



From the Potting Shed March 2019

Master Gardeners of Bergen County

SAVE THE DATE

MG meeting – Tuesday, March 26

1 Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack
1st-floor meeting room

Refreshments at 7 pm; announcements
at 7:20 pm; program to follow

Virginia Lamb presents Composting: A gardener's best tool

Backyard composting is a simple, effective, low-cost way to turn organic waste into a valuable soil amendment. Learn what you can and can't compost; tips for creating compost quickly; how to make compost tea; how to compost indoors using red wiggler worms; and uses for finished compost, referred to as "black gold" by seasoned gardeners.



Virginia Lamb

Instructor Virginia Lamb was scheduled for our September 2018 meeting, which was canceled due to the weather. She gave a mini presentation at our November meeting as a teaser for her upcoming presentation. Prior to that, she spoke to the MG of BC in 2012.

Virginia, a Bergen County native, is an environmental educator with more than 30 years of experience in recycling, waste reduction, soil ecology, and organic gardening. The former recycling coordinator for Galloway Township and Monmouth County (where she was an MG) Virginia has been a freelance educator/consultant since 2000.

Her clients include Rutgers University, [Footprint Power](#), and [Honey Brook Organic Farm](#) as well as many environmental groups and garden clubs throughout the state. Virginia will receive her master's degree in soil science from UMass Amherst in May.

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From the President's Desk



By Carolyn Gretchen

Is it spring yet?

When our children were young, one of their favorite books was *Is it Spring Yet?* The book is no longer in print, but the theme is running through my mind. Given our weather fluctuations last year and this year, there is no predictable answer to that question. However, we can still dream and plan.

Don't forget the inspiring flower shows coming up. One of the most dynamic is happening March 2-10, the [Philadelphia Flower Show](#). It's definitely worth the trip. Prefer to be closer to home? The [NJ Flower and Garden Show](#) is April 25-29 at the NJ Convention & Expo Center in Edison. There are also some workshops going on closer to home. Check "Shows, Conferences & Workshops" on page 4.

If it doesn't snow and the soil dries out and warms, we can go outside and get a jump start on early spring tasks. Get those emerging weeds before they get a strong foothold. You can divide and separate clump perennial plants, if it's warm enough. But be careful not to walk on soggy wet lawn or beds. You can do harm to the soil by being too "proactive" and compacting it.

If you are careful when checking out the garden, you may get the thrill of seeing some spring bulbs beginning to emerge. Hellebores, witch hazel, pussy willow, and the infamous skunk cabbage will be on display. If you have forsythia bushes, you can snip a few branches and bring them indoors where it's warm to force some blooms. Our approved sites will be waking up also. Go online or visit them in person to see what they are up to. See the list on pages 3-4.

Happy almost gardening!

MG OF BC NEWS

Meet Jane Nicholson, Class of 2017

By Miriam Taub

Jane Nicholson has an affinity for the 1700s. She volunteers at Garretson Forge and Farm where she enjoys all manner of things done the way they were done 300 or so years ago: Wreath-making, vegetable gardening, the seed exchange, pea planting, and participating in Garretson's various festivals.

"All gardening has to be done in the manner of the 1700s, which can be kind of a pain," she said. But the result is worth it when the volunteers eat the blemished produce grown in the garden. The good produce, she explained, is donated to the St. Paul's Community Development Corp. food pantry in Paterson.

Jane, 77, was born in Detroit, raised in Michigan, graduated from high school in Mt. Lebanon in southwestern Pennsylvania, and returned to the University of Michigan as an out-of-state student majoring in history. Her father, Fred Nicholson, an electrical engineer by training and a salesman by profession, moved the family around for his job, eventually settling in Tarpon Springs, FL.



Jane Nicholson

After college graduation, Jane's roommates decided to share an apartment in New York City, and she joined them. Her first "intentional job," as she labeled it, was as a social worker at Bellevue Hospital. After Bellevue, she worked for the City of New York in various capacities for just shy of 50 years. "Forty-nine years and a few quarters" is how she described her tenure in the Big Apple.

