

In this Issue...

Volunteers Keep Jericho Gardens Blooming Amid Pandemic Restrictions by Susan Adams..... 1

Massive Lilac Collection at UVM Horticultural Farm Saved by Volunteers by Kitty Werner.....2

Life is Like a Garden—Even During a Pandemic by Erin Hunt.....4

Landscaping in The Time of COVID-19 by Juanita Burch-Clay.....5

Pandemic Seeds Appreciation for Self-Sufficiency by Julie Marks7

Cambridge at Night by Deborah Barry.....7

Spending Time at the Swamp by Alma Beals.....8

Northfield Gardeners Reflect on 2020 by Christine Barnes9

A New Look for an Old Garden by Bea Cole10

Backyard Compost Wizardry by Jennifer Chiodo11

How Haikus Saved Us by Lisa Kent.....12

10 Pet-Friendly Houseplants by Jennifer Munro.....13

The Importance of Preschool Gardening by Maggie Rubick.....15



Photo courtesy of Susan Adams

Volunteers Keep Jericho Gardens Blooming Amid Pandemic Restrictions

By Susan Adams, Jericho, VT

This has been a challenging, but interesting year for the dedicated volunteers who tend the gardens at the Deborah Rawson Memorial Library in Jericho. Despite the pandemic, volunteers stepped up to ensure that the established gardens continued to thrive, and the vegetable gardens produced abundantly for our local food shelf.

At first, I was not sure how we could make this work. I decided to forgo using our trusty Master Gardener List Serve to invite helpers as I was very conscious of the COVID-19 danger. I began working solo in the early spring, and each week, added a few loyal gardeners. By mid-March we were ready to start vegetable plants with our local elementary school children. Unfortunately, one week into the project, the schools closed. We dearly missed

working with the children, but I was able to use my own grow lab at home to start all the seeds needed.

Throughout the spring, summer, and fall months we had 5 to 8 volunteers each week. It was wonderful to be together again - wearing masks and respecting social distance. Every moment was precious. Our gardens thrived, as did our friendships as we maintained the lovely butterfly and perennial gardens and tended the winterberries and Miss Kim lilacs which surround our library.

For several years, we have also researched and planted a literary-based theme garden in addition to the vegetable gardens. We started four years ago to celebrate William Shakespeare's 400th birthday. This was followed by honoring Beatrix Potter, and in 2020, we dedicated our theme garden to naturalist and children's author, Thornton Burgess.

The highlight of our summer was when we invited the community to help harvest 300 pounds of potatoes to donate to our local food shelf. Ten local churches run and support the Essex, Jericho, Underhill Ecumenical Ministry Food Shelf. Once a

month, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Jericho, food is distributed to people in the community.

It was a beautiful day, with beautiful potatoes and beautiful folks enjoying the brilliant sunshine and the joy of finding treasures in the dirt.

Massive Lilac Collection at UVM Horticultural Farm Saved by Volunteers

By Kitty Werner, South Burlington, VT

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, project volunteers managed to accomplish a lot of work at the UVM Horticultural Farm in South Burlington this year.

Photo courtesy of Susan Adams



However, the biggest challenge was battling the invasive plant species that choke out the lilacs. Bittersweet, grapevines, various trees, and other invasive plants just love crawling up our collections of lilacs.

In the fall of 2019, an invasive planning group was created coordinating with the State of Vermont to create a plan to eradicate the nuisances. But the pandemic put all of that on hold.

Luckily, the lilac collection—comprised of more than 90 plants—was fortunate to have a few loyal volunteers help keep up the fight throughout the summer and fall. Every day we pulled and pruned. But those wretched vines always came back.

We did make some headway. Jim Hayden, a new curator for the Cary Garden who is researching and surveying the collection to bring the information up to date, uncovered Jeff Young's short row of lilacs that had been surrounded by advancing sumac. Two truckloads of compost were ordered and delivered, and eventually spread around lilacs — but only about half of them. We'll need another two truckloads next year to finish the job.

In the meantime, a book is being created on each of the lilacs and their history as an educational tool. Our collection has a few rare lilacs that I am hoping to restore to health.



Photo courtesy of Kitty Werner

Lilacs aren't just "lilac-colored" but come in an amazing variety of colors and shades from white, lilac, blue, violet, magenta, pink, and anything in between. Working with the International Lilac Society, I am learning more about the plants in our collection. My fantasy is to finally put a cultivar name to those that haven't been identified as yet. That's a long shot if there ever was one.

This year, we also managed to clear the Cary Garden and uncovered several "missing" plants. The raintree was cleared of invasives. The rhododendrons were mulched and the path behind them worked on by their new curator, Tad Dippel.

If and when restrictions lift in 2021, we could use all the help we can get catching up on things. Come and learn about our plants and how to care for them, as well as your own!



