

THE DIRT

Winter Issue 2023, Volume 49, Issue 4

Vermont
Nursery and
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Green Works

Big Changes at the VNLA page 4

Pioneering Plastic Pot Recycling page 10

Rethinking the Lawn page 26

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Gabe Bushey, Crafted Landscapes, LLC

Hello VNLA Members, Friends and Colleagues,

Here we are at the beginning of another year. It hasn't felt much like normal winter with temperatures fluctuating from week-to-week and a mix of snow one day and rain the next. I hope you are all getting the opportunity to rest and recharge a bit. I find myself having conflicting feelings this time of year. I am excited to have some down time, but I also know I will get stir crazy and miss the warm weather. Spring will be here before we know it, or at least that is what I am telling myself.



Looking back at this past year I am proud of all we have accomplished. The 2023 Flower Show was incredibly successful in every way you can measure. What an amazing group we have that comes together to make it all happen. It was great to see the enthusiasm of the membership and community after 4 years without a show.

We had multiple volunteer events. The first was at the CP Smith Elementary School in Burlington. There a rain garden was installed, and it really represented what the **VT Blooms Initiative** is all about. Later in the year a planting installation happened at the Allen Brook Elementary School in Williston. This planting was a pollinator garden that was installed in time for kids to return to school. Finally, we did an installation at another home that was recently completed by the **Addison County chapter of Habitat for Humanity**. This was a fun day with an amazing crew that came together to landscape around the second of four homes that area being built in the same neighborhood.

The **VT Blooms Passport Program** took a step forward as well this year. We received a grant to create and market an App that made it easier to push this program forward. Thank you Kristina and Ed Burke for all the work they did to pull that together.

Looking forward we have several exciting programs and changes. Jas Darland has started working with us. She officially became the Executive Director as of January 1st. I hope you can all make it to the Winter Meeting to meet her and say a farewell to Kristina.

Change is always a bit scary and comes with a lot of work but we on the Board are really excited about the direction we are headed in as your Association. The future is bright with Jas and all the programs we are working on.

One item we have started working on is the 2025 Vermont Flower Show. We have had our first Display Committee meeting and there is a lot of energy and enthusiasm already. If anyone has interest in participating on any level, please reach out. We also have several volunteer projects we are working on. We will be in touch with more info as it becomes available.

In solidarity,

Gabriel Bushey



inside this issue

Board of Directors	2
The President's Letter	3
The Buzz	
<i>Big Changes at the VNLA</i>	4
<i>The 2024 Annual Winter Meeting</i>	5
<i>With Deep Sadness</i>	6
<i>Remembering Norman and Dorothy</i>	7
<i>Pioneering Plastic Pot Recycling: VNLA & Prides Corner Farms Leading the Way</i>	10
<i>VNLA Welcomes New Members</i>	14
<i>Calendar of Events</i>	15
Leonard's Clippings	17
The Lab	
<i>Observations from the UVM Diagnostic Lab</i>	21
<i>News from the VT Agency of Agriculture Foods & Market</i>	23
The Idea Factory	25
<i>Robot Bees Tag in for Exhausted Pollinators</i>	
<i>Landscaping with Light</i>	
<i>Rethinking the Lawn</i>	26
<i>Professional Landscapers and Resilient Landscaping: Adapting to a Changing Climate</i>	30
Strictly Business	32
<i>The Essence of a Legacy</i>	
The Plant Lounge	34
<i>White Fir for Tight Quarters (Abies concolor cultivars)</i>	

Cover Photo Credit: Dick Conrad; photo of Judith Irvén's garden - "Winter exposes the bones of the garden".



THE BUZZ

the low down on what's up!

Big Changes at the VNLA!

Please join us in welcoming our new Executive Director, Jas Darland, who officially took the helm as of January 1, 2024. Outgoing director, Kristina MacKulin, will be working behind the scenes over the next few months during this transition time. In case you missed the announcements via email at the end of the year, following is an introduction to Jas Darland and Kristina's farewell message to our membership. Many of you will be able to meet Jas at the Winter Meeting and Trade Show coming up on February 15, 2024.

Meet Jas Darland

Jas Darland is a seasoned non-profit executive with a green thumb for growing organizations. With eight years of leadership experience under her belt, she's cultivated a flourishing career in organizational management, proving that she knows her way around a strategic plan as well as a garden plan.



When she's not "rooting" for her client organizations, Jas can be found acquiring bruises on the roller derby track, painting landscapes that would make the most stoic oak tree blush, or engaging in a friendly battle of wits with the local squirrels over her precious cherry tomatoes. She also enjoys carpentry, baking, traveling, and brewing wine and beer. Family time with her four daughters and grandson is her "compost for the soul," providing the nourishment she needs to keep growing.

A Farewell Message - 1/2/24

As my time at the VNLA comes to an end, I wanted to take a moment to say goodbye to all the VNLA members and colleagues I have gotten to know over the past 20 years as Executive Director. As of January 1, Jas Darland - the new VNLA Executive Director - has taken the helm and I am



excited for everyone to meet her in the coming months. Jas and I will be working together over the next few months to ensure a smooth transition. Please reach out to welcome Jas at hello@vnlavt.org.

I can't think of a better industry to have been a part of and am grateful to have worked alongside so many of you over the years. It has been a privilege to play a role in the amazing work you all do - from growing beautiful plants, to beautifying our landscapes and green spaces, and most of all fostering a community of professionals who generously share their skills and knowledge with one another and the public. I have learned so much from all of you!

You will still be able to reach me at kristina@vnlavt.org for now and I look forward to seeing many of you at the VNLA Winter Meeting & Trade Show on February 15, 2024 at UVM. As I head towards my next adventure, I do plan on staying in touch and am excited to see where the VNLA leads our industry over the next 20 years.

My sincerest gratitude to all of you for the guidance, support, and knowledge bestowed upon me throughout my career. Wishing you great joy and success in 2024 and beyond!

Happy New Year!

Kristina MacKulin



The 2024 Annual Winter Meeting & Trade Show Coming Soon!

by Kristina MacKulin

The VNLA Winter Meeting & Trade Show is coming up on **February 15, 2024** from 9am to 5pm and is being held at the UVM Dudley Davis Center in Burlington, VT.

Our keynote speaker is **Martin Harwood**, RLA who is a technical director at SCAPE Studio in NY, NY. Martin will be speaking about climate change and how industry professionals need to re-imagine the types and scales of what resilient landscapes will look like in the future.

Following Martin's talk there will be time throughout the day to visit with vendors. The VNLA's annual business meeting will be held at 11am and you won't want to miss the awards ceremony!

Afternoon sessions include the VNLA's Industry Award winners presentation of projects followed by a presentation from Declan McCabe, Professor of Biology at St. Michael's College. Declan will be speaking about gardening and biodiversity. VJ Comai,

Burlington City arborist, will be speaking about growing trees in the urban landscape including the challenges that arise. Cheryl Frank-Sullivan, UVM Research Assistant Professor will be talking about ticks, including landscape maintenance strategies. And lastly, Kris Stepenuck, UVM Extension Assoc. Professor will be speaking about smart salting in the landscape and planting in a changing climate.

You can read more and learn about our speakers [HERE](#). The registration deadline is **February 9, 2023** so don't delay!

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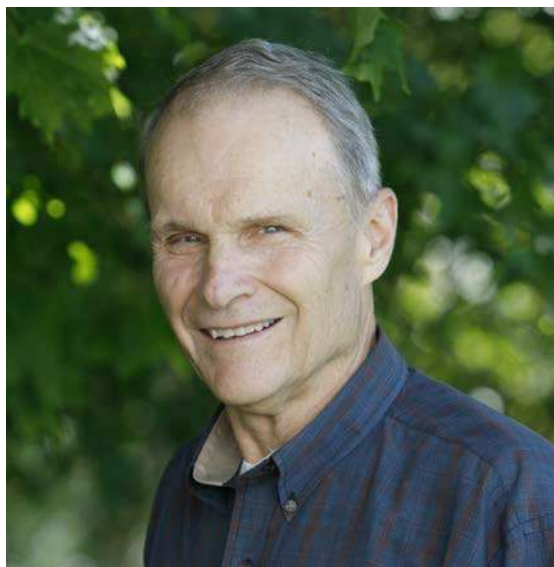
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With Deep Sadness . . .

It is with deep sadness that we re-share the news of Dr. Norman Pellett's passing on December 9, 2023, just three months after his wife, Dorothy Pellett, passed away. Both Norman and Dorothy were longtime advocates and supporters of the ornamental horticulture industry in Vermont and Norman was a lifetime honorary member of the VNLA. Norman also worked closely with the VNLA board of directors over the years conducting educational opportunities for our members.



Norman began his career at UVM 29 years ago as an extension ornamental horticulturist where he conducted outreach education for nursery and greenhouse businesses, landscape designers and architects, and the gardening public. He then moved on to become an undergraduate professor at UVM while continuing his plant research. Following is Norman's obituary as printed in *Seven Days Newspaper*. Followed by the obituary is an article written by VNLA member David Fried of Elmore Roots Fruit Tree Nursery remembering both Norman and Dorothy.

Norman was born to the late Melvin Ambrose Pellett and Elizabeth Louise (Dallinger) Pellett on June 26, 1934, in Atlantic, Iowa. He grew up never far from a trowel at Pellett Gardens, his family's vegetable and fruit farm, and began his education in the nearby, one-room schoolhouse. After spotting the prettiest girl on day one in Horticulture 101, he quickly nabbed her and made Dorothy Jean (Engel) his wife, and they both graduated from Iowa State College (now Iowa State University) with a bachelor's degree in science in horticulture.

They joined his parents at Pellett Gardens in 1958 to expand the business into nursery production and landscape design and installation. After a few years, Norman pursued his graduate studies and received his MS and PhD in horticultural science and plant physiology from the University of Minnesota. Norman next served two years in the U. S. Army, with 16 months in the Army Transportation Corps, serving arriving troopships in Yokohama, Japan.