During that time, Jane worked as a program planner/reporting and evaluation; her official title was administrative staff analyst. She worked for numerous agencies whose names have changed over the years, but the agencies covered the areas of environmental protection; child development; home care; and work experience and training. After hours, Jane pursued her education and earned two master's degrees: One from

New York University in hospital administration and another from Columbia University in public administration.

Jane said she always had an interest in gardening and found the MG program via Google. She enrolled in the Class of 2017 though she missed the orientation, with Joel's permission, because she hadn't yet retired when the class began. The best part of the program, she said, was learning about the different volunteer sites, though Garretson captured her interest because of the variety of things to do, its history, and the proximity to her home in Wood-Ridge. The Garretson farmhouse is listed on the National and New Jersey Register of Historic Places.

Garretson isn't Jane's first encounter with national historic places. She's a volunteer tour guide at the Sandy Hook Lighthouse at Fort Hancock, part of the Gateway National Recreation Area. Jane explained that the lighthouse, built in 1764, is the oldest working lighthouse in the United States. Every Sunday she gives three to four tours of the lighthouse, which include a climb up a spiral staircase (95 steps) to the lens room.

It's there that visitors can look to the northeast and see the steel structure of the former parachute jump at Coney Island. How did she get involved at the Sandy Hook Lighthouse? Several years ago, Jane said, she enrolled in a workshop to make beach plum jam when she saw a notice seeking volunteers.

Jane's other activities include singing in the choir of the First Presbyterian Church of Rutherford and as a grunt worker (her terminology) at FOCAS (Friends of the County Animal Shelter) where she feeds the unadoptable cats, helps set up adoption events at Petco, and hauls equipment and merchandise for the organization's flea markets. Jane has two cats of her own at home. She had been a skier, she said, until "I banged up my knee." She's also a scuba diver, though she lamented that her last scuba trip was two years ago because "I can't find anyone my age to dive with."

At home, Jane said she has raised beds in her backyard and adheres to organic gardening methods — not so easy when you have various varmints eager to eat whatever you grow. A current project is to master the use of a plastic greenhouse, assembled in her yard by her brother, Nic, and his friend.

Despite the Internet claim that the greenhouse could be set up in two days, it took the two men a week to assemble it with its hundreds of parts. The greenhouse got too hot in the summer, but it did yield a lot of lettuce well into December, she said. "I thought it would be so easy," she chuckled.

THIS AND THAT

Attention tomato lovers

If you love Rutgers tomatoes — and who doesn't — here's your chance to order seeds for some old-time varieties. The Rediscover the Jersey Tomato project is bringing back tomatoes with the delicious, tangy, old-time Jersey tomato flavor that NJ farmers grew from the 1930s-1970s.

Varieties available are the Rutgers 250, Ramapo, Moreton, and KC-146. The seeds come 30 to a packet for \$4 per packet. Click [here](#) for the order form.

Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station is also selling T-shirts with images of Jersey tomatoes and strawberries. The T-shirts are available in sizes S, M, L, XL, and XXL for \$18 each.

SPOTLIGHT ON ...

... 2019 MG of BC volunteer sites

All of the MG of BC volunteer sites below are available for the 2019 gardening season. Check the information below from your favorite sites, as some of it may have changed from last year. And don't be shy about volunteering somewhere you've never been before. New places, new faces, and new plants await you.