Photo courtesy of Kitty Werner

Life is Like a Garden—Even During a Pandemic

By Erin Hunt, Moretown, VT
www.vermontpotlady.com

I have been a gardener for years, and like every other aspect of my life, the pandemic immediately affected my favorite hobby. At first, I was annoyed. Amateur gardeners were buying out my favorite products at the hardware stores, the garden centers seemed more crowded than ever, and inventory has been a problem all season.

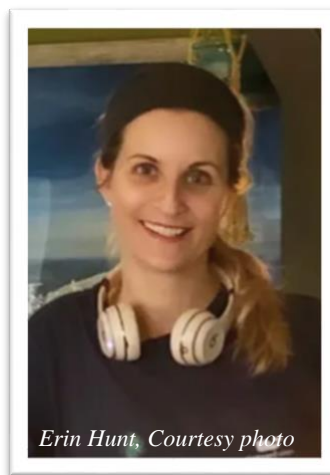
After I got over myself, I realized what a wonderful thing it is that people are flocking to such a beautiful and fruitful (literally) hobby. Gardening isn't just about how pretty your roses look; it's about growing and creating healthy food, as well as helping people better understand the environment in which they live. More people than ever have reached out to me for help and advice, and are finding the solace that we gardeners know well to be a welcome quarantine relief.

That solace has been more vital to me than ever these days, and has been a much needed mental and physical escape from my computer screen and Zoom calls. But the extra time spent in my garden while working from home has also helped me apply some concrete garden principles to my life:

Only patience will prevail. You can't rush the seasons, no matter how much you want them to change. When we all went into lock-down at home in March, we thought it would only be for two weeks. And as we entered fall and the 6th month of the pandemic, it became clear that we wouldn't be able to rush through this.

In life, as in the garden, we can't rush the seasons. While we wait for the pandemic end, all we can do is continue to nurture and care for ourselves, eat right, and get our vitamins. One day, it will all be in the past.

Cheating the basics never helps. When it comes to gardening, if your soil, water, and nutrient levels aren't right, you get a pretty disappointing result. The same goes with people. If we cheat ourselves from eating correctly, sleeping enough,



and taking time to make sure we are as healthy as we can be, we will show up as disappointments as well.

Planning and maintenance are key. Sometimes, people think gardening is just planting and waiting for flowers to arrive. Those who have been doing this awhile know that the upfront planning and daily maintenance is what really makes a garden successful. The planting is a very

small part of the whole process.

When it comes to managing jobs and school and everything else from home, I am trying to spend more time planning and scheduling my days to make sure I can do everything I need to, in the best environment for me to do so. Showing up is only part of the battle, showing up as my best self is the goal.

Location matters. Some plants like dry soil, some need damp soil, others need blazing sun all day while others need afternoon shade. Where you place a plant will determine its success right from the get-go. I felt the same way when I started working from home. I thought I could work from couch, my dining table, my bed and anywhere else. I quickly realized that I needed a defined space for me that was comfortable and convenient for me to work. Once I settled on where I work versus where I relax, I was able to up my performance and my spirits.

Nothing lasts forever. When you are a Vermont gardener, you usually stare out the window from November to April waiting for the snow to melt and you can get going. Every year it feels like spring will never come, and I can't even imagine the barren outside looking lush and green. But before I know it, I'm picking dirt out of my fingernails again (and that's a good thing).

This pandemic will not last forever. And just like the weather, and a May Vermont snow, we may not be out of it as soon as we want to be. But the day will come when we can live life a little more freely.



Photo courtesy of Juanita Burch-Clay

Landscaping in The Time of COVID-19

By Juanita Burch-Clay, Middletown Springs, VT

Our house, with a wall of glass panels, looks out over a five-acre field and picturesque hills. This gambrel post and beam has a great view, but hasn't had much in the way of landscaping in front.

Because of the passive solar design, no trees had ever been planted which could block the southern exposure. For years I had wanted to give more life to the front of the house, but other commitments and expenses took my time.

After retirement, I consulted with Judith Irven, known from the EMG training. Her recommendations motivated me to make improvements by the back door last summer - a small project, but a first toe in the water of landscape design.

In March 2020, when I lost my part-time job as a ski instructor due to the lockdown, I decided it was time to take the next step. My long term "COVID project" would involve landscaping to provide more plant diversity, more seasonal color and texture, more native plants, and more visual interest around the front of my home. A priority was easy maintenance and minimal weeding as well as support for birds and pollinators.

I was eager to try the "lasagna" layering technique for creating new planting areas without tearing up sod or disturbing the soil structure. With layers of dried leaves, the last of the previous year's compost, cardboard, newspaper, mulch hay, and a load of aged cow manure from a local farmer, I got to work.

Starting in March, I drew garden outlines on the lawn with old hoses, trying to create curves and pleasing shapes but keeping in mind the practical concerns of mowing and plant access. From March into May, I chugged along, digging out and thinning current plants by the bucket-full, laying out cardboard, and spreading compost, leaves, hay and mulch.