In 1964, Norman accepted his first position as assistant professor of horticulture at SUNY Cobleskill to teach horticulture and develop a new curriculum in nursery

management. In 1967, they pulled up roots, and he accepted a position as an extension ornamental horticulturist at the University of Vermont, where he conducted outreach education for nursery and greenhouse operators, landscape architects and designers, and the gardening public, while also conducting research on plant cold hardiness, plant propagation and plant adaptation to Vermont winters. In 1980, he exchanged his extension role for an undergraduate professorship and continued his plant research, where he helped study and develop cold-hardy cultivars in rhododendron, azalea, and forsythia, such as forsythia 'Vermont Sun'. The Vermont gardening world is

well-mulched, with many of Norman's accomplished students who fondly remember him as a playful yet challenging professor.

During his 29 years on the faculty of the University of Vermont, he published multiple professional and refereed journal articles, leaflets, and books on his research and a variety of gardening topics; advised hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students; and gave frequent gardening presentations to home gardeners and professional horticulturists.

He served as vice president and president of the Northeast Region of the American Horticultural Society and northeast representative to the American Society for Horticultural Science. Awards and honors include the American Society for Horticultural Science's Alex Laurie Award in 1970 for the best research paper in Floriculture, Ornamental, and Landscape Horticulture; the UVM Joseph E. Carrigan Award in 1985 for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; the Vermont Association of Professional Horticulturists Award for contributions to the industry in 1994; an Honorary Life Membership in the Vermont Association of Professional Horticulturists in 2000; and finally, in 2016, the University of Vermont College of Agriculture's Sinclair Award for professional advancement in his field/discipline of expertise, achieving special recognition, awards, and honors which reflect a noteworthy and exemplary career.

After retirement from UVM in 1996, he authored *The Gardener's Quiz Book*, *History of the University of Vermont Horticulture Research Center*, *The Pellett Gardens Story*, and *The Life of Frank Chapman Pellett* (his famous apiarist grandfather). He co-authored *Landscape Plants for Vermont*. He has served the town of Charlotte as a member of the Charlotte Park and Wildlife Committee and the Rutter Tree Fund Committee.

Norman always generously gave his love and support, access to his remarkable practical skills and know-how, and, of course, that untiring baseball-throwing arm to his sons. The twinkle in his eye, that irresistible trademark Pellett-family giggle, and his gentle, affectionate teasing is already terribly missed.

Norman was predeceased by his wife, Dorothy Jean, in September 2023; his son Dwight Allen Pellett in 1960; and by his daughter, Kerri Pellett Frost, in 1994. He is survived by his sons, Alden Pellett (Tara Brown) and Andrew Pellett (Rachel Smith); grandchildren, Hannah Frost and Laurel Pellett; and son-in-law, Gregory Frost. A private memorial gathering for Norman was held on Saturday, January 13, 2024, at the Essex Resort & Spa, 70 Essex Way, Essex, VT.

Remembering Norman and Dorothy

by: David Fried

There is a tree on the old Pellett farm in Iowa that makes very good golden apples. One day Norman Pellett came to our hardy fruit tree nursery in Elmore, Vermont and handed me a few scions of this tree from his family farm. "I think you will like these, David" he told me. *"It was the favorite apple of my mother."*

I thanked Norman for calling me David and not Dave, and he thanked me for calling him Norman and not Norm. *"I don't know why people I barely know think they can call me Norm"* he said.

It was springtime and I took these thin branches from the Pellett farm and grafted them carefully onto hardy Russian apple rootstock called *"antonovka"*. After four or five years surviving ice storms and deer and vole visits, one of them was strong enough to plant in the orchard.

I had asked Norman his mother's name and so when the tree began producing apples a few years later, I gathered some into a box and mailed them to Dorothy and Norman with a note. *"Here are some golden apples from the 'Elizabeth' tree from Iowa."* I did this for a few years and then Norman asked me not to send them anymore. He didn't want me to take the trouble.

Dorothy and Norman invited me over to their house for lunch. It was decorated simply and there was a piano with a hymnal standing ready at the stand above the ivory keys. I brought my oldest daughter Gaia with me. She knew all the names of all the trees and shrubs I would point to at an early age. After a tour of their gardens and little nursery and our sandwiches they served, Dorothy sat down at the piano and began playing. It was so easy to be with them and there was so much joy in their home. It was inside joy, not displayed. You had to get closer to be surrounded by their love for life and each other.

Here we were and we were all smiling being there together that afternoon.

Each Vermont Plantsmen's Association (the original name of the VNLA) meeting, each VNLA gathering, Norman would take a little walk around with me looking at the different booths and asking me how things were at my nursery. Then one day coming back from visiting my wife's sister who lived in Iowa City, I saw a familiar face sitting in this small quiet airport. Norman was surprised to see me. We sat together and talked until our plane left.

Norman and Dorothy sent me cards and letters and I sent some to them too. Not that many people do that anymore. Norman told me he had been taking long walks near Mt. Philo and that was probably keeping him alive he said. Though he could no longer go as high up as he liked. When they moved to the assisted living, they wrote again and I was glad they had each other still.

I was one of the Norman Pellett fans in attendance when he received his honorary bench for his years teaching at University of Vermont. He smiled a lot and we all oohed and aahed because his name was on the bench and we all knew he deserved it and a lot more. I had the feeling that even though the bench and the ceremony was in a sunny hallway, he would have been more comfortable outside in the real sun and air. My father was also a teacher at a university. When my father died some of his students came to visit and one of them said: *"You know, a lot of teachers know how to teach, but your father really cared about us as people!"* This meant a lot to me and this is how I feel about Norman Pellett.

He had a way about him where I just knew that he cared about me and my work and my life and it was uplifting. I wanted to



be part of an organization that he was part of. I was loyal to it because he was and I wanted to be loyal to him. The VNLA was so strong and so bright for me because he was there and teaching us all how one could be strong and smart and kind and playful all at the same time.

Norman Pellett wrote the book on growing landscape plants in Vermont. It is not just an expression, he actually wrote the physical book, after taking over from Harrison Flint who wrote the first edition. Harrison Flint once visited my nursery when I was taking cuttings from our Meadowlark Forsythia stand. I told him that this was by far the hardiest forsythia and always

flowered to the tips, even after 43° below. He looked at me and said " *I know, I introduced this plant*".

There is a twinkle in the eye and a warm smile that Norman Pellett was famous for. Whether it comes from growing up in a farm in Iowa or from being married to Dorothy or from being so connected to plants, we don't know for sure. Maybe it comes from eating those golden apples he grew up with?

Whenever our work and our generosity of spirit merges, Norman Pellett's charm and knowledge is alive and well and we are scions from his tree.



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Pioneering Plastic Pot Recycling: VNLA and Prides Corner Farms Leading the Way

by Jas Darland

The gardening industry, often associated with sustainable practices, is paradoxically heavily reliant on plastic, a material that never fully decomposes. This contradiction is evident in the widespread use of plastic pots, identification tags, and packaging for various gardening products. From soil and mulch to fertilizers, most gardening essentials are typically encased in plastic bags and bottles. Even watering systems and certain soil treatments involve the use of plastic.

This extensive use of plastic, primarily derived from environmentally damaging petrochemicals, starkly contrasts with the sustainability efforts of many gardeners. Over the past two decades, the production and use of plastic pots have grown exponentially, with most made from virgin material. This issue is recognized by gardeners, growers, and pot manufacturers alike, all acknowledging the urgent need for a solution to this pollution problem. However, a viable solution remains elusive.

For most gardeners, recycling outlets are scarce. Many nurseries are unable or unwilling to handle large amounts of plastics due to the labor-intensive nature of the process. Trade associations for the green industry are discussing the problem, and many public gardens are addressing the issue of single-use plastics. However, one of the most problematic sources of plastics in horticulture is the pots in which plants are grown.

Municipal curbside pickup recycling programs typically do not accept plastic plant pots, as black pots and single-use plant packs contaminate the waste stream and cannot be read by most scanners to distinguish the resin content for sorting.

In the fall of 2020, a unique opportunity for environmental stewardship presented itself to the Vermont Nursery and



Above: A Prides Corner Farms truck picking up recycled pots.

Below: Pots being collected at Gardener's Supply during a weekend event open to retail customers.

Landscape Association (VNLA). Ray DeFeo of Prides Corner Farms proposed a collaborative effort to initiate a Plastic Pot Recycling Program in Vermont, exclusively for VNLA members. Recognizing the potential for significant environmental impact, VNLA embraced the idea, and the planning phase commenced. As a large nursery, Prides Corner Farms annually recycles 300,000 pounds of greenhouse film, 100,000 pounds of waste plastic, and 100,000 pounds of used plastic pots.

So far, collection has been a challenge with specific parameters for collection bins and difficulty in building and maintaining them. For the 2024 season, Prides Corner Farm will be utilizing their delivery carts for plastic pot collection, easing the process at multiple points. Once the pots are collected, Prides Corner Farms transports the sorted, compacted bales to East Jordan Plastics in East Jordan, Michigan for recycling into new pots.

This initiative is more than just a recycling program; it's a statement of our commitment to environmental

stewardship. By participating, we're not only reducing waste and conserving resources, but we're also aligning our professional practices with our personal values. We're demonstrating that the landscaping and nursery industry can be a part of the solution to the plastic waste problem.

With the successful start to this program in Vermont, Prides Corner Farms is expanding recycling to other New England states. They are also collaborating with other growers to work with East Jordan Plastics to offer this same program throughout the mid west and mid Atlantic coast states. We extend our gratitude to Prides Corner Farms and our collection site hosts for their invaluable contribution to this initiative. Together, we can make a difference and pave the way for a more sustainable future in our industry.