Bergen New Bridge Medical Center

230 E. Ridgewood Ave., Paramus

Various days and times

Contacts: Lynette Stewart, 201-310-2498

lynettstewart35@aol.com

Ilona Toth Robinson, 732-307-4091

irobinson@newbridgehealth.org or

heddyharvests@gmail.com

Butterfly and Native Garden at Overpeck Park

40 Fort Lee Road, Leonia

Tuesday 9:30 am-1:30 pm

Contacts: Pat Knight, 201-848-0069

gspmk@hotmail.com

Don Torino, president, Bergen County Audubon Society

greatauk4@gmail.com

Davies Arboretum & Wildlife Preserve

49 Anderson Road, Demarest

Monday 9:30 am

Contacts: Jessica Wang, 201-600-8495

jessica007wang@gmail.com

Joanne Holmberg

joalholmberg@hotmail.com

Garretson Forge and Farm

4-02 River Road, Fair Lawn

Thursday 10 am-2 pm

2nd and 4th Sunday 1-4 pm

Contact: Lida Gellman, 201-461-4204

lb922@aol.com

Hackensack River Greenway

1404 (approximately) River Road, Teaneck

Various days and times

Contact: Richard Karp, 201-357-4048

meadowlark@optonline.net

The Hermitage

335 N. Franklin Turnpike, Ho-Ho-Kus

Tuesday and Wednesday 9:30 am-noon

Contacts: Kathleen Sullivan, 201-934-7595

kmsrhc@verizon.net

Lynn Curtin

lacurtin1@gmail.com

Master Gardener Helpline, RCE Office

1 Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack

Monday-Thursday (April-October) 10 am-noon

Contact: Karen A. Riede, 201-336-6788

karen.riede@rutgers.edu

McFaul Environmental Center

150 Crescent Ave., Wyckoff

Wednesday 8:30 am-noon

Contact: Joseph Cooper, 201-666-5111

joseph@MGofBC.org

Email to confirm seasonal start and stop dates.

New Jersey Botanical Garden

(GPS information) 2 Morris Road, Ringwood 07456-

0302; 973-962-9534

Wednesday 9 am-noon

Contact: Dania Cheddie, 201-699-0803

danial.cheddie@gmail.com

Teaneck Creek Conservancy

20 Puffin Way, Teaneck

Wednesday 9-11 am year-round

Contact: Denise Slusarev, 917-975-1400

fionaalex@optonline.net

Thielke Arboretum of Glen Rock

460 Doremus Ave., Glen Rock

Tuesday and Saturday 9 am-noon year-round (weather permitting)

Contacts: Bruce Walencyk, 201-921-3020

brucewalencyk@gmail.com

Jean Epiphan, stewardship director and forest ecologist

stewardship@thielkearboretum.org

jnepiphan@thielkearboretum.org

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Van Saun County Park

216 Forest Ave., Paramus

Monday 9 am-noon

Contact: Jeffrey Chan, 201-723-7422

jchan11918@msn.com

Meet inside the zoo.

Washington Spring Garden in Van Saun Park

216 Forest Ave., Paramus

Thursday 9 am-noon

Contact: Suzanne Danzig, 201-218-4093

suzannedanzig@gmail.com

Special project

New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home

1 Veterans Way, Paramus

Thursday 10 am-noon

Contact: Carolyn Gretchen, 201-893-1664

dcgretchen76@gmail.com

SHOWS, CONFERENCES & WORKSHOPS

Several conferences and workshops are scheduled for the next few months. Register early!

Rutgers Home Gardeners School

Saturday, March 23, 9 am-4 pm (check-in begins at 8 am). Hickman Hall, 89 George St., New Brunswick 08901. **Note:** Many of the workshops have been filled.

The Home Gardeners School is made up of 40 individual workshop sessions covering an array of horticulture topics. You select the four workshops that are most relevant to your gardening interests to create a customized schedule. You have the option of attending two keynote presentations during lunch.

Fee: \$90. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

'Top 10 trees' workshop

Sunday, March 24, 1-4 pm. Environmental Education Center, Thielke Arboretum of Glen Rock, 460 Doremus Ave., Glen Rock. Space is limited for the "Top 10 trees of northeastern NJ – the hardiest native trees for local suburban habitats."

Jean Epiphan, a trustee and land and stewardship manager at Thielke, will speak. Her presentation will consist of a lecture and slide show from 1-3 pm and a walking tour of the trees of Thielke from 3-4 pm.

Fee: \$20 for arboretum members/\$25 for non-members; 50% off for 2019 Thielke volunteers. Earn two Rutgers

Master Gardener CEUs. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

Monmouth County Home Garden Symposium

Saturday, March 30, 8:30 am-3:30 pm. Monmouth County Agriculture Building, 4000 Kozloski Road, Freehold 07728.

This symposium provides a day of gardening presentations by the Master Gardeners of Monmouth County. Among the presentations: Four seasons of colorful shrubs in your landscape; growing great vegetables; and tips from the butterfly whisperer.