Much as I'd like say I had a precisely drawn plan, with the progression of seasonal colors clearly marked, I put little on paper. My design process was very organic and intuitive, and I spent a lot of time just staring at the spaces and reflecting. I wanted to keep some of my easy-care perennials (day-lilies, sedums, sundrops, and geranium), while making space for some native shrubs (bunch cherry, high bush cranberry, Labrador tea, nannyberry, ninebark) and filling in with annuals for prolonged color and future flexibility.

I researched native shrubs and trees, keeping in mind the need to avoid blocking my windows. My compromise was several dwarf cultivars of the natives. In spite of the May snowstorm that damaged my shrubs the day after I bought them (ah, Vermont), they have all survived and seem to be thriving.



Photo courtesy of Juanita Burch-Clay

The addition of annuals among the perennials filled the empty spaces (zinnia, cosmos, cleome, tithonia, amaranth), and even in late October, there was a pleasing mass of color and texture. Once everything was planted, mulched and growing, it was time to work on phase two: the wall.

The wall was intended to be a dry-stone retaining wall to define the slope of the lawn before it hits the field, with an expanded perennial bed below. It was easy to imagine, but not so easy to bring to fruition! I began with guidance from a local wall builder, followed by research online and reading books on masonry. Then I laid out old hoses on the lawn to determine the line of the wall. Finally, with trepidation, I okayed the digging of the trenches (by heavy machinery) followed by the shoveling in (by hand) of several inches of gravel base for protection against frost heaves.

Next, we needed the building material. On our property, we have long lines of crumbling stone walls, so I made trip after trip with the car; drive down to the road, roll stones down the bank, load them in the car, drive back up the driveway, unload

the stones, repeat. My rule is to take only stones from destroyed sections and respectfully leave the standing wall portions alone.

Once a critical mass of rocks was collected, the 3D puzzle of the wall began. Progress was slow because of weather, other commitments, and aching shoulders and backs. Sporadic help by local “young muscle” looking for a bit of paid work moved us along.

By October, the first wall was mostly complete and ready for backfilling on the uphill side. I removed the Siberian irises and their cement-like roots from below the wall, and began the ‘lasagna’ layering process again. Getting that area replanted will be next year’s project, along with the second slightly smaller wall on the other side of the lawn. And then there is the expansion of the vegetable garden with more lasagna layering.... will this project never end?

Like any creative project, it was easy to envision an end result, but working through the process required, and continues to require, patience and much effort. At a time when I might otherwise have been out in the community more, having this on-going commitment at home helped anchor the months of COVID-19 restrictions with a positive focus.

Understanding how something works (or should work), such as the “lasagna layering method” or stonewall construction, is easy enough in the abstract. Applying that knowledge in a hands-on project develops a deeper understanding and practical skills. I have a new confidence in these areas and look forward to doing more with them.



Photos courtesy of Juanita Burch-Clay



Pandemic Seeds Appreciation for Self-Sufficiency

By Julie Marks, Jericho, VT

During the summer of 2020, when so many people were trapped in an urban confinement, I found myself feeling more deeply humbled by my contrasting situation than ever before. From my rural window in the Green Mountain foothills, I would look out each morning at a wide-open space—a space that was all mine, a space where I could explore, I space where I could grow.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected us all differently, caught us all at different times in our lives. None of it was convenient, none of it was easy. During the worst times of job loss and isolation, my garden became the only thing that brought me purpose. During the worst times of the pandemic, I realized my garden had seeded an enormous sense of resiliency in my soul.

As the pandemic summer went on, I remembered why I started my tiny homestead in the first place: to live in a manner that is self-sufficient, simple, and secure. As COVID-19 raged across the country, I wasn't being threatened by food shortage. I wasn't in danger of claustrophobia or indoor entrapment. I wasn't living beyond my means and my simple lifestyle had already eliminated many "non-essentials" out of my daily needs.

One day in the late spring, as a warm rain soaked my freshly turned garden beds, I pull my homesteader's bible, *The Good Life* by Scott and Helen Nearing, off the shelf for the first time in years. As I flipped through its soft pages, I came across this earmarked quote:

"I do not think that any civilization can be called complete until it has progressed from sophistication to unsophistication, and made a conscious return to simplicity of thinking and living." ~Lin Yu Tang, The Importance of Living, 1938

A timely point, I thought. As I was watching a world reliant on increasingly complex and fragile



systems fracture, my simple world felt remarkably stable. My pantry and freezer were filling with an abundance of garden bounty. The neighboring farms were still stocking their farm stands. The local grocer was fully supplied with Vermont-made goodies. And while I missed the luxury of the yoga studio and restaurants and concerts and large social gatherings, I was alright without them. I had my gardens to keep me busy and keep me fit. I had my gardens to keep me cooking creatively in the kitchen. And I had hundreds of acres of woods to wander through safely with a good friend just a few paces behind.

