



# Dutchess Dirt®

An e-mail gardening newsletter from  
Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Dutchess County

Issue# 4, November 1, 2007

**HELP SPREAD THE DIRT-** Please forward this to anyone you think might be interested. To be added or removed from our e-mail list, or submit upcoming gardening events, contact Cheryl Hearty at [cah43@cornell.edu](mailto:cah43@cornell.edu).

## HOT TOPICS FROM THE HOTLINE

**My oak tree produced a heavy crop of acorns last year and we have none this year. Why?** This is a fairly normal occurrence. A tree has to expend a lot of energy to produce a crop of nuts. It may take years before another crop is produced. Other factors that affect acorn crops include insect infestation and the weather. Too much rain and too little rain can affect nut production.

**I bought some clearance plants at a nursery. Is it too late to plant them?** You can plant right up until the ground freezes. November is not the optimal time to plant but it can still be done. The disadvantage to planting now is that the unrooted plants may heave out the ground from repeated freezing and thawing. The best way to prevent this is to wait until the ground is frozen, then apply a layer of mulch to keep the soil temperature consistently cold.

## THE DUTCHESS VEGETABLE GARDEN By Mary Nisley, Master Gardener volunteer

When I handed in my October column, I was asked by two different people at the Cooperative Extension if I would be writing a November column.

"Of course I will."

"But what is there to write about? What's left in the vegetable garden?"

Frost hit my Poughkeepsie garden Oct. 28. Now that the hulking tomato and pepper plants are gone and the zucchini is no longer blocking the gate, the autumn garden is visible. Most of these plants have been there all summer, but I've been ignoring them, while focusing on the tender summer vegetables.

As I survey the garden, I see carrot tops, bunching onions, Brussels sprouts, parsnips, beets, leeks, and kale, lots of kale. These are the vegetables that give

color and substance to winter stews and soups. I don't grow vast quantities of most of these vegetables, and most I only want to eat in small quantities, but together with the stored winter squash, potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, and canned tomatoes they add up to a winter meal.

I divide the fall vegetables into two groups: those planted in the spring for harvest after frost, and those planted mid-late summer. My most successful fall/winter vegetables, the ones I've been growing for decades, are some of the long season, spring planted vegetables.

Some vegetables have a naturally long growing season and don't reach their peak flavor until autumn. These include leeks, parsnips, and Brussels sprouts, all of which have a growing season of 100 days or more. Although planted in the spring, they don't reach harvest size until fall. Parsnips and Brussels sprouts sweeten up after a frost. Both parsnips and leeks can be harvested all winter until spring, even if they freeze. My favorite parsnip is "Hollow Crown".

Some vegetables have separate varieties for summer harvest and other varieties for autumn harvest. The winter storage vegetables often have a longer growing season and the vegetable tends to be denser and less juicy.

For winter eating, I grow Lutz Green Leaf (aka Winter Keeper) beets. Lutz takes over 80 days to mature and has a dense, sweet, root which is much drier than summer beets. It can get very large, but it doesn't get woody. Last winter I left the Lutz beets in the garden covered with shredded leaves. The beets I'd covered deeply were fine for eating right up to spring, but where I was sloppy, and the mulch was shallow enough that the tops of the roots were eventually exposed, the beets froze and turned mushy when thawed. I usually pick during thaws and store enough beets (and parsnips and carrots) in the refrigerator to last us through the next freeze.

(OK, now I must be brutally honest. I've been planting Lutz beets since 1980 and this year I had my worst crop ever. I've finally identified the problem: cercospora leaf spot, a fungal disease. It's a problem that has been getting worse in my garden each year. The disease flourishes under warm, humid conditions. In 2007 I planted the beets in the shadiest part of the garden; the leaves probably stayed wet until noon. It looks like the solution is to grow no beets or chard in this garden for two years so the cercospora spores can die out. And when I plant beets it should be in a sunny spot so the leaves dry.)

Kale is my most successful spring planted fall vegetable. The National Gardening Association Edible Landscaping web site has a thorough article on growing kale. Go to <http://www.garden.org/ediblelandscaping/index.php?page=200710news> and click on Articles in the left side column. Kale was featured in October 2007.