The plastic problem in the gardening industry is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach to finding a reliable solution. It's not just about finding alternatives to plastic pots and packaging, but also about changing the mindset of consumers and producers alike. It's about creating a culture where sustainability is not just an afterthought, but a fundamental part of how we garden.

The Plastic Pot Recycling Program is a step in the right direction, but it's just the beginning. We need to continue to innovate and find new ways to reduce our reliance on plastic. This could involve developing biodegradable pots, promoting the use of bulk buying to reduce packaging, or encouraging gardeners to make their own compost to reduce the need for bagged soil and fertilizers.

We also need to improve our recycling infrastructure, making it easier for gardeners to recycle their plastic pots and packaging. This could involve setting up dedicated recycling points at garden centers to then bring to VNLA collection sites, or working with local authorities to include plant pots in curbside recycling programs.

Education is another crucial aspect. We need to raise awareness about the impact of plastic waste on the environment and

encourage gardeners to make more sustainable choices. This could involve running workshops, creating educational materials, or even incorporating sustainability into gardening TV shows and magazines.

Finally, we need to work together as an industry to tackle this issue. This means collaborating with other nurseries, garden centers, and manufacturers to share best practices and develop industry-wide standards for sustainability. It also means engaging with our customers, listening to their concerns, and involving them in our sustainability efforts.

By taking these steps, we can help to reduce the impact of plastic waste on our environment and create a more sustainable future for the gardening industry. It won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight, but with commitment, collaboration, and a bit of creativity, we can make a difference.

A special thank you to our VNLA member businesses who served as collection sites in 2023: Evergreen Gardens in Stowe, Gardener's Supply Co. in Lebanon and Williston, Glebe Mountain Gardens & Landscaping in S. Londonderry, Greenhaven Gardens & Nursery in New Haven, and Horsford Gardens & Nursery Charlotte.



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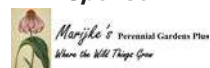
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The Vermont Nursery and Landscape Association – visit us at VNLAVT.org





CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 6, 2024
9:30 am - 12:15 pm
UMASS Amherst Winter
Workshop about Tree and
Shrub Insect Pests -
Webinar

Learn more [HERE](#).

February 15, 2024
VNLA Winter Meeting &
Trade Show - In-person
8am - 5pm

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February 17-18, 2024
NOFA-VT Winter Conference

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February 21-22, 2024
Ecological Landscape Alliance
Annual Conference & Eco
Marketplace - VIRTUAL
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February 29, 2024
Perennial Plant Association's
Virtual Edition Grower
Education on Shade
Perennials - 11am - 1:30 pm
 Learn more [HERE](#).

March 5-7, 2024
New England Regional
Turfgrass Foundation
Conference
 Rhode Island Convention Center
 Providence, RI
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March 8, 2024 - 9am-3pm
Perennial Plant Association
Symposium
 Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore
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March 22-24, 2024
Capital Region Flower &
Garden Expo
 Hudson Valley Community
 College
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July 29-August 1, 2024
Perennial Plant Association
National Symposium
 Asheville North Carolina
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August 5, 2024
The Garden Center Tour
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August 20-22, 2024
Garden Center Conference & Expo
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October 6-8, 2024
New England ISA Conference
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November 6-7, 2024
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LEONARD'S CLIPPINGS!

by Dr. Leonard Perry, UVM Horticulture Professor Emeritus

Winter, 2023-2024

Each semester I give a **course snapshot of the PSS department**, reflecting focus and student interest. Here's what is offered this spring, with instructor and enrollment (as of this writing).

Intro to Agroecology (Izzo, 150), Illustrating Botanicals (Zahn, 25), Living Landscapes (White, 40), Coffee Ecologies (Mendez, 20), Home Hops Growing (online, Perry, 40), Home Vegetable Growing (online, White, 100), Indoor Plants (online, Perry, 44), Sustainable Vegetable Crops Production (Stievater, 26), Greenhouse Operations and Management (staff, 16), Commercial Plant Propagation (Starrett, 47), Permaculture (online, White, 50), Soil Fertility and Conservation (Gorres, 32), Diversified Farm Planning (staff, 22), Agricultural Policy and Ethics (Bradshaw, 32), Biological Control (Chen, 26), Ecological Landscape Design (Hurley, 20), Soil/Water Pollution/Bioremediation (Nielsen, 24), Landscape Plan: Global Design (Acosta Moreno, 12), and several small specialty and higher level graduate courses.

Prior to the spring semester, during winter break, offered online are: Home Hops Growing (Perry, 24), Pollinators and Perennials (White, 34), Pest Management for Gardeners (new, Izzo, 40).

In PSS Department and Campus news: (subtitle this issue: It's all about the money!)

- You may recall from a previous edition of *The Dirt*, my mention of

the **extensive renovation of the Hills Building** on campus (where some of you I know had courses when PSS was located there, and where I spent over half my career). At The University of Vermont Board of Trustees' meeting in October, with former senator Patrick Leahy in attendance, **it was renamed the Patrick Leahy Building**, which will house the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships. (architect rendering in photo, and quote, from *UVM Today*).



"The new institute will focus the resources and expertise of multiple UVM centers and institutes to help find solutions to the most pressing challenges rural communities in Vermont face, including workforce training, access to broadband and clean water, sustainable energy, suitable housing, food production, building welcoming and inclusive communities, and mitigating the stresses placed on Vermont by extreme weather events brought on by climate change." The west courtyard (shown) will be revitalized, along with expanded corridor (outside Benedict Auditorium) to Marsh Life Science building. The new institute was made possible by a \$9.3 million award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, with leadership and support from Sen. Leahy. Lest the former name not be forgotten, the land surrounding will be known as the

Joseph L. Hills Plaza, named for longtime Dean of UVM's agricultural science program and director of the Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station for whom the original building was named.

- PSS Professor **Yolanda Fanslow Chen** has been awarded a \$308,000 USDA NIFA grant for a research project entitled, *Field testing of pheromone mating disruption for swede midge in brassica crops*.



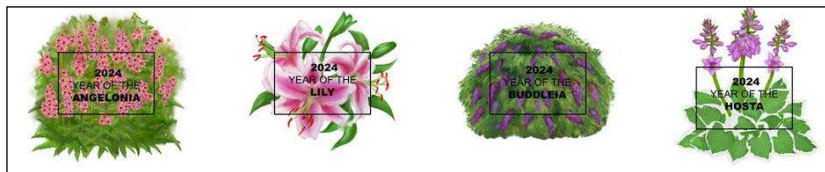
- UVM Extension Professor and Agronomy Specialist **Heather Darby** has been awarded a USDA NIFA grant for an over \$2 million multi-state research project entitled, *Enhancing the viability of grass-fed dairy production in the U.S. through comprehensive research and Extension*.



Each year the **National Garden Bureau** selects one annual, one perennial, one bulb crop, one edible, one houseplant, and



one shrub as our “**Year of the Crops.**” You can find extensive info on these, including the various types and culture, on their website, (along with past winners too, ngb.org/). “Plants are chosen because they are popular, easy-to-grow, widely adaptable, genetically diverse, and versatile.” Originally and for many years, annuals and vegetables were the yearly crops,. The program has grown to include these other additions.



For 2024, the annual winner is *Angelonia*, *Buddleia* the shrub, squash the vegetable, African Violet the houseplant, *Hosta* the perennial, and lily the bulb. If you’re selling these, I hope you mention this recognition and take advantage of all the PR they give them in the garden media and online. (images courtesy ngb.org).

Watering less? The American Floral Endowment (AFE) released a report where they summarized research (from Texas A&M, Starman and Guo) on how several bedding plant crops responded to being grown at reduced substrate moisture content. Plants were irrigated using either a narrow range drying interval similar to conventional irrigation methods where the growing mix is kept evenly moist or a wide range drying interval where the plants were allowed to dry down to the point where they were starting to show signs of water stress before irrigation was applied.

Results showed that many crops can be grown with less water without having detrimental effects on plant growth and quality. These reductions can help growers reduce their irrigation frequencies, amounts and the costs associated with higher frequency waterings. With wide range drying intervals leading to more compact plants, growers may be able to grow plants at higher plant densities; therefore, not only can cost savings be

obtained, growers could potentially grow more plants and generate more revenue per square foot. (Full details at <https://endowment.org/afe-research-reports-production-technology/>. Adapted from Paul Pilon, *Perennial Pulse*, Ball Publ.)

university (<https://today.tamu.edu/2023/10/23/connection-with-nature-linked-to-longer-healthier-lives/>). Or watch a recent video presentation (<https://vimeo.com/872732080/aef6d3be86?share=copy>).

Here are just a few more quotes from it that I found interesting, some of which you might use to help get more youth and adults into nature, including our own build landscapes and gardens.



On the right is a front view of *Salvia* ‘Red Hot Sally II’ irrigated with a narrow range drying interval (54% to 40%), and a wide range drying interval (54% to 20%) is pictured on the left. The plant on the left is more compact and darker green. This photo was taken after two weeks of shelf life. Photos by Cecilia Guo.

In some previous issues of *The Dirt* I’ve mentioned facts or resources on the **importance of connecting people with nature**—something we all know from our profession is important, but we really need to sell more to the public and policy makers--- which is just what Texas A&M is leading the charge to do (Thanks Jennifer, *Ball Green Talks* for the tip to this). They’re “laying the groundwork to lead the nation to the healing powers of nature.” You can read more on this in this article from their



• “In 2012, American adults spent just over four hours a day consuming digital media, including television and desktop/laptop computers, according to a survey by eMarketer.” This rose to six hours by 2018, and exceeded eight hours daily by 2022.

• “While days in nature on camping trips in wilderness environments provide a much deeper overall benefit to mental and physical health, even a 30-minute walk on a trail or in a greenspace can improve overall health outcomes.”

