dirty growing a garden or preparing a meal in the kitchen are hands-on experiences that teach valuable lessons about food, agriculture, health, and responsibility, said Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Anson Tebbetts. “That’s the power of Farm to School initiatives—they connect young people with where their food comes from while giving them skills they can carry with them for a lifetime.”

The application deadline is Wednesday, October 21, 2026 at 1:59 PM.

Apply at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/farm-school-and-early-childhood>.

NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

State Agriculture Department Seeking Input for a Program Supporting Disadvantaged Farmers

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball announced that the Department of Agriculture and Markets is now accepting letters of interest from prospective program administrators with experience working with or representing socially and economically disadvantaged farmers for Round 3 of the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmers Grant Program. The grant program aims to expand opportunities to farmers who are less likely to enter or succeed in the agricultural field, due to discrimination and the inability to access resources. Funding for the program was provided in the New York State Budget and builds on the State’s work to expand opportunities in agriculture to more New Yorkers.

“This is a great opportunity for entities to play a direct role in helping our agricultural industry grow,” Commissioner Ball said. “I encourage all eligible entities to take advantage of the opportunity to administer the third round of the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmers Grant Program and help provide farmers across our state with the funding they need to start or improve their business.”

The Department is seeking input from organizations that can provide financial assistance, including capital assistance, to grant awardees to

ensure effective distribution of grant funds. Entities eligible to administer Round 3 of the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmers Grant Program include municipalities, public benefit corporations, local development corporations, or not-for-profit organizations. The RFI is not a solicitation of actual proposals to administer this program. A Request for Proposals (RFP) will be published on a later date. Responding to this RFI is not a prerequisite to submitting a proposal in response to any future RFP and will not result in a contract.

The selected Program Administrator will administer the \$2 million third round of the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmers Grant Program, which was funded in the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 New York State Budget to assist farmers who face disproportionate barriers to success due to discrimination. The selected administrator will award grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$250,000, on a competitive basis to eligible socially and economically disadvantaged farmers who will materially and substantially participate in operating a farm within a region of the state. This may include urban farmers. Grants will be awarded to start up, improve or expand farm operations; provide worker or apprenticeship

training; purchase agricultural land, infrastructure, equipment, or livestock; and more.

Socially disadvantaged individuals include those who have been subject to discrimination due to their race or ethnicity, including those who identify as Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Pacific Islander. Economically disadvantaged farmers are socially disadvantaged individuals whose farming opportunities have been hindered due to diminished capital, credit opportunities, or access to land, among other things, as compared to other similarly situated individuals who are not socially disadvantaged.

For more information about this opportunity, visit agriculture.ny.gov/rfi-0431-program-administrator-round-3-socially-and-economically-disadvantaged-farmers-competitive. Letters of Interest must be received by the Department by October 07, 2026.

The Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmers Grant Program offers support to New York farmers who face disproportionate social and economic barriers to success. Opening doors to all farmers is a critical piece of New York’s agricultural landscape that will help ensure a strong, diverse, and well-supported agricultural future.

Fall Foliage Forecast 2026: Where to Expect the Best Color Across the US

New England, upstate New York and parts of California could see vibrant fall colors this year, while drought and wildfire stress may dull leaves in the Rockies and parts of the East.

By Brian Lada
AccuWeather Meteorologist

The fall foliage season could bring a striking contrast across the United States this year, with vibrant colors possible in some of the country's most popular autumn destinations.

The first signs of fall start to appear at higher elevations across the northern U.S. before gradually expanding south throughout the season.

Most areas will have peak colors between late September and mid-October, although the exact timing depends on location and varies from year to year based on the weather conditions leading up to autumn.

Where the best fall colors are expected

New England and upstate New York stand out as some of the most promising areas for fall foliage in 2026. Wet weather in late spring and early summer followed by drier conditions and cooler nights heading into autumn could set the stage for vibrant color.

The Midwest and areas along the Cascades in the Northwest could also have good color if dry days and cool nights arrive at the right time.

However, foliage may not be as vibrant across the interior Northwest due to long-term drought and wildfires.