As the pandemic continued and fear mounted, I tried to remain focused on the things I could control: nursing 70 seedlings to maturity; enriching the earth around my budding fruit trees; creating new habitats for pollinators; and nurturing the landscape around my property. I was often struck by how much comfort and companionship I gathered from nature. Alone in my gardens, I never felt lonely. Even amidst a global crisis, I felt safe and resilient. I felt the true magic of gardening.

Cambridge at Night

By Deborah Barry, Newfane, VT

I am homeless. My house and gardens are being enjoyed this August by quarantining Brooklynites. I am currently on the downhill stretch, finally heading home to beloved Vermont in 2 days. This last week of exile, I am back in

Cambridge, Massachusetts – house and cat-sitting for ex-husband, David, and sleeping in the same bed he and I did for a good 10 years (is the mattress that old?), the last 5 of which (maybe all 10?) were anything but good as divorce became imminent. Wally and I walk and walk—past so many of the houses I listed and sold as a 20-year real estate veteran here. Unpleasant memories flood back—bad marriage ones, yes, but also many memories of the real estate wars waged with and for these past and current inhabitants, inside and outside of these walls. Some walls, to no surprise, have been moved or completely torn down. Such personal strife and sadness and nostalgia reside in this place. Compounded by a current war fought in this city—with mask walls against a killer virus. My angst is piling up and spilling over. How to make it stop? How to find my center again? I hear an almost audible answer: Nature. Nature, my salvation. Nature my one true and constant and eternal love. Here in the midst of this city and my past, I am masked and imprisoned. Nature, where are you? “I am here,” she replies, “just look”

Last night for my nightly Wally walk, feeling yet again as if I were an extra in some zombie apocalypse movie, I decided we would slow down and observe Cambridge’s Nature. We idled our way along picket fences (Wally loved this, as it gave him even more opportunities to raise a leg) and little gardens lovingly created and cared for in front of the double- and triple-deckers that line the streets of Huron Village. We lollygagged. And Wally-gagged. No agenda (once the poop bag was filled). Breathe. Notice. Listen. Sniff. Who built these sentinels 100 years ago on top of farms and fields? Why? What families lived here? What did those builders and dwellers look like? What were their lives like? What did they “do for a living”? I begin to see them in my mind’s eye. Picture them planting their small gardens. Feel their presence, almost, keeping Nature present amongst their newly built homes. Wally and I are breathing deeply and smelling the night. Observing the night-blooming flora and fauna. Drinking in exotic aromas. His head down. My head up. Above the rooflines I spot the incredible gift of a 2/3 moon, a bright, bright star just above (planet of course – which?). Eternal light spilling and shining down upon Wally and me and

these gardens and night creatures -- blessing us all. Past, present and future inhabitants of this place, this world, and this universe. We send back our humble love and eternal thanks to you, oh Nature, our salvation. All is well when we are with you. All we need do is look.

Spending Time at the Swamp

By Alma Beals, Westminster, VT

Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have been restless, unable to settle down to do the projects I need to do around the house. Many of my friends feel this same way. Will this restlessness ever end? The many volunteer organizations that I belong to are quiet and I realize that the fewer I do, the fewer I want to return to when this is over.

I have been luckier than many people because I spend as much time as I can outside. For the past six months, my day has begun by stopping at a local swamp to see what has shown up overnight. Then I drive into town for my morning walk. After that I return to the swamp to watch the wildlife for the next hour or so. What a great place to sit and think.

The spring began with the return of the Canada geese. Several pairs had a total of 35 goslings. Following the geese were several families of wood ducks and mallards. One lone family of hooded mergansers rounded out the duck babies. All the geese and the mallards insisted they owned the road and forced cars to go around them. Next were the great blue herons who fledged four young.

Many mornings I watched the nest for little heads to show over the side. All the while bald eagles, peregrine falcons, kestrels and red-tailed hawks kept things interesting. Even muskrats, beavers and otters were there.

Finally, I would pull myself away from the swamp and head home to spend time in my flower gardens before getting on with my day. All spring and summer, I've felt lucky to start my day this way but now that fall is staring me in the eye, what will I do next?

Northfield Gardeners Reflect on 2020

By Christine Barnes, Northfield, VT

Memories of this passing year 2020 will be filled with concern, anguish, sadness, fear, doubt and more. It has not been an easy time. All the more reason to plant a garden, make it bright, make it light – give those who view it a moment of comfort and joy, and perhaps, peace.

Ten members of the community of Northfield, Vermont share in the garden responsibilities which help to brighten our town in the spring, summer and early fall. Since 2018, members of this group have included four Master Gardeners, graduates of the University of Vermont Extension Master Gardener Program, and six or seven additional members of our community who also bring their own garden experiences to share.

Northfield Gardeners 2020 divided the town's 17 gardens among the group, so fewer people tended fewer gardens. Although this year's gardening experience was reduced socially by the pandemic, the following contributions, written by several members of our group, reflect the spirited views of Northfield Gardeners 2020 and how their work affects them and their community.