Fee: \$5 by check; registration deadline March 15. Bring your own lunch. Beverages and snacks available. Click [here](#) to register.

Monmouth County School Garden Conference

Friday, April 5, 8 am-2:30 pm. Monmouth County Agriculture Building, 4000 Kozloski Road, Freehold 07728.

The mission of this conference is to support schools that want to create, or already have created, a school garden, as well as to address their needs and issues on an individual basis. The morning will consist of general-interest presentations to the entire audience, while the afternoon will include specific-interest demonstrations. Several outdoor agencies and organizations will be on hand to offer opportunities for educators to build and improve their outdoor classrooms/curricula.

Fee: \$25 (includes continental breakfast and boxed lunch). Click [here](#) for registration information.

Beekeeping for beginners

Thursday, May 2 and Friday, May 3, 9 am-4 pm and May 4, 9 am-noon. Check in May 2 is at 8:30 am. Rutgers Eco-Complex, 1200 Florence-Columbus Road, Bordentown 08505.

This 2½-day course will cover everything you need to know to further your hobby or get your business off the ground. You'll get hands-on training on topics such as assembling hives and opening and examining colonies.

Fee for MGs: \$300. Click [here](#) to view the list of course topics, directions to the venue, and to register. A short video about beekeeping is also available. *You must preregister.*

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International MG Conference

June 17-21. Valley Forge Casino Resort, King of Prussia, PA 19406. **Note:** Registration closes May 23, and some tours have already been filled.

This conference is held every two years and covers just about everything: Speakers, field study, pre- and post-conference tours, evening programs, and a marketplace. Examples of the range of seminars are witch hazels, climate change, carnivorous plants, bog gardening, vegetable diseases. The list goes on.

Fee: \$350 for early registration by April 14; \$390 April 15-May 23. Other fees may apply. Click [here](#) to visit the website and to register.

VOLUNTEER SITE NEWS

The Hermitage

Cynthia Drennan (left) and Elizabeth Gil (center) from the Class of 2019 and Sharon Ma (right), Class of 2018, helped with the maple sugaring event Feb. 16.

A total of 17 trees were tapped, and the sap is expected to run until mid-March. If you can help us collect the sap and boil it into maple syrup, contact [Lynn Curtin](#) for a time slot.



Useful links

Many local garden centers give discounts to MGs. See the list on our [website](#). Bring your membership card when shopping.

Thielke Arboretum of Glen Rock

This Norway maple, which had fallen several years ago, was no match for Class of 2019 students, from left Caroline Newman, Cynthia Drennan, and Herb Arbeiter. They removed portions of the tree's canopy that overhung the trail and cut the remains into logs that were used to define the edge of the trails.



Photo by Diane Van Kemper

OUT AND ABOUT

Frelinghuysen Arboretum

Frelinghuysen Arboretum is located at 353 E. Hanover Ave., Morris Township. All events are in the Haggarty Center. Visit the [website](#).

Orchid program and judging

Bring an orchid to be judged by the North East Judging Center of the American Orchid Society or come for a free educational program. The educational program begins at 10:30 am Saturday, March 16 and the judging begins at noon.

Dan Hinkley speaks about Windcliff

Dan Hinkley, plant consultant, teacher, naturalist, and lecturer, will share the joys and tribulations of creating his current garden, Windcliff (located on a windy cliff) as part of the arboretum's Great Speaker Series. The event will take place from 2-3:30 pm Sunday, March 17.

As creator of the famed [Heronswood](#) garden near Seattle, Dan has explored remote corners of the globe in search of new plants to expand the ever-growing offerings in his, and ultimately our own, gardens. Dan is recognized worldwide as a giant in the field of horticulture. This is a rare East Coast visit by one of the most dynamic and popular speakers in today's plant world.

Fee: \$35 members/\$40 non-members. Earn 1.5 Rutgers Master Gardener CEUs. Click [here](#) to register. Then scroll down to March 17 in the left column.