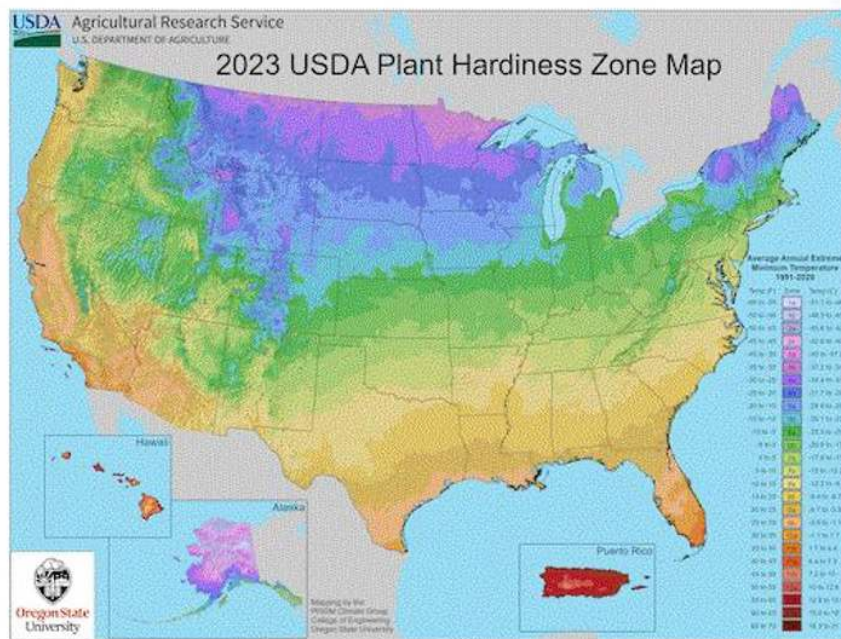
- “Humans are innately connected to the natural world and when removed from nature, bad things happen.”
- “Daily exposure to nature provides a long list of benefits to human **health**. Stress reduction, better sleep, lower anxiety, greater happiness and life satisfaction, improved immune function, lower blood pressure, better birth outcomes and childhood development, reduced obesity and diabetes, improved eyesight and an overall longer life are all directly related to the frequency and scale at which a person engages with nature.”
- “There are a wide range of activities like walking nature trails, gardening, daily exercise in greenspaces and hunting that can connect people to the healing powers of nature.”

[The following nice summary is from Paul Pilon, *Perennial Pulse* e-newsletter, in case

you missed this announcement elsewhere.] The USDA recently updated its **Plant Hardiness Zone Map**. It was last updated in 2012. The updated map came to fruition as the result of a joint venture between the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and Oregon State University's PRISM Climate Group. This updated map is the most precise one to date as it used data collected from 13,412 weather stations across the country compared with 7,983 stations used for the 2012 map.

The hardiness zones are based on the average annual extreme minimum temperatures over a 30-year period in the past. The annual extreme minimum temperature represents the coldest night of the year, which can be highly variable from year to year, depending on local weather patterns. The zones do not suggest these are the lowest temperatures ever recorded in these areas or the coldest temperatures that might occur in the future.

There are 13 zones across the United States and its territories. Each zone is broken into half zones, designated with an "a" or "b" following each zone number. For example, Zone 5 is divided into 5a and 5b half zones.

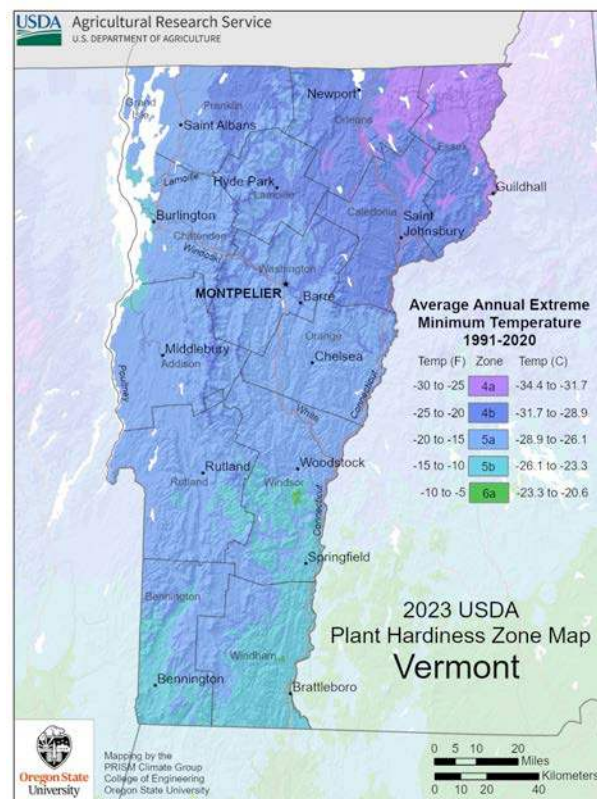


How has the map changed since 2012 you ask? The 2023 version of the USDA Hardiness Map reveals that about half the country (that's right, about 50%) shifted up to the next warmer zone. [LP note: much of VT did as well, however, it is still general. For instance I am now listed in 5a but due to elevation am really in 4b still.] This indicates that these areas warmed up somewhere between 0 to 5 degrees Fahrenheit over the past 11 years. Temperature updates to

plant hardiness zones aren't necessarily reflective of global climate change because of the highly variable nature of the extreme minimum temperature of the year, as well as the use of increasingly sophisticated mapping methods and the inclusion of data from more weather stations.

Although paper versions of the 2023 map will not be available this time around, anyone may download the new map free of charge and print copies as needed. Like the 2012 map, the 2023 web version offers a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based interactive format and is designed to be user-friendly.

(<http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>)



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In honor of Dr. Perry's 35 years as UVM's Extension Greenhouse and Nursery specialist, the VNLA established this fund in January, 2023.

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Fall Updates

by Ann Hazelrigg, PhD, UVM Extension

Damaged root systems and root death were common in annual crops this summer due to rain events and saturated soils. Perennial plants also suffered but it remains to be seen what the long-term effects of the flooding and water-saturated soils will be. Soil borne plant pathogens such as *Phytophthora spp.* thrive under wet conditions especially when these conditions are coupled with heavier soils. When soils are saturated, this pathogen releases motile zoospores that can swim in water films and are attracted to the sugars released by the fine roots of susceptible plants.

Several *Phytophthora* species can cause destructive root rots in a wide range of plants including rhododendron, apples, beech, blueberries, *Chamaecyparis*, Mugo pine, *Prunus sp.*, *Taxus* and *Viburnums* in both field and containers.

Above ground symptoms of the disease initially resemble nutrient deficiency or drought stress, but as the pathogen attacks more of the root system wilting, dieback and death can occur.

Some areas of Vermont experienced flooding and standing water which can cause direct damage to trees by interrupting normal oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange. Most tree species can tolerate 1-4 months of flooding during the dormant season, but if flooded during the growing season, 1-2 weeks can result in serious damage or death, depending on the tree species. Flood stressed trees can show a range of symptoms such as yellowing, leaf drop, smaller leaf size, early fall



Top: Black glebal masses of the shotgun fungus on grapes. Photo: Loree Silvis.
Bottom: Black glebal masses of the shotgun fungus on bean foliage (L) and wood mulch (R). Photo: Loree Silvis.

coloration and crown dieback. Even if the flooding does not result in the death of the tree, it can contribute to other stresses such as insect feeding. In many cases we will just have to wait and see how the trees do this next spring and summer.

A gardener recently submitted several images of grapes, bean leaves and mulch with small black raised structures they thought may be scale insects. The little black bumps on the plants (called glebal masses or peridioles) were actually a common fungus. The “artillery” or “shotgun” fungus (*Sphaerobolus*

spp.) causes no real damage to plants or humans and typically occurs during cool, wet weather in spring or fall since the fruiting bodies on the fungus are suppressed at temperatures above 77°F. The fungus becomes established in moist organic matter, such as manure or wood mulches, and the black spore masses are forcibly ejected up to 6 feet vertically and 20 feet horizontally, often towards a bright reflective light source

like shiny cars or aluminum siding. A sticky coating on the mass helps it to adhere to the surface producing a raised black spot about 2 mm wide. Once the mass has adhered to a surface, it is nearly impossible to remove it without damaging the surface itself. Occasionally the fungus and glebal masses can be found indoors when wood mulches are used in houseplants. No control is necessary, although replacing infested mulch with stones or 85% bark mulch may suppress the fungus.



Another fungus also found growing in moist shady areas on disturbed soil, decaying wood or manure is the bird's nest fungus. There are several different genera in the bird's nest fungi group and these may vary by shape, size and color depending on the species. In general, the fruiting bodies of these fungi are about ¼ inch in diameter and have an outer "nest" or cup-shaped reproductive structure filled with objects that look like eggs. These "eggs" are spore-containing structures called peridioles. During rain events, the "eggs" are splashed and dispersed out of the cups, traveling up to a meter or more before adhering to another object. Once the peridiole dries, it splits open and releases fungal spores. These are wood decay organisms and cause no harmful effects to plants or humans. No fungicides or control measures are warranted.



Bird's nest fungus fruiting bodies. Photo: J. O'Brien, USDA Forest Service, www.Bugwood.org.

We are always happy to look at pictures of problems or diagnose physical samples in the UVM Plant Diagnostic Clinic if you have an issue you are concerned with. You can reach me at Ann.hazelrigg@uvm.edu.

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News from the VT Agency of Agriculture, Foods & Markets

By: Judy Rosovsky, State Plant Regulatory Official and Entomologist, VAAFM

December 2023

Greenhouse Conference Report, Invasive Plants and Thanks and Goodbye Kristina!

Plant Health sent State Survey Coordinator Ben Dillner State Survey Coordinator to attend the Northeast Greenhouse Conference held in Manchester, NH this November. This conference was attended by growers both big and small, extension staff, university researchers, and those who serve the horticultural industry in Northeastern states. There were presentations on everything from beneficial insects to hydroponics to new perennial varieties. Alongside the talks there was a vibrant trade show featuring wholesale nurseries, greenhouse manufacturers, IPM companies, and other industry vendors. This was Ben's first time attending the conference and it was a very enriching couple of days; the following are some of his important takeaways.