Most references suggest making a second planting of kale for fall harvest six weeks before frost. I've never done this. I transplant my seedlings in April then harvest lightly through the summer. By now the plants are 3' tall. I'll be harvesting kale into January, weather permitting. I like the flavor of "Winterbor" kale and some years the plants live through the winter to sprout new leaves for early spring salads.

Another group of fall vegetables are the cool weather vegetables with short growing seasons. Now that I'm retired, I've been trying some of these vegetables, but with very limited success.

I sowed radish seed the first week of September. The radishes grew well and quickly. I direct sowed spinach in late August and lettuce in early Sept. and neither did well. Most of the sprouts disappeared and I only got about five plants of each. I planted sugar snap peas 7/14 and a chipmunk or squirrel dug up all the seed within 24 hours. The animal must have eaten some seed and stored the rest, because two weeks later I found little clusters of 5-6 pea plants growing under the rhubarb, the pole beans and the corn.

By now, any gardener who is familiar with fall crops is probably wondering why I'm not growing any of the cool weather cole crops, such as broccoli and kohlrabi. Well, I tried. I started kohlrabi, broccoli, and Chinese cabbage, along with lettuce, indoors from seed in mid-July. Once they sprouted I put the pots out on the deck for sun, instead of under lights in the basement which I do in spring.

The trouble started shortly after the first true leaves appeared, although it wasn't immediately obvious. Something was eating the leaves of the broccoli and kohlrabi. They nibbled from the outside edge, so the leaves got narrower and narrower until nothing was left except the mid-rib. I never saw anything out there during the day. The damage might have been caused by a nocturnal beetle. Next year I plan to cover the pots with a floating row cover for protection against insects. The lettuce and Chinese cabbage were not eaten, so I transplanted them in late August. The lettuce was only so-so and some was starting to bolt by Oct. 27. The Chinese cabbage did quite well, and unlike my spring planting, it did not bolt.

I hope this tempts you to plant some vegetables for harvest after frost. Spring planted kale, and fall planted radishes are two of the easiest.

### **MY SHADY FRIENDS – EPIMEDIUMS**

By **Connie Herodes, Master Gardener volunteer**

Epimediums (Bishop's Cap or Fairy Wings) are perennials which aren't very well known, but should be. They have deservedly been called the aristocrat of all ground covers for shady areas. I wouldn't want to garden in the shade without at

least a few of these easy-going and attractive members of the Barberry family. Epimediums do not seem to be favored by deer – although as everyone knows, deer palates are very, very adaptable.

Here in my garden, the dappled shade provided by high branched Oak trees is perfect for Epimediums. They would also thrive in an exposure with sun for all or most of the morning with shade all afternoon; they do not do well in either full sun or deep shade. A neutral to slightly acid soil rich in organic matter suits them well. Good drainage is a must; they will not survive in poorly drained areas. It is essential that Epimediums be kept moist throughout their first year after planting. Thereafter, they can tolerate drier conditions. They are one of the few plants that I know of that will compete successfully enough with tree roots to snuggle right up next to the trunk. One of my favorite work horses for partial shade, Epimediums require little attention once established. They are clump forming; most expand slowly, but some spread rapidly enough to form a drift or ground cover in a few years.



*Epimedium grandiflorum*  
'Tama No Genpei'

Even if Epimediums didn't flower, they would be a useful addition to the shade garden for their long lasting foliage. But flower they do. Their delicate blooms include shades of white, orange, yellow, red, rose, pink, and purple. Some blooms are bi-colored. Peak bloom is usually around mid-May. The flowers emerge just before and/or above leaves of many cultivars. A few Epimediums' flowers are not held above the foliage. Usually this is noted in catalog descriptions. I have not included any of these in my list below.



Salmon blooms and colorful new foliage of *E. x versicolor* 'Versicolor'

The foliage is evergreen in warmer areas than ours. Here, it is often still good looking through December, depending on the weather. Old, unsightly foliage should be removed before the delicate new growth emerges in the spring. Some Epimediums offer an additional bonus of colorful new foliage in the spring, which later changes to green. This, in combination with color from the blooms, can sometimes extend the color interest to a month or more. Some also display colorful fall foliage. Many have heart-shaped leaflets.

Some of my favorites, all of which are thriving in my garden, are;

*E. grandiflorum* 'Lilafee' – Spidery violet flowers; bronzy lavender new foliage; this small beauty shows especially well when planted near a rock. 10 inches tall.