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Garretson Forge and Farm

By Lida Gellman

Garretson will kick off the spring season with its annual Pea Day planting from 1-4 pm Sunday, March 17.

After that, regular weekly MG hours will begin Thursday, March 21 from 10 am-2 pm. We also meet on the second and fourth Sundays of the month from 1-4 pm. Bring gloves and small hand tools, such as pruners and trowels; we have the rest. The group meets rain or shine since there's a small greenhouse and plenty to do even in inclement weather. This is a great opportunity for Class of 2019 members to begin your required hours, and we look forward to seeing old friends as well.

Garretson is located at 4-02 River Road, Fair Lawn. Contact me at LB922@aol.com if you have any questions. Visit the [website](#).

Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck

The Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck has scheduled two cleanups per month (the first Saturday and third Sunday) of each Greenway area. The first location to be cleaned up this season is Terhune Park, 550 River Road, Teaneck, from 10 am-noon March 23 and April 7. Meet at the southern end of Terhune Park. Dress appropriately, and bring tools, such as loppers. You can park across River Road at Hillcrest. For more information, visit the [website](#) and click on "Events."

The Hermitage

The history of the Hermitage was shaped by the women who lived there. A lecture titled "A feminine point of view - the women of the Hermitage from Theodosia Prevost Burr to Mary Elizabeth Rosencrantz" will explore the changing roles of women in American society through the lives and experiences of the women at the Hermitage.

The lecture will take place at 7:30 pm Wednesday, March 27 in the Hermitage summer kitchen. As you walk through the house, you'll hear about these compelling characters and witness the impact their decisions and passions left on the Hermitage.

Tickets are \$10 each for the approximately 90-minute lecture and must be reserved in advance. Space is limited to 20 people per program. Call the museum office at 201-445-8311 for a reservation. The Hermitage is located at 335 N. Franklin Turnpike, Ho-Ho-Kus. Visit the [website](#).

NJ Botanical Garden/Skylands

NJBG is located at 2 Morris Road, Ringwood. Indoor events take place in the Carriage House Visitor Center and are free unless noted. Parking is free at this time of year. Visit the [website](#).

End-of-winter tree walk

Learn the differences among the trees and how to tell them apart in this walk led by Rich Flynn, head landscape designer. Meet at the Carriage House at 10 am Saturday, March 23 and wear sturdy, comfortable shoes.

Gardening for butterflies

Don Torino of the Bergen County Audubon Society will give a photo presentation in the Carriage House about creating gardens with perennials, annuals, and native plants to welcome butterflies. The event is at 1 pm Sunday, March 24.

Rain gardens: A blooming technology

Green Infrastructure, native plants, and rain gardens are a vital and affordable way to improve the health and resilience of our watersheds and ecological communities as well as your backyard. Karin LaGreca, sustainability consultant, will speak in the Carriage House, beginning at 1 pm Sunday, March 31, followed by a walk in the botanical garden (weather permitting). **Fee:** \$5 for members/\$10 for non-members.

Thielke Arboretum of Glen Rock

The arboretum and the NJ Watershed Ambassadors Program will sponsor a rain garden event from 1-4 pm Saturday, March 30 featuring family friendly science experiments and demonstrations; guided tours of the arboretum for kids; and information on environmentally conscious gardening practices for parents.

The cost is \$10 per family. Click [here](#) to register. The arboretum is located at 460 Doremus Ave., Glen Rock. Visit the [website](#).

Wyckoff Area Garden Club

Cathy Miller, who created flower arrangements for five U.S. presidents, will design an arrangement while entertaining her audience with stories about her White House experiences. The former concert pianist also will play a few of her favorite pieces on the piano. Cathy's presentation will be held from 2-4 pm Sunday, April 7 at the Ridgewood Public Library, 125 N. Maple Ave., Ridgewood.

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This event is a fund-raiser for the club's Sally Ditton Memorial Scholarship. Tea sandwiches and sweets will be served, and one audience member will go home with the flower arrangement that Cathy will create. Tickets are \$20 each. Click [here](#) to visit the club's website and print a form to purchase tickets.

HORTICULTURE

Do you recognize me?