IPM: A Focus on Biocontrol.

When I attended Cornell for Plant Science 7+ years ago, we certainly learned about Integrated Pest Management and the use of beneficial organisms to treat pest issues. However, beneficials or biocontrol was presented as more of a niche tool in commercial settings; something that only smaller organic growers were using. Now, biocontrol is very much mainstream. Several talks were dedicated to discussing new biocontrol strategies and trials of products. There is a wide variety of products that fall under the "bio" umbrella currently: beneficials which include predatory organisms such as wasps that kill pests, biopesticides (microbes that attack pathogenic fungi), and biostimulants which are organic substances that promote plant growth. Biocontrol really is one of the hottest topics in horticulture; for good reason, too. Growers face a seemingly unending deluge of new invasive pests that want to damage their crops. Some of these pests like *Thrips parvispinus* have been shown to be resistant to traditional pesticides. Biocontrol offers a more targeted approach to pests. There is also very little risk to workers, consumers or the environment from biocontrol agents. Especially in greenhouse grown

produce, growers can avoid pesticide residue if they only use biocontrol. In the past, biocontrol products were costly and harder to obtain; now many larger companies are producing them on a commercial scale. A biocontrol approach may ultimately be more cost effective if the beneficial organisms can establish/ reproduce in the production greenhouses.

Native Plants- Very Popular!

Consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of native plants and pollinator species in the landscape. Multiple presentations focused on growers taking advantage of this trend. While this is great news for our insects and birds, there are some concerns to overcome. A common theme was that the demand for natives is actually outstripping the supply. We need many more plants propagated from local populations by local growers. Not all native plant species are the same genetically; Joe-pye weed from Illinois is different than Joe-pye weed in Vermont. Some farms and organizations are addressing this by starting seed sharing groups that collect wild seeds in a sustainable manner to be grown out. Other plant breeders are developing cultivars of native species that are extra showy or hardy. These cultivars are good replacements for non-native and potentially invasive plants that provide far fewer resources for our beloved pollinators.



An adult female Thrips parvispinus on a pepper leaf. Photo credit: Lance Osborne, University of Florida.

A Changing (Horticultural) Climate.

Horticulture is a diverse and rapidly evolving industry. The conference highlighted some of the big challenges we face but also some amazing plant-based successes. With food insecurity increasing around the world, Controlled Environment Agriculture (ie. Greenhouses) offers the ability to produce quality food locally. Even in frigid New England, growers are producing vegetables and berries all year round. The horticulture industry is not without sustainability issues such as energy and plastic use. But new technology like LED grow lights and pots made from cow manure are helping reduce the environmental impact. There was a fascinating presentation about growing media (potting soil) made from wood that is a



viable alternative to peat which is effectively a non-renewable resource. Similar to many industries, labor constraints are affecting horticulture in a major way. There is no simple solution to labor issues, but new technologies like AI and robotics are reshaping how plants are grown. It is also important to note that horticulture is rapidly becoming a multicultural industry even in the Northeast. I was impressed to see that there were a number of presentations offered in Spanish. It would behoove growers to foster inclusivity for both their labor and how plants are marketed.

In Summary.

I am truly impressed by the innovation in the horticulture field and feel that overall the industry outlook is quite positive. Interest in gardening, local food production, and houseplants is at an all-time high especially here in Vermont. There will always be challenges: weather, invasive pests, inflation, labor but that is why events like the Northeast Greenhouse Conference are so important. We need to have a clear exchange of information between public researchers, industry vendors, and growers.

Invasive Plants in Vermont Again.

Earlier this year the Plant Health Team wrote about an invasive plant species newly found in Burlington called pale swallowwort, or dog-strangling vine, *Vincetoxicum rossicum*. We have now unfortunately found two additional invasive plant species in the Burlington area, porcelain berry, or amur peppervine, *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*. This is a woody vine that was introduced to the US in the 1870's, as was a common practice, as an ornamental plant. It looks similar to wild grape. It spreads easily and forms dense thickets that shade out native species, thus decreasing wildlife habitat and species diversity. It is hard to control partly because it's roots grow back easily and it produces seeds that wildlife can spread. It was found on private property and once it was identified the owner was willing to remove and destroy the plant.

Another uninvited invasive weed appeared in two places in Chittenden County this fall. Mile-a-minute, *Persicaria perfoliata*, is in the knotweed and smartweed family, *Polygonaceae*. It too forms dense mats and can physically overwhelm the plants that it spreads over. The shading can limit the ability of the covered plants to photosynthesize. It



Top left: *Vincetoxicum rossicum* (Pale Swallowwort).

Top right: *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata* (Porcelain Berry).

Bottom: *Persicaria perfoliata* (Mile-a-minute).

Photos: North Carolina State Extension.

self-fertilizes and produces seeds from June to October and the seeds can remain viable for 6 years. USDA is developing a biocontrol agent called the mile-a-minute weevil, *Rhinocominus latipes*, that can stunt the growth of though not eradicate the plant.

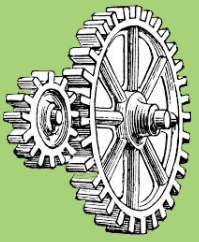
The biggest problem with mile-a-minute is that can be spread through the nursery and landscaping trades. It is one good reason to be

vigilant about weeds in pots and in rootballs. Infestations in both New Hampshire and Massachusetts are associated with nursery stock (see https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326054940_A_New_Record_of_Invasive_Mile-A-Minute_Vine_Persicaria_perfoliata_Polygonaceae_In_New_Hampshire). Weeds can be handpulled or treated, and see <https://pnwhandbooks.org/weed/horticultural/nursery-greenhouse-bulb/container-grown-nursery-stock> for suggestions on managing weeds in containers. Because of the arrival of these three invasive plants nursery inspectors will be paying more attention to weeds in containers and rootballs in businesses that we inspect in the coming season.

A Farewell.

The Plant Health team is delighted to hear that the VNLA will have a new leader but very sad to know that we will no longer have the pleasure of working with Kristina, who has brought so much imagination and energy to the work she does. We have all loved the Flower Show and the VNLA meetings and special events. I know Jas Darland will take up the leadership baton and fill the void, but we'll miss you Kristina. Stay warm and drive safely this winter season.





THE IDEA FACTORY

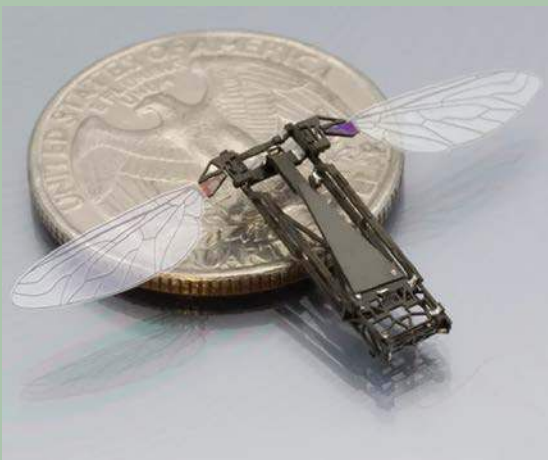
tips & trends, food for thought...



The **VT Small Business Development Center** is a GREAT resource for small business owners. You can request a confidential, no-fee, one-to-one advising session [HERE](#). Learn more about the work they do for VT business owners [HERE](#).

Robot Bees Tag in For Exhausted Pollinators

The BBC reported on tech firm BloomX, which has developed innovative solutions to address the challenges faced by bee populations due to climate change and habitat loss. The company has introduced two AI-controlled, GPS-equipped devices, "Robee" and "Crosse", designed to assist in crop pollination. These devices are not merely tools, but sophisticated technological advancements that can potentially increase fruit yields by up to 30%. While the intention is not to replace bees, these devices offer a supplementary solution to alleviate the pressure on bee populations, particularly in large-scale monoculture operations. Read more [HERE](#).



Landscaping with Light



Luminous seasonal displays not only add a festive touch but also transform the stark winter landscape into a vibrant tableau, enhancing the aesthetic appeal of homes and public spaces during the darker months. By integrating light plans into the initial design, we can ensure that trees, shrubs, and architectural elements are positioned for optimal illumination. This approach elevates holiday light displays from mere decoration to a strategic component of landscape design, creating dynamic, inviting spaces that residents can enjoy year-round, regardless of the length or severity of the winter season. See more photos of Shelburne Museum's award-winning lights display [HERE](#).



Rethinking the Lawn

by Judith Irlen and Tim Parsons

A nice green lawn is surely a pleasant component in any residential garden.

For instance, a stretch of lawn can create a visual frame around the planted beds, helping people focus on their flowers and other plants which they enjoy.

And, since lawn grass can be walked across without causing damage, lawns also provide space for strolling, as well as for children to play.

However, in addition to providing space to grow beautiful flowers and nutritious food, most people want their gardens to be a positive force within the overall environment—a place where wildlife like birds, butterflies, bees and so many other creatures that are part of our natural world, can thrive and reproduce.

But, beyond providing the occasional worm to be foraged by birds like robins and blue birds, the typical residential lawn offers very few ecological benefits to the overall environment. Doug Tallamy, the noted environmentalist and Professor of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Delaware, refers to the expansive lawns he sees in suburbia as ‘ecological wastelands’ or ‘green deserts’.

Meanwhile the weekly mowing rituals not only take precious time and money, but — unless one uses an electric mower—they also spew out considerable amounts of the greenhouse gases which degrade the environment.

So for all these reasons I like to minimize the area of lawn in any of the gardens which I design—while still maintaining the inherent aesthetic and functional benefits which a lawn provides.