California is another area where fall color could impress. Typical or vibrant foliage is expected across the Sierra Nevada and portions of northern California, where significant drought has largely been avoided and wildfire activity has been limited.

Fall colors in the Sierra Nevada typically peak in mid- to late October, and relatively quiet weather could provide favorable viewing opportunities through much of the month.

Where fall colors could be duller

The Rockies are among the areas where foliage may fall short of previous years. Last winter had much less snow than normal, which contributed to worsening drought throughout the spring and summer, stressing vegetation.

"The aspens in Colorado should not be as spectacular as previous years," AccuWeather expert senior meteorologist Paul Pastelok said.

Some of the highest elevations could fare better thanks to cooler nights and rain from summer thunderstorms, but widespread vibrant color is less likely.

Farther east, drought has taken a toll on trees across parts of the mid-Atlantic and Carolinas. Recent rainfall may provide some benefit, but some trees have already experienced significant stress, increasing the risk of brittle leaves and

duller colors.

"The contrast from central and northern Pennsylvania to southeast Pennsylvania/Maryland/Virginia will be drastic," Pastelok said.

Parts of the lower Mississippi Valley and Southeast may also have less vibrant foliage.

"Plenty of clouds and rain will keep the leaves green until leaf drop in the Southeast," Pastelok explained. "Lack of nights with a clear sky and cooler air will help foster the dull colors."

Where fall foliage could arrive early or late

The timing of fall foliage could vary just as much as the quality of the colors.

Where trees are already stressed, they may shed their leaves earlier than normal, including areas from Georgia to New Jersey and across much of the Rockies. Tropical storms or systems packing gusty winds during late summer and early fall could also strip leaves from trees before the season reaches its typical peak.

Meanwhile, warmer conditions could delay the seasonal change in other regions. Warm days across the Ohio Valley and portions of the Mississippi Valley may push leaf drop back by a couple of weeks while warm days and nights in the Northwest could delay the change by about a week.

Peak fall foliage should arrive on schedule elsewhere in the country, including the Northeast, Great Lakes and northern Plains.

State of Organic Produce Report

According to a recently released report, organic fresh produce sales in the U.S. continued to climb in 2025, growing 5.9% to \$10.6 billion, with volume increasing by 6.4%. Organic sales advanced at a pace nearly five times faster than conventional produce, which recorded 1.3% growth in sales and 0.9% growth in the total produce share volume.

In response to increasing demand for organic options, growers and retailers are expanding their organic produce assortments, aiming to command a larger share of the basket among health-focused shoppers. Organic produce accounts for 13% of total retail produce sales, 1% higher than in 2024, and 8% of overall produce volume, also 1% higher than the year prior.

Organic Produce Network collaborated with Category Partners to deliver this annual report highlighting 20 high-performing organic produce categories.

The Organic Produce Network (OPN) was founded in January, 2017, to connect facets of the fast-growing organic produce community through education, information and live events like the Organic Produce Summit and Organic Grower Summit.

Learn more at <https://www.organicproducenetwork.com>

Farm Credit East Accepting Applications to Support Northeast Food Security Initiatives

Farm Credit East is now accepting applications for its Food Access Infrastructure Initiative Grant. This initiative provides organizations with grants of up to \$50,000 as they work to improve food security in the Northeast. The deadline to apply is November 10, 2026.

Farm Credit East's Food Access Infrastructure Initiative financially supports organizations such as food banks, food hubs and other non-profit food distribution and infrastructure organizations as they implement a new project to further food access in the Northeast. The grant funds must be used for capital projects to improve infrastructure, such as expanding cooler

storage or increasing produce handling functionality.

Nominees should be based in Farm Credit East's territory: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont, although nominees from outside the territory may be eligible if the initiative is positively impacting the rural areas of Farm Credit East's territory.

The deadline to submit an application for a Food Access Infrastructure Initiative Grant is 4:00 p.m. ET on Tuesday, November 10, 2026. Visit FarmCreditEast.com/foodaccessgrant to learn more and to apply or contact stewardship@farmcrediteast.com for more information.