The comments made from the hearts of those who do this work on behalf of our community speak for themselves. In a challenging time, their efforts have brought spirit and light, a smile, a sense of uplift, of gratitude and more, to those in our community, and beyond. We encourage other gardeners in other communities to take a bold step forward together and bring hope to all in the future.

"This is the second year of working with my gardening group. Being newly retired, it gave me a way to meet others with like interests. Sharing knowledge and experimenting with different plants to see what will do well in our gardens is an ongoing process. This year our enjoyable social times were impacted by the Coronavirus. Smaller groups met to do the work. Regardless, it was still a rewarding experience." ~ Carol Jenkinson

"This has been a very different gardening year experience for me, for all of us. Most of my volunteer gardening was done in the evening when it was a bit cooler and village activity infrequent. People still stopped to thank the gardeners saying how the blooms lifted their spirits and made them smile. The smiles showed in their eyes. Evening gardening was magical. Watching the town and the garden settle down for the night made me feel like a kid again (a naughty one) trying to get the very last of the summer light before heading home." ~ Nancy Motyka

"I have so enjoyed being in the Northfield Gardeners group. I thought I would learn about plants: the names, the care, the plantings, the soil, etc. etc. What I have learned, however, is how much plants bring communities together. Having our beautiful garden on the Common in the center of town has proven to be a real communication experience. People from our own community and people who are here for a visit stop and talk with us as we are planting or weeding or watering our gorgeous plants. I have learned that plants make everyone happy and bring a ray of sunshine to everyone's day. I am in awe of how many men stop and comment on how lovely our gardens are and how nice it is to have them for everyone to enjoy. I knew women loved flowers, but I am surprised at the men loving to have them just as much as the women do. I guess I am surprised at how a garden of beautiful flowers can bring people together. I love being a part of such a happy experience - to say nothing of the growing roots it has made between us gardeners!" ~ Sally A. Davidson

"We tended the Northfield Dog River Park pollinator garden and the Northfield Senior Center gardens. Spring blooms at the pollinator garden provided a bounty of color and a rich attractant for butterflies and bees which carried through the late summer and into the fall. And the late autumn saw many migrating birds feasting on the echinacea and monarda seeds. Each time we three did maintenance work at the garden, there were members of the community of all ages at the Park commenting on the beauty of the flowering plants, asking interesting questions, and enjoying the bird and pollinating

insect activity. The annuals we planted in the Senior Center gardens and pots also elicited good questions and delightful comments from the community. The weather was a challenge this season, but most plants survived quite well with a bit of Master Gardener help. We always found it rewarding to contribute to the knowledge of the community as well as provide a beautiful pollinator habitat for the town.” ~ Kim Adams, Lucinda Sullivan, and Debbie Zuaro

A New Look for an Old Garden

By Bea Cole, South Royalton, VT

Our vegetable garden has always been a source of pride and joy for us. We grew enough food so that we could have fresh vegetables for our growing family, can and freeze for the winter ahead and share the overflow of our bounty with neighbors. However, 30 years of keeping up our 30'x50' vegetable garden as well as numerous flower beds had taken its toll on my body. In the spring of 2019, I told my husband, “I just can’t physically do this anymore.”

Our girls had grown with homes of their own so we no longer needed the volume of food we were producing. I was also canning and freezing food that we were just giving away. Then as our neighbors aged and passed away, it became harder to find people to take the extras. Yet I couldn’t imagine not growing my own food. So what was the solution?

We thought about making the garden space smaller and turning it into lawn but that meant more mowing which was not a reduction in labor. I did use some space to move some perennials that were overcrowded in their previous location but the last thing I really needed was more flowers to take care of. So my husband came up with a great solution: containers to grow our vegetables in.

It seemed like a simple solution but then we had decisions to

make: how many planters, what size would they be, what shape would they be and how would we arrange them in the space we had? We decided to make the containers various shapes – triangles, rectangles, squares and diamonds. We took a hard look at what we had been growing and came up with a list of the things we ate the most. This helped us to decide how many containers we needed.

Bending over or crouching was putting too much strain on my back and knees so it made sense for the planters to be two boards high so that I could sit on my gardening stool to weed and harvest. My husband then went to work on building the containers. He made them from 2x10 hemlock planks, two planks high so that each planter was 20 inches high. The shapes proved to be a challenge to build and it took him most of the summer to finish them all.

We removed the top layer of soil to put back into the containers. Then used wood chips that the local power company had left on our property to cover the ground. This eliminated having to weed in between the containers. The planters were then placed far enough apart so that I could maneuver my wheel borrow between them.

Our first year of this new system was not without challenges since 2020 was a very dry and hot gardening season. We set up irrigation which helped but next year we will have to make some adjustments to what we can grow in this new space. The good news is that most things thrived in these containers



Photo courtesy of Bea Cole

and my weeding was reduced to a few hours not days.

The containers are so much less time consuming and physically demanding that I wonder why I didn't do this sooner. Now as my garden lies in winter's rest, the planter boxes sit in quiet simplicity waiting for another gardening season.