The Lawns at Middlebury College

So, this past September, I was delighted to participate in a Twilight Meeting at Middlebury College, lead by VNLA member Tim Parsons, who showed us his new rewilding initiative, whereby he is both reducing the hours devoted to lawn mowing, and also shrinking the total lawn area.



VNLA Summer Twilight Tour led by Tim Parsons at Middlebury College in September.

Tim is the college’s Landscape Horticulturist with the responsibility of managing the entire iconic outdoor landscape at the Middlebury campus, in addition to the Bread Loaf campus in Ripton. This monumental task not only includes caring for the many magnificent and noteworthy trees on campus, but also maintaining all lawns and landscape plantings.

The ornamental lawns frame the college’s many renowned buildings, and are an essential component of the Middlebury Campus.

In addition, they provide congenial spaces where the members of the college community—including almost 2,800 students—can gather in groups, or alternatively, spend precious quiet time alone.

However, the lawns at the Middlebury campus encompass a total of 97 acres—which does not even include the extensive athletic fields.

And, until recently, these lawns were all mown weekly, involving 1,920 hours of staff time plus an additional cost of over \$10,000 for the diesel fuel. Furthermore, this lawn maintenance emits approximately 20 Metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere yearly, including over 400 pounds of other gaseous pollutants.

Struck by the negative impact on the environment, as well as all the time and money associated with this mowing routine, Tim has been actively working to reduce both the annual mowing time per acre, as well as the total number of acres of lawn that need to be mown on a regular basis.

And he aims to accomplish this while still maintaining the special qualities which the lawns offer the entire college community.

Historically campus landscapes are open spaces, with large, expansive views. The challenge is how to maintain these areas ecologically—preserving the history but without the traditional maintenance.



And, as you might expect, there is **much useful information** which all landscape professionals—together with our clients—can learn from this ongoing effort. So let's take a look how this is playing out at the College.

The Initial No-mow Program

Back in 2009, Middlebury College initiated a 'no-mow' program—whereby 16 acres of lawn, located in sparsely used parts of the outer campus, were mown just twice a season.

However, over time, Tim found that the gradual incursion of weeds—including prickly thistles and other thorny plants, as well as poison parsnip and other non-native species—felt really out of place in the managed landscape of a college campus. So he has gradually reduced the amount of 'no-mow' land to just 4 acres (see go.middlebury.edu/landscape).

The Rewilding Study

Then, in 2022, Tim approached the Sustainability Solutions Laboratory in Middlebury's Franklin Environmental Center to help develop a better way forward.

That summer two students, Aria Bowden '23 and S.J. O'Connor '24, volunteered to conduct an extensive study of the different areas of lawn on campus and the way each area was **actually being used** by the college community.

They then developed specific recommendations for evolving each area of lawn, with the dual goals of reducing the overall maintenance burden while also enhancing the environmental benefits of these open spaces.

Finally they documented all their findings in a paper entitled 'Rewilding and Restoration of Ecological Habitats on Middlebury College's Main Campus' (see go.middlebury.edu/rewild).

As you can imagine, they found that, while some parts of the campus lawn are in regular use by both students and visitors, other sections of lawn are rarely stepped on.

Indeed—a quick look at Google Earth shows how all the buildings at Middlebury College are interconnected with wide

concrete paths. And certainly, from my own observations, the predominate way people walk between the buildings is to use these paths. So, not surprisingly, the actual lawn between these paths is used far less!

S.J. and Aria recommended that the season-long weekly mowing regime should be restricted to **just those areas of the lawn that they found to be in active use**, which they designated as 'High Performance Lawn' areas. In addition all lawn areas at the College are mown at a more sustainable height of between 3 and 3.5 inches—something we can also recommend to our clients.

Also, by reducing the total area of highly managed lawn, more organic and sustainable approaches to lawn care become more feasible.

For other areas they recommended two different

'mowing reduction schedules'—described below.

They also visualized parts of the college lawn gradually transitioning to specific forms of *rewilded areas*—both to provide beneficial habitats for pollinators and other wildlife and because they would require just one or two mowings a year.

This past summer, in a trial section of campus on Route 30 and near the library—where it is easily visible to both the college community as well as the general public—Tim and his staff have been actively implementing new rewilding proposals. And remember: this was just the first year in their overall process of reinventing the lawn!

Strategies to Reduce the Weekly Mowing Ritual

Park Lawn. The park-like hill below the Chapel at the college is home to a number of really beautiful mature trees.

But, due to the trees themselves as well as the underlying ledge, the soil here tends to be dry and of poor quality. Consequently, the lawn in this area grows more slowly and has a tendency to turn brown.

Thus the recommendation was to reduce the frequency of mowing on this hill as well as in other areas with mature trees. So, starting next spring, the mowing routine will be reduced to twice a month. This more prescriptive maintenance approach should save significant time and resources while still maintaining the historic view-shed.



Rough Lawn. There are also several areas of lawn at the college— designated as ‘rough lawn’—where, starting this past year, the weekly mowing ritual was restricted to the cooler months of April and May, when grass grows fastest.

In addition, towards the end of May the college welcomes many visitors to campus for the Commencement ceremonies, when having shorter grass for visitor gatherings is desirable. But from June onwards—when the higher summer temperatures cause the grass to grow more slowly—these areas are now being mown just once a month. The result is a meadowy lawn with a rougher but still very pleasant texture.

Rewilding to Increase the Ecological Value

In addition to reducing the mowing frequency for different areas of the lawn as described above, Tim and his staff are also actively converting entire sections of lawn with the goal of increasing their ecological benefit—a process they call *rewilding*.

This past summer they began with a trial area to the south of Starr Library and down towards South Main Street.

Native Fescue Areas. Last spring, as part of their lawn replacement initiative, Tim and his crew also established Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) in wide swaths near the library. Red Fescue needs mowing once a year in the fall. By the time we visited in August, it was about 18” high and had a delicate wavy texture.

In order to prevent ticks being transmitted from the taller fescue to pedestrians on the paths, they left a strip of mown lawn alongside the pathways—a feature which also created a pleasing visual frame against the wavy texture of the fescue. Like most lawns in the northeast, the existing lawns at the college actually contain a considerable amount Red Fescue. But it is mixed in with a number of non-native grasses (such as Kentucky bluegrass, ryegrass, and tall fescue) and weeds, which Tim and his crew wanted to eliminate.

So they applied a specialty herbicide (available to commercial lawn care companies) which quickly killed the non-native



The native Fescue area planted this past spring

grasses, but left the red fescue. By removing the invasive weeds and grasses, the remaining red fescue was able to quickly dominate the area where it is now thriving without the competition.

The alternative would have been to remove all the sod and then reseed with fescue. However they decided this would be difficult to implement on the large scale involved in this project. It would have also released a considerable amount of carbon which is locked in the soil, thus negating the goal of reduced carbon emissions by cutting back on lawn maintenance.

By contrast, solarization would be a viable strategy when working with smaller areas in residential gardens. Red Fescue (or other native grasses) are readily available by seed, which can then be established in the newly solarized areas.

Clover Areas. Clovers (and yes—there are several kinds!) are an incredibly beneficial group of plants for the environment.

- Firstly, clovers are ‘nitrogen fixing plants’—with the ability to extract nitrogen from the air and then store it in their roots, where eventually it becomes available to other plants as soil fertilizer.
- And secondly, clover flowers offer a wonderful source of nectar for bees and other pollinators.

So, as part of their rewilding initiative, in some sunny areas Tim and his crew are completely replacing the lawn grass with low-growing clover ‘meadows’.

In addition to providing all the environmental benefits of the more familiar taller clover, the expanse of lower growing micro-clover which they have planted near the college library this past spring (from seed purchased from DLF Pictseed) has a delightful ruffled texture which can be mown a couple of times a year. And when we visited it was abuzz with pollinators! !

Furthermore, the short stature of the micro-clover means that mice are less likely to inhabit the space and then move into nearby buildings in the winter.



Clayplain Forest Plantings.

The long-term rewilding plans also recommend that parts of the outer campus be gradually converted to Clayplain Forest —using native trees such as various species of maples and oak, as well as American beech, white pine and hemlock, with an underplanting of shrubs and perennials. The goal of these forest plantings is to mimic the original natural Champlain Valley ecosystem while also bringing more species diversity to the campus.



A trial area planted with wildflower pollinator mix.

Perennial Groundcovers, Pollinator and Wildflower Gardens. The long-term plan also recommends that, in order to create a beneficial habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, a variety of flowering plants be established in certain areas around the campus.

However it was also recognized that, at least initially, these plantings will likely be more labor-intensive to maintain. A

trial area was planting this summer of a wildflower pollinator mix in the front of the Axinn library and should bloom next year. More of these plantings will be initiated gradually as time permits.

In Conclusion

Our college colleagues are undertaking a thoughtful and careful approach to enhancing their expansive grounds for the benefit of the overall college community. But, at the same time, they are also seeking to reduce the carbon footprint associated with their lawns while transforming them to benefit the wider environment.

It is my fervent hope that we can all learn from this effort, and then help our clients manage their own smaller home landscapes to be both beautiful and also environmentally responsible.

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Professional Landscapers and Resilient Landscaping: Adapting to a Changing Climate

by *Natasha Duarte and Karen Bates*

Landscape professionals have the unique opportunity to be stewards of change for their customers in the face of a changing climate.

In recent years, we have seen an alarming increase in the frequency and intensity of rain and flood events, alternating with periods of drought. These ever-shifting weather patterns and unpredictable conditions require an evolution of landscaping practices to create resilient landscapes that will endure and thrive amidst dynamic conditions.

Planting the right plant in the right place is one obvious solution, but paying attention to soil conditions and building healthy soil helps them thrive. Healthy soil is a critical component of climate resiliency. Fertile and aerated soils act like sponges, efficiently absorbing and retaining water and preventing runoff and erosion during heavy rainfalls. This sponge-like quality also makes soil a valuable reservoir of moisture during drought. Healthy soils can also lead to increased plant resilience to disease and pests.