USDA Approval Advances Efforts to Restore the American Chestnut



USDA-APHIS/Photo

Efforts by researchers at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) to restore the American chestnut tree to the American landscape took a significant leap forward with an approved designation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that ESF's genetically modified Darling chestnut trees are unlikely to pose a threat to other plants.

ESF's American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project announced that the USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS) has completed its review of blight-tolerant Darling 54 American chestnuts and determined the trees are unlikely to pose a plant pest risk.

While USDA approval does not mean the trees are yet available to the public, it represents a significant regulatory achievement in the restoration process. The decision marks the completion of the first major federal regulatory review for the American chestnut. Researchers view the approval as an important advancement in the long-term effort to return this iconic tree to

forests and landscapes where it once played a vital ecological role.

These trees, produced using modern tools of biotechnology, have been undergoing rigorous federal regulatory reviews since January 2020. The first of these agencies, the USDA APHIS evaluated the data submitted and concluded that Darling chestnut trees would not act as a weed or a plant disease carrier.

"This means the trees do not spread in ways that would harm forests, farms, or the environment," explained Dr. Andrew Newhouse, director of the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project at ESF. "As a result, the trees are no longer regulated by USDA APHIS."

Additional reviews need to be completed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) before American chestnuts can be distributed to individuals or used for wider restoration projects. However, this recent decision will be immediately beneficial to researchers.

"Our 'Darling' chestnuts are an important step in the big picture

of chestnut reintroduction. They tolerate blight better than any other fully American chestnuts we've tested, so they can help restore some of the ecological relationships that were lost to this disease," said Newhouse. "This is also good news for ESF's research toward other threatened trees such as American beech, elm, and ash, all of which may benefit from biotechnological approaches toward restoration."

"While many food crops and some ornamental plants have completed similar regulatory reviews, this decision marks the first time a forest tree has been approved, and the first time any plant engineered specifically for environmental restoration has reached this milestone," said Newhouse.

"Research at ESF continues to demonstrate how innovation and science can address some of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time," said ESF President Joanie Mahoney. "The work being done to restore the American chestnut reflects not only academic excellence, but a deep

commitment to advancing solutions that strengthen ecosystems and benefit communities for generations to come."

Researchers emphasize that Darling chestnuts are not a standalone solution. Further improvements, alongside many other restoration strategies and efforts, will be essential for long-term success.

The progress achieved by ESF's American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project follows decades of work pioneered by visionary ESF professors William Powell and Chuck Maynard. The continued research has been made possible through strong collaboration and sustained support from partners, including the Research Foundation for SUNY, philanthropic support via the ESF College Foundation, American Chestnut Restoration, Inc., and partnership with like-minded groups including SilvaBio Public Benefit Corporation. Their collective backing has been critical in advancing long-term research, supporting rigorous regulatory review, and enabling the development of innovative approaches like the Darling chestnuts.

"This collaborative effort underscores the importance of continued investment in scientific research to address complex environmental challenges and restore vital ecosystems," said Newhouse.

The SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) is dedicated to the study of the environment, developing renewable technologies, and building a sustainable and resilient future through design, policy, and management of the environment and natural resources. Members of the College community share a passion for protecting the health of the planet and a deep commitment to the rigorous application of science to improve the way humans interact with the world. The College offers academic programs ranging from the associate of applied science to the Doctor of Philosophy. ESF students live, study and do research on the main campus in Syracuse, N.Y., and on 25,000 acres of field stations in a variety of ecosystems across the state.

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New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association

Every once in a while, you have one of those events where you drive home exhausted, sunburned, and smiling because you know everything came together exactly the way you had hoped. The August 5, 2026 New Jersey Contractors Showcase Expo (NJCSE) was one of those days!

After months of planning, hundreds of phone calls, countless emails, moving equipment, laying out the grounds, worrying about the weather (because that's mandatory when you host an outdoor event), and making a thousand last-minute adjustments, it was incredibly rewarding to stand back and watch nearly every part of the show buzzing with activity.

The weather couldn't have been better. Bright sunshine and just enough breeze made it one of those perfect New Jersey summer days that reminded us why we all chose careers that keep us outdoors.