Backyard Compost Wizardry

By Jennifer Chiodo, Hinesburg, VT

I have been a backyard composter since 1992. Over the years I've used a variety of methods based on my available inputs and the presence of compost-interested parties like Beagle dogs and skunks. In my early composting days, I had horses and pasture on my property and used manure and shavings from the stalls to mix in with my food and garden waste. We built three-sided wooden retaining walls to corral the compost piles. Those piles were moderately successful, but wood shavings are slow to break down and often my green/brown ratios were off, so the piles didn't get hot enough to kill weed seeds which are rampant in horse manure. Plus, those piles were too big for me to mix.

When we got a Beagle-mix rescue dog I had to start using a fully enclosed barrel style bin to keep Molly and the compost safe. That bin would essentially result in anaerobic digestion of the kitchen waste, then once or twice a year, I would

bump the sludge out and mix it in with stall waste in a separate bin to get so-so compost.

More recently we've moved to a home on a wooded lot with a small yard. Now I have two of the black plastic style compost bins and have developed a recipe and process that is delivering high-quality compost. One new addition to my composting repertoire is a garden fork. A friend recommended this to me for digging beds, and it is wonderful for that in my rocky soil. But it is fantastic for turning my compost!

In addition to my turning fork, my husband has been bagging and bringing me the lawn clippings and he mows the leaves at the end of the season so I have a solid supply of browns for my compost recipe. I've been amazed at how quickly our food waste is breaking down as I'm able to strategically combine it with greens from the lawn and browns from the leaves, mixing them thoroughly all summer long. And with two bins, I can have one bin in finishing mode – this bin gets mixed periodically - and one active bin where the kitchen waste gets tossed with my other green and brown inputs.

Over the winter I just layer my kitchen scraps and leaves, then when the pile thaws in the spring, I give it a good mix and it takes off. I can add meat, dairy and fat into my piles without any odors and without attracting critters. The piles smell just like dirt! I'm so pleased to have finally found a recipe and process that works for me after nearly 30 years of composting.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Chiodo

How Haikus Saved Us

By Lisa Kent, Shelburne, VT

As the pandemic was getting underway, and we were trying to desperately grasp this new reality, I woke up one day in April and had a brilliant idea. I had always wanted to write haikus, but had never really done so. This was certainly the time.

So, I approached a very dear friend, whom I think of as my best friend. I have known her for forty years. She lives in Massachusetts. She loves gardening and animals, and anything at all in nature. She would be a perfect haiku partner.

At first, she was somewhat reluctant to commit. But with a little prodding, she agreed. We began composing and sending each other one haiku each day. As the project progressed, we started taking photographs to accompany our haikus. It became a lovely daily habit for both of us. Our haikus were mostly about gardens, but sometimes about the general landscape, or wildlife, or our pets



Photos courtesy of Lisa Kent

(she has a cat and I have a dog). This became addictive and so amazingly pleasurable. It increased our focus during a time when we needed to really pay attention to the beauty around us, and not the chaos in our crazy world. Below, I share a few pieces from this project.

Happy gardening to all of you Master Gardeners. Take time to smell the flowers. And maybe try a haiku or two?

*Tall, golden grasses.
Light and soft tassels on top.
Reaching to the sky.*

*Purple profusion.
The floriferous aster.
Offering beauty.*

*Pink anemones.
They seem to bloom forever.
Just what we need now.*



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Munro

10 Pet-Friendly Houseplants

By Jennifer Munro, Hampton, NH

In many ways, houseplants are like pets. We bring them into our homes with the best intentions, with the goal of providing nutrition, water, and a comfortable environment in which they will thrive. Both contribute greatly to making a house a home, but what happens when they just can't get along?

Nothing will lift your spirits like a walk through a warm, humid greenhouse bursting with life. Both flora and fauna go a long way toward elevating our moods, particularly during the long New England winters, but there's no guarantee that your pets and your plants will respect each other's boundaries. At the very least, it's important to ensure your pets' safety by thoroughly vetting houseplants before you bring them home, regardless of whether your cat or dog has bothered your plants in the past.

Because many plants go by multiple common names, it's important to shop for pet-friendly houseplants by scientific name. Binomial nomenclature was developed in the mid 1700s, and together the scientific names specify the genus and species of organisms. Its purpose remains to this day to prevent the ambiguity that can lead to misidentification.

