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HONEY BEES & THEIR
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

“Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.”

— Henry David Thoreau



Mary Greene

After a long intense winter, the Upper Delaware River region is busting at the seams to get started with the spring and summer season. Planting seeds is the theme for this spring edition of **Our Country Home**. Fittingly, much of the magazine is devoted to profiles of our local organic farms, conversations with three of the area's premier gardeners, and a listing of local farmers' markets and garden supply centers.

We also explore the idea of planting seeds in the minds of our young children with a story about alternative education. We bring you a timely story of honey bee populations, which are increasingly endangered and also increasingly recognized for their role in healthy cropland. We present a complete spring menu of recipes from our own Slow Food chapter to get you started on an inspired and healthy connection to your kitchen and your family table. And, we give you decorating ideas for “bringing the outside in” as envisioned by local shops.

Wishing you some peaceful hours in a garden.

Mary Greene

Mary Greene
Section Editor

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Check out MORE ONLINE articles, tips and recipes at <http://OurCountryHome.Wordpress.com>

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CATCHING THE BUZZ

'NEWBEES' LEARN THE LANGUAGE OF THE HIVE

Text | Nancy Dymond



Photograph | Tina Spangler

“We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love.” —Stephen Jay Gould



Tom Morrisette shows bees on the comb.

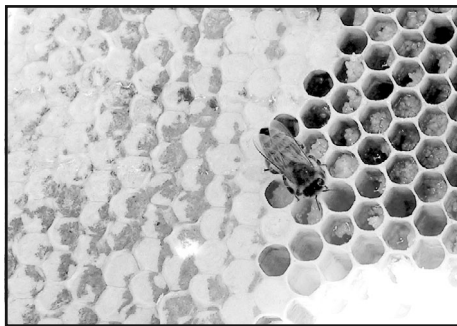
Photograph | Nancy Dymond

Last month I tucked my pants into my boots, pulled on long, leather gloves and fastened a veil over my head in an attempt to learn the secrets of the ancient order of *Apis Mellifera*. I was not alone.

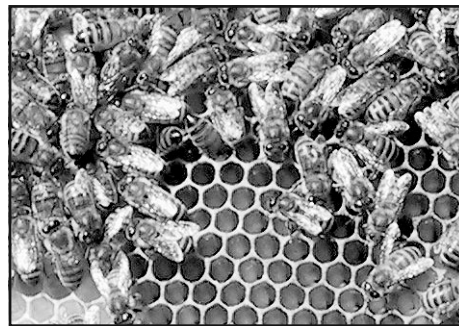
Moving quietly into the seething swarm issuing from a tower of wooden boxes beside the garden of Narrowsburg, NY resident Rick Maloney, Tom Morrisette of Dingman’s Ferry, PA bravely held his smoker aloft. In another minute, Morrisette had pried off the lid of the buzzing colony with his hive tool to reveal the mysterious inhabitants within. Calmed by smoke and encouraged by an early thaw, the season’s survivors broke slowly from their winter cluster. Some explored around the entrance to the hive while others clung to the honey-filled frames, symmetrical rows of hexagonal cells that contained the colony’s entire winter food stores.

Maloney became fascinated by the tiny nectar collectors when he worked on an estate that used bees as pollinators for the orchards. “The trees just hummed,” he remembers. When he was alerted to Morrisette’s internet ad seeking land for bee hives last spring, he was quick to respond. Morrisette, who also placed hives at two other properties, installed two bee hives on Maloney’s property in June. Eventually Maloney bought the hives, though Morrisette continues to manage them.

continued on page 4



Photograph | Nancy Dymond



Photograph | Nancy Dymond



Photograph | Nancy Dymond



Photograph | Tina Spangler

Legendary status

Honeybees are not native to North America. It is widely accepted that the species originated in Southeast Asia. Honeybees evolved along with flowering plants during the Cenozoic Era and their bodies have been found preserved in amber dating back millions of years. Depictions of honeybees appear in Egypt's tombs and temples as far back as 2400 BC, when they were first domesticated. Aristotle, Greek philosopher and naturalist, was the first to make written descriptions of honeybees around 325 BC. According to legend, the body of his famous pupil, Alexander the Great, was embalmed in a coffin filled with honey. In this country, honeybees were introduced to the colonies by the British in the early 1700s and spread westward. From hives shipped to San Francisco in the mid 1800s, the culture of beekeeping fanned eastward until the entire continent was enveloped by colonies of buzzing honey producers.

Thanks in part to Cleopatra's enduring legend, we know honey as a skin softener and beautifier. Although honey has been replaced by sugar on the grocer's shelf, scientific studies are mounting that indicate honey has powerful antioxidant, antiseptic, antifungal and antibacterial properties, making it an option in wound healing therapies. Other health benefits attributed to honey are as an aid to digestion, a soothing gargle for irritated throats and a gentle cough suppressant.

The process of honey production

Honey, gathered in the form of nectar, is collected by thousands of worker bees. Returning to the hive, they are met by other worker bees that process the nectar in their honey stomachs, adding enzymes that turn the nectar's sucrose into glucose and fructose, sugars more digestible by the bees. By vibrating their wings over the nectar deposited in droplets on the hexagonal cell walls, the bees create a breeze that reduces the 80% water content to 17%.

Each season's honey will vary in flavor and fragrance in step with the variety and abundance of flowering plants. In the spring, bees gather nectar from tree blossoms and early flowers such as dandelions and phlox. Summer's plentiful crop will include milkweed, red clover and sumac. Autumn's nectar is gathered from goldenrod, Joe Pye weed and New England asters, among others.