As different plants have varied tolerance to flooding and drought conditions, planting diverse native plants on the properties you manage can help build their resilience. Plant diversity can enhance the property's aesthetics - especially where lawns are struggling - while providing other benefits your customers may value. These include attracting pollinators, sequestering carbon, and reducing the volume of stormwater entering streets and local waterways.

Consider implementing the following strategies that can lead to healthier soils and landscapes:

Increase organic matter in soil. To build resilient landscapes that can better meet the challenges of a changing climate, we must start from the ground up – literally. Increasing organic matter in the soil is crucial. Soil rich in organic matter can absorb more water, reducing surface water pooling and keeping lawns from becoming waterlogged. It also provides essential nutrients to plants, helping them thrive even in adverse conditions. On lawns, a simple way to build soil organic matter over time is by leaving grass clippings where they fall; you can also consider topdressing with compost when overseeding or establishing a new lawn.

Keep grass longer. As many of your customers' yards are most likely lawn, it is best practice to mow to 3 inches. This practice helps keep the grass green because longer grass shades the

soil, reducing moisture loss through evaporation. It also encourages deeper root growth, creating air pockets in the soil to allow more rain to infiltrate the lawn. Deeper roots can also reach water-rich areas during dry periods, providing a natural way for a lawn to combat drought. Longer lawns may also deter white grubs and provide habitat for beneficial insects.

Plant pollinator-friendly landscapes. The changing climate poses a threat to pollinators and their habitats. Encourage the planting of native, pollinator-friendly flora that can withstand weather fluctuations and provide essential resources for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Native plants are better adapted to local conditions and may reduce the need for excessive watering and chemical inputs. Establishing pollinator habitat supports local ecosystems and contributes to the global effort to protect pollinators.

Use green infrastructure for stormwater management. Enhance stormwater management by incorporating green infrastructure elements like rain gardens and permeable surfaces. These features can help maintain a reservoir of water during drought and reduce soil erosion from runoff during heavy rainfalls. In areas that are hard to mow, consider replacing portions of lawns with water-resilient perennials.

Educate customers about sustainable choices. Empower your clients with knowledge about the benefits of climate-resilient landscaping. In addition to promoting long-term resilience, explain the resulting co-benefits, which include better pollinator habitats, healthier rivers and lakes, and increased sequestration of carbon. By understanding the co-benefits of these changes, clients can become your partners in promoting sustainable practices. There are links to information below that will help you better explain the benefits to your customers.

By following these strategies to proactively adjust lawn management practices, you can help create landscapes that endure and thrive amidst the dynamic conditions of a changing climate. As landscape professionals, you have the unique opportunity to be stewards of change in the face of a changing climate. Help your customers embrace these adaptations for the immediate benefits of our landscapes and also for the broader positive impact on surface waters, carbon dioxide levels, biodiversity, and pollinator habitats. Together, we can create landscapes that are not only visually appealing but also resilient and ecologically responsible. Together, we can create landscapes that are not only visually appealing but



also resilient and environmentally responsible.

Staff from Lawn to Lake partner organizations are available to talk with you one-on-one or present programs on healthy soils, lawn care, and stormwater management for homeowners. [Contact us for more information.](#)

Useful Links:

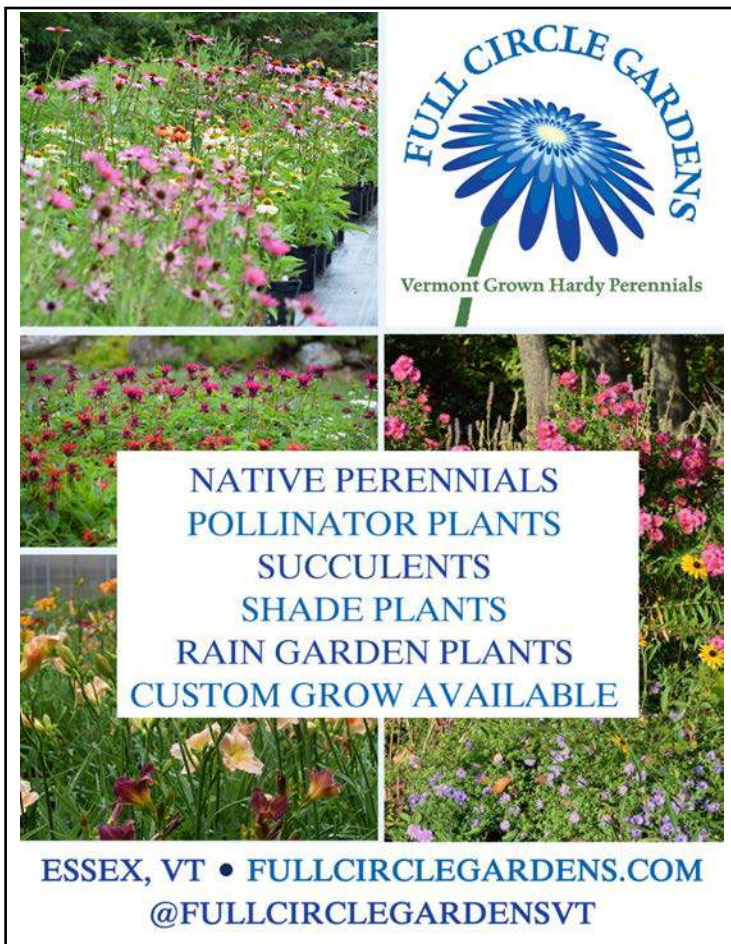
- Lawn to Lake's Healthy Lawn Tips: Click the "Learn more" button on our homepage: <https://lawntolake.org/>
- Short video describing soil health and best practices for both the health of your grass and for water quality: 35-second version - <https://youtu.be/u-8CdXJfoOI> ; 2-minute version - <https://youtu.be/MhvUUYWDzEI>
- The Soil Story from Kiss the Ground, narrated by Larry Kopald: 3 ½ minutes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08TI1RKj54g>



No-mow-VTDEC.

- Using nature's strategies to clean and minimize stormwater runoff: rain barrels, rain gardens, and other approaches: <https://www.uvm.edu/seagrant/outreach/green-infrastructure-stormwater/resources>
- UVM Ag Soil Testing Lab, <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/agricultural-and-environmental-testing-lab>
- Extension Master Gardener resources (includes links to climate-friendly and pollinator plants, etc.), <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/mastergardener/gardening-resources>

For more information please contact Natasha Duarte, Director of the [Composting Association of Vermont](#), or Karen Bates, Watershed planner, ANR DEC Water Investment Division, Watershed Planning Program (<https://anr.vermont.gov/>) and members of the [Lawn to Lake Partnership](#).



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The Essence of a Legacy

by Jacki Hart

It's More About 'Why' Than 'What' You've Done.

Every now and then, I've thought about how many hours I've spent writing business columns and blogs since 2006. My guess is that I've written 200+ columns. Each column hovers around 1,000 words and takes a couple of hours to write, sometimes more. So, that's like a 200,000 word essay – or a book (or two or three books worth – the average novel is about 70,000 words). And a lot of hours at the keyboard. But that's WHAT I've done, not WHY.

And since 2006, I've led and developed the Prosperity Partners Program for Landscape Ontario – two full day workshops about running a business - which I delivered to well over 800 business owners across the Province over about 8 years. That Program changed the trajectory for MANY small business owners. It also helped to provide a business blueprint for those aspiring to start a landscape business. But that's WHAT I've done, not WHY.

I know from 24 years of running my own landscape business, that it's easy to become overwhelmed with all of the responsibilities of running a business. And to feel alone. That's why my husband Tim Kearney and I started the Peer-to-Peer Network for Landscape Ontario 11 years ago. And if I were counting the full day workshops and Summit's I've delivered and facilitated for hundreds of Peer-to-Peer Network members, it would be north of 50 days – with another 150 days of prep and research. And a LOT of driving across the province. But that's WHAT I've done, not WHY.

And speaking of that landscape business of mine, we won 20 Landscape Ontario Awards of Excellence. But that's WHAT I've done, not WHY.

Since 2005, almost every year, I've been a speaker at the LO Congress Conference – to thousands of attendees, on topics ranging from engaging the team, business systems, setting goals, leadership and more. And as well, I've spoken at Landscape conferences and run full day workshops across the country. But that's WHAT I've done, not WHY.



I also sat on the Landscape Ontario Provincial Board of Directors and was elected to the Executive Committee. But that's WHAT I've done, not WHY.

Three years ago I took on the curriculum overhaul and continuous improvement delivery for the Employers of Choice program, with now over 300 business owners and managers working hard to implement that

robust tool box for better HR management and employee engagement. But that's WHAT I've done, not WHY.

Focus On What's Happening Through You, Not To You.

I recently read *'The Depressed Motivational Speaker'* by industry consultant, facilitator and long-time LO friend, Jim Paluch. And this month, I co-facilitated another Feature Congress Event with Jim for the Peer-to-Peer Network, to share some amazing strategies to build resilience under stress. The book is a must-read for business owners. One of the most striking themes for me in this story is "focus on what's happening through you, not to you".

This one simple phrase is so powerful. Without realizing it, I believe that's what I've managed to do, through lots of challenges and adversity in my own journey - always doing my best to show up with authentic advice, separated from my own stresses. Focusing on what has been happening through me rather than to me.

Leaving A Legacy

I never thought of my role writing blogs, or building and leading the PP, P2P or EOC programs, or speaking at Conferences, as creating a Legacy. That is until now. I don't think that we typically start our careers with the intention of legacy. I didn't. And for me now, here it is – a time to take a look at my Landscape Ontario legacy.