*E. grandiflorum* 'Tama No Genpei' – a Japanese selection with large, bi-color lavender and white flowers; purple-tinted new foliage. To 16 inches tall.

*E. sempervirens* 'Cherry Hearts' – white flowers; heart shaped new foliage is cherry-red, fading to red-edged green before turning all green. 12 inches tall.

*E. x versicolor* 'Versicolor' – The salmon colored flowers emerge over foliage which is strongly flushed with red. It spreads four to five inches a year, more rapidly than many, and will form a mass of stunning spring color over time. 14 inches tall.

*E. x rubrum* 'Sweetheart' – this clone is an improved version of the more common *E. x rubrum*, with larger foliage than the older 'unimproved' one. The rose-red and cream flowers are found both above and below the foliage. Foliage is red-rimmed upon emerging in spring. Sweetheart will form a slow spreading, bold textured ground cover over time. 16 to 18 inches tall.

To see more pictures of Epimediums, you can Google 'Epimedium' and/or access the following Websites. The first is that of Epimedium guru Darrell Probst. Darrell has long been an internationally recognized Epimedium expert, and has been responsible for unraveling the naming confusion found in the nursery trade. He grows Epimediums in his Massachusetts nursery, and has introduced many new ones from China. <http://www.home.earthlink.net/~darrellpro/> Another site is the Epimedium page in the catalog of plantsman Tony Avent: [Click here: Plant Delights Nursery -- Catalog Search Results](#). If this link doesn't work, go to the following address and type in Epimedium in the 'Search the catalog' box. <http://www.plantdelights.com>

*Connie, like her plants, has adapted to preferring shade, and now rarely has to garden in the sun. Read about more of her shady friends in future issues of Dutchess Dirt.*

## **FARM & HOME CENTER GARDENS**

**By Cheryl Hearty, Community Horticulture Educator, CCE-DC**

For those of you who may not know, the office of Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County is located at the Farm & Home Center in Millbrook. For years, we have had demonstration gardens next to the entrance doors. Over time, the gardens became overgrown. Also, two dying trees had to be cut down in one end of the shade garden. Last month, the Master Gardener volunteers began renovating these gardens. Most of the shade loving plants have been relocated to the south end of building, under the hemlock trees. We removed the turf grass bordering the garden to create more growing space. Next spring, new plants will be added, creating a bird and butterfly garden for all to enjoy.

Work has also begun on a new garden around the foundation of the building, on the south side facing the road. Old shrubs were torn out, the sod was removed and the soil was tilled. Decker Construction from Tivoli generously donated these services. This new garden will be an edible landscape, combining fruiting shrubs, perennials, annuals, vegetables and herbs that are both edible and ornamental.

Our long range plans include installing a rain garden and a xeriscape garden. All of our gardens will demonstrate how to garden in an environmentally friendly way. Plants will be labeled and printed brochures with additional information will be made available.

### ASK MR. SMARTY PANTS!

The Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center, located at the University of Texas at Austin, has created a great website for gardeners- "Ask Mr. Smarty Pants". You can search their database for frequently asked gardening questions by keyword, topic or geographic region. Make sure you click on "Northeast" to make sure questions and answers are appropriate for our area. Go to <http://www.wildflower.org/expert/>.

### ARTICLES FROM THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

- **Taking the Awe Out of Autumn-** Global warming may ravage the sugar maples that set New England woods ablaze with color each fall and that provide the basic ingredient for America's maple syrup industry. <http://www.nwf.org/nationalwildlife/article.cfm?issueID=117&articleID=1520>
- **The Gardeners Guide to Global Warming- Challenges and Solutions** [http://www.nwf.org/gardenersguide/Gardeners\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.nwf.org/gardenersguide/Gardeners_Guide.pdf)
- **Create a NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat-** <http://www.nwf.org/backyard/>

### BURIED TREASURES: TASTY TUBERS OF THE WORLD

Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) announces the release of its newest All-Region Guide, ***Buried Treasures: Tasty Tubers of the World***. This is BBG's first handbook devoted to root vegetables, the underground delights that have sustained cultures all over the world for millennia.