By Edith Wallace

I recall the evening when my friend called to invite me to his house immediately to smell the *Dracaena fragrans* in flower. Then, imagine my surprise a few years later to find these fragrant flowers in the Glen Rock Public Library.

Why did it bloom? Mostly luck. This is one of the many dracaenas that is easy to care for and the one most likely to flower. The botanical name *Dracaena* comes from a Greek word meaning female dragon. Taxonomists can have fun: Where did the common name "corn plant" come from?



The mighty bonsai

By Marie Alfano

The Japanese word "bonsai" literally translates to "tree in a pot," according to the *Bonsai Survival Manual* by Colin Lewis. The bonsai combines the beauty of a manmade sculpture with the perfection of Mother Nature into one art form. Bonsai originated from the Chinese art of "penjing," or miniature landscaping. The art of bonsai is simply growing a wild tree inside a small vessel.

Bonsai are ordinary trees that have been miniaturized using horticultural techniques. These trees are shaped by the artist so that they have the same beauty as a tree growing in its natural environment. "Bonsai are an artistic expression that uses almost any species of tree or shrub that bears leaves or needles small enough to be in proportion to the scale of the desired result," explained John Michalski, president of the [Great Swamp Bonsai](#)

[Society](#), which meets at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum in Morris Township.

"In addition to small leaf size, the bonsai artists seek species or varieties that have an interesting bark, branching patterns, and intricate surface roots, all of which enhance the simulation of great age in the resulting design," John said.



A close-up of the bark of a collected olive tree, trained as a bonsai for six years and estimated to be 50-75 years old. William "Will" Farro of the Bergen Bonsai Society explained that collected trees often start out with desirable characteristics that lend themselves to promising, potential bonsai having been subjected to harsh conditions in nature.

The owner of this tree "trained" it by selecting branches; giving those branches movement by wiring, bending, and pruning them; developing root structure; and pairing it with a proper pot that complements

the features of the tree. The owner has been working on this tree for more than six years to make it show-worthy, Will said. Photo courtesy Bergen Bonsai Society.

Bonsai are like any other living organism: If given the correct environmental conditions, they will thrive. If they are properly cared for, bonsai will live longer than their counterparts growing in nature.

In his book, *The Art of Living Sculpture*, author Jack Douthitt states: "By understanding the growth habits of the plant, the artist can manipulate and harness those characteristics to help create a bonsai shape. Both artistic vision and horticultural techniques are required to produce the illusion of a large old tree growing in nature from a bonsai only inches high." Bonsai artists could work years to develop their trees.

While the thought of creating the perfect bonsai might be intimidating, there are plenty of resources available on the Internet and excellent YouTube videos with step-by-step instructions. What I found most helpful was attending local meetings. At the Bergen Bonsai Society, which meets in Teaneck, members were creating massive amounts of bonsai soil to purchase and use for their personal bonsai. They passed along tips and tales of their own experiences of working with their first bonsai.

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For example, Len Schwartz, president of the Bergen Bonsai Society, explained that a person needs patience when working with bonsai. "You need to think in the long term," he said. "Maybe let it live for a few months in its new environment" before you start major alterations. To learn more about this great group of individuals who are dedicated to promoting their knowledge and appreciation of bonsai, visit the group's [website](#) where you'll find meeting dates and events, which include lectures and workshops. Everyone is welcome from the very beginner to the most advanced artist.

Meanwhile, the Great Swamp Bonsai Society, whose meetings are also free and open to the public, includes members from internationally recognized artists to newcomers who have yet to design their first bonsai. Meetings feature a new topic each month, usually related to the time of year.

Once or twice a year the group hosts a visiting artist from Europe, Japan, or North America for a paid afternoon workshop. To receive the society's online newsletter, contact [John Michalski](#). The club's annual open house will be 10 am-4 pm June 2 and will feature lectures, demonstrations, display trees, and various bonsai materials for sale.

FROM THE GREEN SIDE

These are a few of my favorite tools

By Arnie Friedman

With the arrival of winter every year my pickup truck gets emptied out and cleaned. Come spring all our tools go back in. Each spring I try to limit what I put into the truck to those tools we really need and use for our landscape and garden construction business. Over the years I've tried to stay with the basics and not to carry those seemingly clever tools that catch our eye but wind up being used once or twice and left to clutter the truck bed.