The essence of my 'WHY' has always been to help hard working business owners with fresh ideas and business tools, meaningful discussions, and sharing a new perspectives, with



the hope that my ideas and words will build confidence and curiosity, making the path forward a bit easier, more rewarding, and more hopeful. That's WHY. Because I believe there's always improvement to aspire to, and the importance of being on a shared journey, together.

When you look back on the lives that your career has touched, I'm guessing that you too are building your own legacy – but perhaps without realizing it – like I have.

From the people that you've worked with, to the landscapes you've designed, or built, planted, pruned, cared for, enhanced, watered, fertilized, supplied, or illuminated, your legacy lies within.

There are watershed moments in every career that are transformational. But we often don't recognize it at the time. Pride is our looking-glass in real-time. Legacy is our rear-view mirror.

Perhaps you have heard the phrase, "it takes a community to raise a child".

I've been thinking a lot about the LO community in the past few months, and the 'children' (businesses) it has raised, both of mine included (Water's Edge Landscaping and Consulting By Hart). This LO community has raised tens of thousands of 'children' in its' 50 years. And just like you, here reading this Business Tips issue for maybe the first time, or the 200th, I'm grateful to be one of them.

A Fond and Grateful Farewell to Landscape Ontario

I am confident that all of the Landscape Ontario 'whats' I've done over the past 15+ years has offered solutions, and some

inspiration to try something new for business owners and managers. And that my 'why' has helped many to realize that they're never alone if they engage in all Landscape Ontario has to offer.

After 200+ business column issues for Landscape Ontario, I have just submitted my last one. I am sadly retiring from all of my work with LO. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to inspire others to challenge hard working business owners and to have shared my hard-earned wisdom on running a business and a team. For your business and your team. That's always been my 'why', and why I love being a business coach – which I will continue to do in the years ahead.

I encourage you to take a moment to take stock of the legacy that you are building.... And to hone in on your 'why' vs your 'what'.

Onwards. Thank you for reading! Until next time.

Jacki Hart

About the Author: Jacki Hart is president of Consulting by Hart in Ontario, Canada. She is an entrepreneur, advisor, business consultant, and workshop facilitator with a career in the Green Industry spanning 35 years. Jacki is one of Canada's first women to hold the North American Green Industry certificate for business management excellence. Jacki has managed the Prosperity Program and Peer to Peer Network for Landscape Ontario. We share Jacki's "Business Tips" with her permission. To learn more about CBH visit www.consultingbyhart.com.

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White Fir for Tight Quarters (*Abies concolor* cultivars)

by Mark Dwyer, *Landscape Prescriptions by MD*

John Muir, one of America's most famous and influential naturalists and conservationists, once called white fir (*Abies concolor*) "a charmingly symmetrical tree" and went on to state "the noble grandeur of the species is patent to every eye." Those that know this conifer undoubtedly appreciate the inherent beauty of the large, silvery blue needles that give such a lasting impression in the garden 365 days per year. Primarily native to mountain slopes (3,000-9,000 feet in elevation) in the western United States, this fir has broad adaptability in other regions of the country if given proper siting and consideration. White fir is considered one of the best firs for the Midwest and has increasing use as a substitute for the Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*) which has been frequently overplanted and suffers from an array of ailments. While the species, subspecies and some selections of white fir will attain significant heights in time, there is an exciting array of more compact and restrained varieties that lend their toughness and ornamental qualities to the smaller-scaled landscape or tight spot in the garden.

Prior to promoting some of these exciting selections, it's important to talk about this species and how it best will thrive in your landscape. As the most drought tolerant of the firs, it is important to make sure that you have good drainage in your potential planting location. White firs do best in deep, rich, moist and well drained soils and prefer a slightly acidic situation if possible (although slightly alkaline is acceptable). *Abies concolor*, while adaptable to gravelly soils, will not thrive in heavy clay soils and excessively wet sites and areas that might be prone to early frost ("frost pockets") should be avoided as this fir breaks bud early and can suffer some damage from early frosts.

Tolerating not only drought, white firs can also handle heat and cold temperatures. White firs have relatively few insect and



Abies concolor 'Blue Cloak'

disease problems and are rarely browsed by deer. Hardy from zones 4-7, this species prefers locations with long winters and cool summers and shouldn't be used where lengthy heat and humidity are factors. Positioning white firs in full sun is ideal although they will tolerate partial shade. The best blue coloration on the needles will occur in full sun locations although is also related to the specific variety. The soft, flattened needles (1.5-2.5" long) emerge light green in spring and attain their summer coloration in short order. Both sides of the needles are the same color, hence the specific epithet of "concolor". The needles are spiral on the shoot but are upswept across the top of the shoot in flat ranks. Crushed needles emit a lemony scent. Although most selections are consistently a decent blue in summer, the two larger selections of white fir, 'Candicans' and 'Blue Cloak', are thought to be among the most blue of

conifers although their ultimate mature size removes them from the primary focus of this article. Cones are rare on white firs and tend to appear with age.

While the growth rate for white fir is slow, the straight species and some selections will ultimately reach an average height over 40' with a width of 15-20' in the landscape. This classic, conical form is very symmetrical with the top half of the branches appearing slightly upswept and the bottom half of the tree featuring downswept branches. As with any larger conifer that gains significant size, having the proper location is vital. Our landscapes are all filled with errors of judgement in terms of plant placement with little foresight in to the maturing sizes of these woody plants. With so much ornamental value to *Abies concolor* and various selections, evaluating reduced-size selections makes sense and allows for a broader applicability in smaller landscapes, rock gardens and areas that simply don't have the space for a larger form. As mentioned earlier however, if you do have space for medium to large versions of white fir,



consider the straight species, 'Candicans' or 'Blue Cloak' for superior blue coloration.

If a narrow form of white fir is needed as an exclamation point in the landscape or to anchor a tight spot, the selection 'Conica' is excellent. Slow growing and narrowly conical, this dense and strongly fastigate variety has shorter branches (and needles) but offers the same contribution of powder blue every day of the year. This selection will maintain a central leader and light shearing on new growth in late spring can be accomplished as needed to maintain a desired size. If a shorter, upright form is of interest, consider the selection 'Archer's Dwarf'. This 1982 introduction is quite uniform and symmetrical with similar features to 'Conica' but on a reduced scale. While very slow growing, the intensity of blue on the needles of this selection is admirable. While still narrow but with a weeping form as well, the selection 'Gable's Weeping' (not pictured) adds significant interest, texture and character with irregularly weeping branches with no two specimens looking identical.

While not a comprehensive assemblage of dwarf cultivars of *Abies concolor*, there are some excellent selections available although an aggressive search may be required. The slow growth rate coupled with "patience in propagation" will undoubtedly expand the offerings of these compact selections in future years. Incidentally, from a Midwest perspective, there are excellent conifer collections to include many of these varieties at Hidden Lake Gardens (Tipton, MI), the Dawes Arboretum (Newark, OH), the Bickelhaupt Arboretum (Clinton, IA), the Chicago Botanic Garden and Dubuque Arboretum & Botanical Gardens (IA) to name just a few.

With my 21 years at Rotary Botanical Gardens, I saw many developments at this 20 acre botanical garden in Janesville, WI. This also included the addition of a dwarf and miniature conifer collection in 2005. The most asked about plant in that



Above: *Abies concolor* 'Conica'.

Left Bottom: *Abies concolor* 'La Veta'.

Right Bottom: *Abies concolor* 'Wattetzii Prostrata'.



firs, you can't go wrong with 'Wattetzii Prostrata' which has very large needles in a blue cast similar to the taller forms of 'Candicans' and 'Blue Cloak' mentioned earlier. I first saw this selection at the home of plant breeder Hans Hansen in southwest Michigan and it caught my eye from 100' away. With the bright orange of butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) in close proximity, this blue and orange combination really worked well. This selection is purported to get about 2' tall and 6' wide but it will likely continue to slowly gain additional size over time.

Some other fun selections to look for include 'Hosta la Vista' which is a recent selection found at Hidden Lake Gardens that features a globose to "flattened globose" form and leans towards a blue-green hue. The selection 'Rochester Park' is described by the American Conifer Society (ACS) as "a slow growing, upright, tree form of white fir with dense, tidy

collection has been the 'La Veta' compact white fir. Positioned adjacent to the golden foliage of a 'Princeton Gold' Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), the crisp blue of the needles really pops. The location of this specimen along a path encourages visitors to reach out and enjoy the physical texture of this slow-growing specimen which features a very nice layered effect. I've seen older specimens of 'La Veta' that go from being globose (rounded) to becoming a bit more upright in time once they reach about 48" in height. The variety 'Compacta' was first introduced in 1923 and is the classic favorite for an irregular mound of powder blue in the border or rock garden. Judicious pruning can be applied at any time as needed and this variety is one of the more commonly available in the nursery industry. In the "very blue" category of compact white

symmetrical branching, and chartreuse-green spring growth that contrasts nicely with the older gray-blue foliage.” I’ve not seen larger forms of this but it can be found in commerce. The selection ‘Tubby’ is another blue-green form that is globose when young and becomes broadly conical with age. Tight and uniform branching is a characteristic trademark of this form. For a different look in winter, consider the selection ‘Wintergold’ which shows a bright golden-yellow needle in the cooler winter months. This slow-growing, irregular upright selection features chartreuse spring growth that ages to a dark green in summer with the butter yellow needle transition beginning again in late fall. This selection benefits from a bit of afternoon shade.

With so many opportunities to incorporate compact and unique selections of *Abies concolor* in the landscape, it’s important to balance their specific needs for a “happy location” with the merits of their color and form. There are limitless opportunities for these plants in beds, borders, foundation



Abies concolor ‘Rochester Park’, photo by Glenn Herold.

planting schemes, rock gardens and much more as their value as “all season” contributors, coupled with their durability, makes them ideal for a wide spectrum of uses. Sourcing these selections can be challenging but consider contacting local nurseries, specialty conifer nurseries and reputable online sources for specific varieties.

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