***Buried Treasures: Tasty Tubers of the World*** takes intrepid gardeners and curious epicures on a global tour of edible roots, tubers, corms, and rhizomes, including such underground treasures as Hawaiian elephant's ear, Japanese devil's tongue, Chinese sacred lotus, South American canna, and hardy North

American spring beauties and groundnuts. With contributions from leading experts Scott D. Appell, James J. Lang, Leda Meredith, and BBG's Alessandro Chiari, ***Buried Treasures*** is a handy resource with detailed tips on buying, growing, designing with, harvesting and cooking more than 30 featured vegetables.

All the plants are illustrated with striking color photos showing both the tasty tubers usually hidden below ground and the attractive and unusual foliage and flowers above. Virtually all the plants in this book also make a garden-worthy aboveground display. Tropical giants like elephant's ear and yautia are exotic accents in a summer border or container, then transition indoors when the days get cooler to become show-stopping houseplants. Or they may be harvested and cooked into tasty dishes. Hardy plants like the North American natives spring beauty and jack-in-the-pulpit can stay in the ground year-round, providing an appealing floral display in spring and hearty nourishment in fall.

***Buried Treasures*** provides great recipes from around the world and shows readers how to pick out the healthiest tubers and plants at markets, where to buy hard-to-find varieties, and how to make more tubers at home. Dig in!

**Ordering Information: *Buried Treasures: Tasty Tubers of the World*** (ISBN-10: 1-889538-34-5) is available at a discount direct from Brooklyn Botanic Garden's online store at [shop.bbg.org](http://shop.bbg.org), or by calling 718-623-7286. It is also available in bookstores and at garden centers for \$9.95 in the U.S. To receive a free brochure of current and past handbook titles, call 718-623-7241.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Kiku, the Art of the Japanese Chrysanthemum**, is showing at the New York Botanical Garden through November 18. Website: <http://www.nybg.org/kiku/>. "Discover the exquisite beauty of *kiku*—meticulously cultivated chrysanthemums, a traditional Japanese art never before seen on this scale outside Japan. This is the most elaborate flower show and cultural exhibition ever presented by the Garden in its 116-year history."

Master Gardener volunteers visited the gardens last month and loved the show. We also recommend seeing the exhibition of photographs by Victor Schrage titled "A Passionate Grower, Heirloom Melons and Squashes" from the gardens of Amy Goldman. The exhibit is located in the Arthur and Janet Ross Gallery.

Amy Goldman is a Dutchess County resident and is renowned for her lush gardens of heirloom squashes, melons and tomatoes. She and her gardens have been featured on television by Martha Stewart and the Victory Garden. She is also the author of two books. Amy Goldman has been working for years to

preserve rare heirloom vegetable seeds. For more information, visit her website at <http://www.rareforms.com/index.htm>.

**November 9-** You are welcome to join us from 12:15-1:15pm, for a live transmission (via Polycom) of a lecture taking place at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY as part of the Fall 2007 Cornell University Environmental Sciences Colloquium "Climate Change - Mitigation and Adaptation."

Topic- Potential impacts of climate change on plants and ecosystems in the Northeast- Ian Merwin & David Wolfe, Cornell University, Horticulture

Viewing of the seminar via Polycom will take place in Dutchess County at the Cornell Cooperative Extension office (Director's Room) located at 2715 Route 44, Millbrook, NY 12545. Feel free to bring a bag lunch to eat during the seminar. Water and coffee will be provided.

If you plan to attend, please RSVP in advance, with Vicky Buono at 845-677-8223 x 153. Seating is limited.

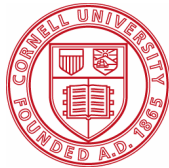
## GARDENING QUESTIONS

For all gardening questions, please call the Master Gardener Hotline 845-677-5067, M-F, 9 to noon. We are not able to answer questions via e-mail at this time.

## WEIRD STUFF!

By Cheryl Hearty, Community Horticulture Educator, CCE-DC

Paperwhite narcissi (*Narcissus tazetta*) are a popular holiday plant. These bulbs don't need pre-chilling and can be planted in gravel in a pot, dish or vase. Just add water and they sprout immediately. The one big drawback to growing them is that they tend to grow tall and flop over. Last year Cornell did some interesting research. They found that adding alcohol (rubbing alcohol or liquor) to the water can actually control the growth of the plants! For more details, go to <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/March06/drunk.flowers.ssl.html>.



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