So here's what I think will cover 90% of all garden tasks. For planting, digging, transplanting, and dividing perennials as well as deadheading and pruning, there are five basic tools that will do almost everything.

1. The long-handled pointed shovel: This is the most important tool a gardener can have. I use a shovel because it's better for lifting, digging, and scooping. The longer handle gives more leverage for prying up rocks and root balls. Sure, there are times a spade



comes in handy. Spades are especially good for cutting an edge, slicing through a large perennial when dividing, or for cleaning up gravel and sand.

A shovel has a bend in the neck just before the blade whereas the spade is relatively flat and all in line. Of course there are variations. There are shovels with flat ends for scooping up loose materials like gravel and sand, and there are pointed-end spades that are good for planting small plants or bulbs. The D handle provides more control for fine garden work.

I like the long-handled, pointed shovel because it's the best all-around tool, and if I carried only one shovel this would be it. As for construction, I look for at least two bolts or rivets to hold the blade. I'm convinced that wood handles are stronger than the new fiberglass shafts. Of course we have cracked both kinds so now I only buy the brand that gives me a "lifetime guarantee" so when the shaft breaks my nursery gives me a replacement.



2. The steel rake: When things are dug and planted there's nothing better for moving the topsoil back into place than a steel bow rake. This is our go-to tool for spreading topsoil for a lawn, raking gravel or sand into place, or pushing around loose material. There's a

heavier-duty version without the wire bow holding the head. That version has the steel head attached directly to the handle. Those are heavier and are used more for heavy gravel, etc. The bow version, pictured, is the best all-around as it weighs less so it doesn't tire you out but is still strong and versatile.

3. The pickaxe: We use a pick when roots are in the way, soil is too hard to shovel, or rocks need knocking and prying out of a hole or to break up hard surfaces like asphalt and concrete. There are several different picks or pickaxes, depending on the shape of the head. For



Pickaxe (left) and mattock

real breaking, a pointed pick is best, but generally speaking, the most all-around tool in our arsenal is the mattock or pickaxe that has a sharpened blade — like an

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axe — on one side and a horizontal blade — like an adze — on the other. This tool cuts through tough roots really well. Swinging it breaks up tough soil, and the flat blade side is good for cutting up sod and weeds as well as getting under rocks and buried items.

4. The bypass pruner: For any cutting, pruning, or deadheading of herbaceous and woody plants up to about a half-inch thick we use a pruner. There are two basic types: The anvil pruner, which has a cutting blade



that closes on a flat plate crushing through a stem and the bypass pruner whose sharpened blade cuts through material and closes next to the flat, opposite side leaving a clean slice. Only the bypass style should be used because it produces a

healthy cut that heals fast. If your stem is too thick to cut through with your hand pruner then you need a handsaw.

5. Handsaw: For cutting and pruning when the pruner isn't sufficient, I use a good quality handsaw. For fast, smooth, and quick cutting I buy a very sharp saw with double or triple action.



This means the saw teeth are actually double or triple in placement so you cut much faster. I find that the Japanese brands like Silky are the absolute best. They come in several sizes in folding and scabbard styles. My favorite folding saw is the

Silky Pocket Boy. It fits in a pocket and will cut up to about a 4-inch limb. I also like the Silky Zubat, pictured above left, which has an 11-inch blade and will cut even bigger branches. However, once the limb you're cutting

is too thick for a handsaw it might be time for a tree surgeon or chain saw.

Keep it clean

Remember that keeping your tools clean and sharp is the key to easy gardening. When your shovel or spade tip wears flat from constant digging in rocky soil grind a new point or buy a new one. Pickaxes and mattocks do get dull, so sharpen them on a grinding wheel or take them to a good lawn equipment repair shop that will grind the blades for you. Your pruners need to be kept sharp so get a small sharpening tool and rub the blade to hone the edge. Silky saws can't be sharpened at home but, don't worry, they stay sharp for years. When you wear it down, buy a new one.