With that, here are 10 houseplants, with both their common and scientific names, that will liven up your living environment, help clean the air in your home, and reduce stress – without risking a trip to the vet:

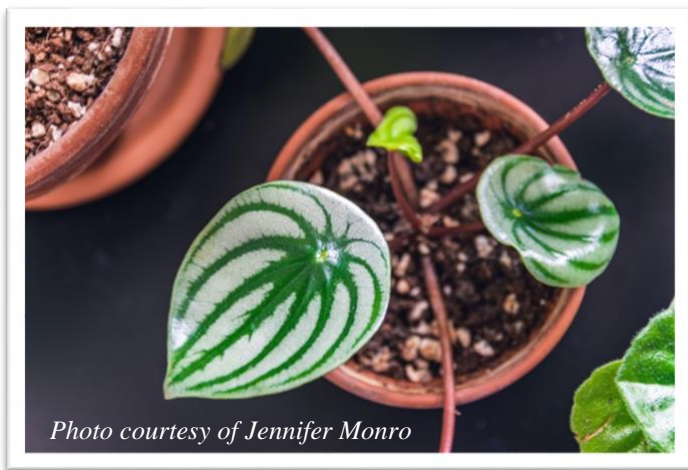
African Violet (*Saintpaulia ionantha*)

There's no shortage of information on caring for African violets. With an almost cult-like following, this single species is the subject of books, blogs, and even podcasts. African violets bring a welcome pop of color to your home -- providing you have the right environment. Once found only in the coastal woodlands of east Africa, this plant prefers indirect

light (even fluorescent!), but be sure to keep it away from drafts and sudden changes in temperature. African violets can be a bit fussy, preferring small pots and loose, well-drained soil. Water from the bottom to prevent leaf rot, and fertilize every two weeks during the growing season (spring and summer).

Gloxinia (*Sinningia speciosa*)

Another flowering favorite and a relative of the African violet, gloxinia prefers bright but indirect light, moist soil, and frequent feeding, but the reward comes in the form of showy purple, pink, red, or blue blooms. Once grown from tuberous roots that went dormant in the winter, seed-grown hybrids produce more prolific blooms because they don't devote energy to their root systems. For this reason, they are often treated as annuals and discarded after the blooming season. The plants are characterized by velvety blossoms on slender stems that grow from a rosette of scalloped leaves, and are popular around holidays like Valentine's Day or Mother's Day. The gloxinia blooming season can be extended by pinching off spent flowers.



Watermelon Peperomia (*Peperomia argyreia*)

A tropical perennial grown for its ornamental foliage, one look at the striped green leaves of this resilient plant and you'll see where it gets its common name. The 3 to 4" waxy leaves grow on fleshy 5" petioles, or stems. Because it prefers indirect light and doesn't need a lot of water, it's a great plant for beginners.

Watermelon *Peperomia* likes to be somewhat pot-bound, and therefore doesn't require frequent repotting. It can be easily propagated with leaf cuttings. In addition to being non-toxic to humans and pets, *Peperomia* has no serious pest or disease problems.

Bromeliads (*Bromeliaceae*)

Widely available at nurseries and garden centers, these tropical plants will bring an exotic touch to your home. They require good airflow and medium to bright light, but thrive in just about any type of soil. Prized for their thick, wide leaves that grow in a circular pattern for catching water in their native habitat, *Bromeliads* produce bright flowers in red, orange, yellow, purple, or white that last for several months.

Friendship Plant (*Pilea involucrata*)

The friendship plant earned its name by way of its ability to rapidly root from cuttings. This trailing plant is known for its heavily textured, crinkled leaves. Although its stems are delicate, it will thrive as a hanging plant or as part of a terrarium – which also makes it a little more difficult for pets to nibble on. Apart from requiring warm temperatures and consistent humidity, it's considered a low-maintenance plant, and only needs to be repotted every few years. An occasional pinch of the tender stems will encourage a compact, bushy plant.

Boston Fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*)

Low-maintenance Boston ferns only require feeding every two months, and can be a lovely addition to your outdoor patio in the summertime. Prized for their graceful, featherlike fronds, they thrive with lots of bright, indirect light and appreciate high humidity. Often planted in hanging baskets or in elevated planters, Boston ferns can take up a lot of real estate, with a spread that can reach 24 to 36". Named as one of the top ten houseplants improving air quality in confined spaces, the Boston fern will add a tropical vibe to your home even in the dead of winter.

Spider Plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*)

Wildly popular in the era of pet rocks and bell-bottom jeans, this incredibly resilient houseplant is a favorite of veterinarians. It's easy to propagate by way of "spiderettes" or "pups," and is equally at home on a tabletop or hanging planter. Spider plants are expert air cleaners, particularly in the winter months when our homes are buttoned up tight. The long, narrow leaves are most often variegated, though all-green species do exist. Spider plants will flourish with well-drained soil and bright, indirect light, and supplemental nutrients are unnecessary, as its fleshy tuberous roots provide ample food storage.

Hens and Chickens (*Echeveria*)

Succulents* are experiencing a surge in popularity, particularly with apartment dwellers for whom space is at a premium. Their moderate growth habit and compact tendency helps keep them tidy. As a result of extensive breeding and hybridization, *Echeveria* comes in many shapes, colors, and sizes. This desert native grows best in an unglazed clay pot, which allows excess moisture to evaporate. Use cactus soil (or an equal mix of sand, topsoil, and compost), and allow the plant to dry out between waterings. *Echeveria* can be propagated via leaf cuttings, or by separating the tiny rosettes that spring up adjacent to the parent plant. (*Please note that not all succulents are pet-safe, including the popular jade plant, or *Crassula ovata*. While not lethal, ingesting any part of the plant can cause cats or dogs to become lethargic and nauseated.)