One of the first things that became obvious was how seriously our attendees take continuing education. Every pesticide recertification class filled up, with contractors eager to earn their credits while learning from knowledgeable instructors. That has always been one of NJLCA's biggest goals—not just helping members satisfy licensing requirements, but giving them practical information they can take back to their businesses the very next day.

Step outside the classrooms, and the excitement shifted into high gear.

The demo area was busy from start to finish.



The NJLCA Today

By Gail Woolcott
Executive Director

NJCSE Delivers Another Outstanding Day of Education, Equipment and Excitement

Contractors climbed into equipment they had only seen online, compared machines side-by-side, asked questions directly to manufacturers and dealers, and, most importantly, actually operated the equipment. There is simply no better way to decide whether a machine belongs in your fleet than getting your hands on the controls before writing the check.

That's exactly why events like NJCSE matter.

The landscape industry is evolving faster than ever. Equipment is becoming more sophisticated. Technology is changing the way we work. New products and services seem to appear every month. Seeing everything in one place, talking directly with the experts, and comparing options without sales pressure gives contractors the confidence to make smart investments that can improve productivity and profitability for years to come.

Then there was the mower obstacle course.

If you've never watched professional landscapers compete on commercial equipment, you're missing

out. It's amazing how quickly friendly competition takes over. Operators who spend every day behind the controls suddenly become serious competitors, spectators become instant coaches, and everyone gathers around cheering as if they're watching the final lap of Daytona. It has become one of the signature attractions of NJCSE, and judging by the smiles—and a little good-natured trash talking—it will continue to be for years to come.

One of the day's unexpected highlights was a surprise visit from Assemblyman Mike Inganamort. Rather than simply shaking a few hands and moving on, he jumped right into the action. He even took his shot at the Bobcat skills challenge before climbing aboard Modern Group's impressive spider lift for a ride nearly 80 feet into the air. From up there, he had a bird's-eye view of the entire event—and probably the best seat in the house. We truly appreciate him taking the time to visit and for his continued support of New Jersey's landscape industry.

Of course, no NJLCA event would be complete without food, and I think it's safe to say nobody left hungry. Hamburgers and hot dogs were flying off the grill, manned by President Kevin Dulio, Director Chris Raimondi and past VP Joe Bolognese, but the real star of lunch may have been the incredible fresh sweet corn generously provided by Abma's Farm, grilled by Associate Director Josh Abma himself. There is just something about fresh Jersey corn in August that reminds you why we are fortunate to live and work in the Garden State.

As I walked around throughout the day, I heard the conversations that make all the hard work worthwhile. Contractors discussing equipment purchases. Old friends catching up. New friendships being formed. Business owners sharing ideas. Manufacturers answering questions. People laughing. Networking. Learning.

That is exactly what NJLCA is all about.

Trade shows and industry events are much more than

displays of equipment. They are places where relationships are built, ideas are exchanged, businesses grow and our industry becomes stronger. Every contractor who attended left with something valuable—whether it was education, a new business contact, a future equipment purchase, or simply the reassurance that they're part of an industry filled with passionate professionals who genuinely want to help one another succeed.

As the day wound down, I heard the same comment over and over again. "This was the best one yet."

I have to admit...I agree.

To every exhibitor, sponsor, volunteer, instructor, staff member, and attendee who helped make yesterday such an incredible success, thank you. You are the reason NJCSE continues to grow every year.

Now, after taking about a day to catch our breath...it's time to start planning next year's show. Based on what I heard yesterday, I have a feeling it's going to be our biggest one yet!

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.

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2026 PERSON OF THE YEAR

Do you know someone in the “Outdoor Living Industry” whose contributions deserve recognition? *Gardener News* is accepting nominations for its 2026 Person of the Year Award.

Nominee must be from the agricultural, gardening, garden center, landscape, outdoor living or nursery industries who best epitomizes concern for, involvement in, and dedication to those pursuits. Or a person who performs exemplary outstanding service to the environment and/or outdoor living industry.

The deadline for receiving nominations for 2026 is November 1, 2026.

Gardener News annually bestows our “Person of the Year” Award in our January edition.

Nominations can be submitted at **GardenerNews.com** under the “Awards” link on the navigation bar.

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