FARMERS MARKETS

Ramsey Farmers Market, Eric Smith Middle School, 2 Monroe St., Ramsey; through March (no markets in April and May); Sundays 10 am-2 pm.
www.ramseyfarmersmarket.org

Bergen County Rutgers Cooperative Extension Office
Joel Flagler Agricultural/Resources Management Agent & County Extension Dept. Head 201-336-6780
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HORTICULTURE GRAPEVINE

Deadline for the Horticulture Grapevine is the 25th of the prior month. Submit information about garden club meetings that are open to the public to Miriam Taub.

March 1 **2 pm, Demarest Garden Club**, United Methodist Church, 109 Hardenburgh Ave., Demarest.
Speaker: Jim Wright, naturalist and author. Topic: Birds in your backyard.

March 4 **7 pm, Sundial Garden Club**, Meadowbrook Elementary School, 50 Piermont Ave., Hillsdale.
Speaker: Sharon Lynch, Bergen County African Violet Society. Topic: African violet magic - the history, care, and propagation of America's favorite house plant.

- March 7** **7:30 pm, Garden Club of Harrington Park**, upstairs in the Harrington Park Library, 10 Herring St., Harrington Park. Speaker: Bruce Crawford, director of Rutgers University Gardens. Topic: Mixed borders - thoughts on blending shrubs and perennials. Q&A session and refreshments to follow program. Visit the club's [website](#).
- March 11** **7:30 pm, Garden Club of Bergenfield**, Cooper's Pond, 133-153 W. Church St., Bergenfield. Program: Members and guests will make potpourri, a dried mixture of scented fruit peel, flowers, herbs, and spices for the upcoming May plant sale.
- March 12** **7 pm, Ramsey Area Garden Club**, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, 55 Wyckoff Ave., corner of Woodland Avenue, Ramsey. Speaker: Paul Kubarych, landscape architect, Rohsler's Allendale Nursery. Topic: Doors to the garden - designs to make a focal point of the entrance to the garden and more.
- March 13** **10 am, Wyckoff Area Garden Club's joint meeting with the Oakland Garden Club**, Wyckoff Public Library, 200 Woodland Ave., Wyckoff. Speaker: MG Janet Schulz. Topic: Hints for a successful garden. Refreshments at 9:30 am.
- March 13** **7:30 pm, Bergen-Passaic chapter, Native Plant Society of NJ**, NY-NJ Trail Conference headquarters, 600 Ramapo Valley Road (Route 202), Mahwah. Park in the lot or the Ramapo County Reservation, a short walk through the woods. Parking and trail are not lighted, so bring a flashlight. Topic: Getting ready for spring - a discussion among members.
- March 14** **7:30 pm, Garden Club of Teaneck**, Rodda Center, Room 2B, 250 Colonial Court, Teaneck; enter on Palisade Avenue. Use upper parking lot for handicap accessibility. Speaker: MG Janet Schulz. Topic: A collector's point of view - the rare, unusual, and some old favorites; how they look and perform in our gardens. Refreshments at 7 pm.
- March 19** **7 pm, Backyard Garden Club sponsored by the Friends of the River Vale Free Public Library**, River Vale Library, 412 Rivervale Road, River Vale. Speaker: Donald Bayne, environmental educator and president of the [Friends of Sterling Forest](#). Topic: Reading the woods - the tell-tale signs of what's in the woods.
- March 19** **7:45 pm, Glen Rock Garden Club**, Glen Rock Annex, 678 Maple Ave., Glen Rock. Speaker: Walter Perry, Perry's Florist. Topic: Impatiens - the latest varieties. Doors open at 7:30 pm. Refreshments served.

Share photos of your volunteer work or of your garden. When submitting photos, be sure to identify everyone in the photo by first and last name and provide the name of the person who took the photo. Submit photos to janet-schulz@hotmail.com.

The Master Gardeners of Bergen County doesn't share or sell its email/ mailing list/ membership directory to non-members or to other organizations. Our membership information is confidential and for use by members for official MG use only. Please don't share our list with non-members or use it for any unauthorized or commercial purposes.