Waxplant (*Hoya*)

Hoya is a genus of 200 to 300 tropical plants, all of which are non-toxic to humans and pets. They're easy to care for, slow to wilt, and can tolerate low to moderate light (though they likely need bright light to produce flowers). These semi-succulent, woody climbing vines feature thick, waxy leaves and are easy to propagate through a variety of methods. *Hoya* can be planted in a hanging pot, but is just as happy cascading from a shelf or window sill. A happy *Hoya* might favor you with a cluster (or umbel) of heavily

fragranced star-shaped flowers that range from creamy white to pink or red.

Areca Palm (*Dypsis lutescens*)

Native to the moist, forested areas of Madagascar, the areca palm is also known as the butterfly palm. This plant is widely available and grows between 6" and 10" per year until it reaches its mature size of 6' to 12'. Its big, bold fronds make it a favorite of decorators, and it will instantly turn your home into a garden oasis. Areca palms can be a bit finicky, and they don't tolerate neglect. They prefer ample bright (but indirect) light, and moist (but not wet) soil. During the cooler months, you can let the soil dry out between waterings.

Personal Tip: If your cat just won't stop chewing your plants, why not give him a plant of his very own? Available at pet food stores, wheat grass (sometimes labeled "cat grass") in a pot on his favorite windowsill or perch might just encourage him to nibble on that instead.

The Importance of Preschool Gardening

By Maggie Rubick, Bennington, VT

It is an early morning in August and the outdoor play spaces surrounding Northshire Day School are quiet. In my preschool classroom, a 4-year-old girl is the first student to arrive. We greet each other as she runs over to the window. Together, we spend a few minutes observing the garden outside our classroom. This particular morning, we are watching a nest of baby rabbits that are inhabiting our carrot patch. Each day, since mid-April, my friend has been checking on the carrots that she planted. She is hoping they will be ready to harvest before some of her classmates move on to Kindergarten. We notice the monarch butterflies are back again. My friend observes, "they really like



Photo courtesy of Maggie Rubick

those red flowers.” A conversation ensues, culminating in a plan to plant “like a hundred red zinnias” next year, for the butterflies.

Later that day, another young student struggles to keep his body safe in our classroom space. He is bursting with energy and crashing into classmates and furniture. I approach him and suggest we take a “garden break.” He runs to meet me at the door. As soon as we step outside and enter our garden space, his entire being relaxes. He becomes calm and focused, without any additional behavior support needed. We spend about 10 minutes pulling weeds from around our tomato plants and picking Japanese beetles off of the green bean vines. Once he deems the “beetle job” is finished, we return to the classroom space and he rejoins classmates on the rug for a story, re-focused and ready to learn.

Garden-related learning experiences are incredibly beneficial for young children. In and around the garden, children develop gross- and fine-motor skills, investigate through all five senses, and engage in authentic, hands-on learning. As an advocate for garden-based learning, I know that garden-based experiences promote *all* aspects of child development. Children’s curiosity, initiative, and critical-thinking skills are nurtured. Caring for plants fosters empathy and encourages children to appreciate and respect our natural environment.

Gardening experiences promote socio-emotional learning as children collaborate and take turns teaching each other. Essential cognitive capacities, such as executive function skills and self-regulation, are nurtured in the context of the school garden, too. Research and practical experience have also demonstrated that gardening experiences

promote resilience, both on an individual and community/systems level. Giving young children opportunities in the garden is a gift that can have a profound, lifelong impact. It may also benefit generations to come as we raise children who will become stewards of our environment.

Tips for Gardening with Young Children

For infants and young toddlers:

- Sensory gardens are best
- Choose non-toxic, edible plants
- Model and encourage sensory exploration

For older toddlers and preschoolers:

- Experiment with different edible plants
- Provide child-sized tools for small hands
- Give children clear visual cues (i.e., a distinct pathway for feet)
- Anticipate that plants may sustain occasional damage and adjust expectations for garden output.
- Quick-growing crops (i.e., radishes, spinach) will help children to understand growth cycles in a developmentally-appropriate timeframe.
- Ask open-ended questions like, “What do you notice?” and “What do you think will happen?”

For pre-kindergarten and early elementary students:

- Engage children in garden-related “jobs” and responsibilities.
- Grow a variety of edible and non-edible plants.
- Support children to document their gardening experiences (i.e., keep a garden journal, graph plant varieties, make a garden map).
- Have children assist with garden-planning.
- Let children become “curators” of the garden space.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. University of Vermont Extension, Burlington, Vermont. University of Vermont Extension, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating, offer education and employment to everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. Any reference to commercial products, trade names, or brand names is for information only, and no endorsement or approval is intended.