The use of honeybees to increase the yield and improve the quality of plants is a very recent development. In late 18th-century Germany, Christian Konrad Sprengel, a non-botanist and the son of a clergyman, became the first to systematically record his observations of the pollination activities of honeybees. Today honeybee pollination is responsible for the abundance of many of the foods we enjoy such as apples, blueberries, strawberries, cantaloupe, nuts and broccoli, as well as feed crops like clover for dairy cows.

Beekeeping society

"Beekeeping is a lifelong learning experience," says Charlie Kinbar, PA bee inspector and vice president of the Wayne County Beekeepers Association (WCBA), welcoming about 50 beekeepers, mostly newcomers, to the WCBA's first meeting of the year. The club has been a respected gathering place for bee lovers since the 1950s, when Francis Motichka and two other local men started it in order to compare experiences and later to help others learn the basics of beekeeping. In November his daughter, Dolores Motichka, who had helped her father tend his beehives in his failing years, was elected president of the WCBA.

"Becoming a beekeeper does not entail years of study beforehand," says Motichka. "The normal process, and the one that works, is to make your commitment to beekeeping, invest about \$1,000 initially (the price of two working hives and accessories), and join a club. From there, the bees become your teacher."

She described the membership as mainly made up of hobbyists, managing two to 10 hives, with a sprinkling of commercial beekeepers, who keep upward of 100 hives. The \$15 annual fee entitles members to use the club's new beekeeping library, be advised by experienced members and participate in special events. "Our membership is very diversified," says Motichka, "from farmers to engineers and everything in between. It is often a couple who will go into beekeeping together, or family members. Many are retirees." In recent years she has observed an explosion in the number of new beekeepers. She credits media publicity surrounding Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) for the influx. Although the puzzling phenomenon of the disappearing bees is tragic in one sense, she is pleased to see that "more people are becoming aware of honeybees as pollinators, rather than just as producers of honey."

Beekeeping is considered an agricultural process and is regulated by each state's department of agriculture. In Pennsylvania, the first Bee Law was passed in 1921 in an effort to control a lethal and highly contagious disease of honeybees called American Foul Brood (AFB). Other serious infestations such as the parasitic Varroa mites and tracheal mites have led to the mandatory licensing and regular inspections of apiaries.

Challenges and rewards

In addition to diseases, beekeepers must stay alert for predators of other kinds. Bears, skunks, wax moths, hive beetles, mice, even other bees will attack a weak or unguarded hive. Beekeepers have found that the most effective protection against bears is a 12-volt electric fence. An additional lower strand on the fence will deter skunks, which find the bees as delicious as the honey.

Second-year beekeeper Kathleen Schloesser of Bethany, PA says she received her bees too late last year to get any honey in the fall from her two hives. She experienced setbacks when swarming left one of her hives weakened, and when she found that one of her queens was laying only drone eggs. Drones, the males of the hive, have one function: to impregnate the queen. They do not forage, clean the hive, feed the larvae, build comb cells or perform any of the tasks necessary to maintain a healthy hive. Kathleen, a WCBA member, called on Motichka for help. "Her help has been invaluable," says Schloesser. "She'll talk on the phone or come out. She's been here to help several times." Despite problems, Schloesser's hives survived the winter and she looks forward to enjoying her own honey and serving it to her guests.

For links and other fun and useful references, including honey recipes, visit ourcountryhome@wordpress.com. For information on how to contact the Wayne County Beekeepers Association, contact Edward D. Pruss, Penn State Cooperative Extension office, 648 Park St., Ste. E, Honesdale, PA 18431, 570/253-5970 ext. 4110, edp4@psu.edu.

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Willow Wisp Organic Farm

Photograph | Tina Spangler

FRUITS OF THEIR LABOR

Three area farms commit to sustainable, organic practices

Text | Tina Spangler

One of the best parts of life in the Upper Delaware River valley is the opportunity to experience fresh, locally grown food. Over the past few years, organic produce from local farms has become more and more accessible as farmers' markets have been established in nearly every town, restaurants have taken pride in peppering their menus with ingredients from the area and consumers are discovering the benefits of buying direct from the farm through CSA programs.

Neversink Farm, Willow Wisp Organic Farm and The Ant Hill Farm, all located right in our back yards, offer healthy, organic foods—from arugula and asparagus to tomatoes and turnips—while building a true connection with their customers. This trio of farms allows conscientious eaters to support local entrepreneurs, sustain a healthy environment and enjoy pure and tasty food. What more could you ask for?

Quality of the crop

Organic agriculture is different than conventional

forms of farming in that it takes a natural, non-petroleum-based approach to raising vegetables, fruits, flowers, insects, and animals. Organic farmers control pests and weeds through time-tested methods of mulching, crop rotation and human labor, rather than chemical pesticides and herbicides.

"It's important that we have a shared definition of what it means to be organic and that's why we're believers in certification," said Neversink Farm's Conor Crickmore. Organic certification ensures that all farmers are working from the same standards of clean, chemical-free farming. Several organizations offer organic certification, including the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFANY), which is a USDA-accredited certifier. Only certified farms can market themselves as organic.

"Many farmers say that the organic certification requirements are too expensive and the paperwork is too burdensome. I disagree," said Greg Swartz of Willow Wisp Farm. "Yes, it does cost money, but it is not prohibitive. And the paperwork is the same paper-

work that any good business person should do—keeping good records is key to a successful business."

Neversink Farm

Neversink Farm (635 Claryville Road, Claryville, NY 12725, 845/985-2519, farmer@neversinkfarm.com, www.neversinkfarm.com) lies in the Neversink River Valley in Claryville, NY. The setting is straight out of a magazine, the picture of timeless, unspoiled beauty. Crickmore and his wife Kate bought the farm in 2009 after they left Brooklyn with intentions of homesteading in the Catskills. Sometime after they arrived, they decided to start a full-fledged farm and today they offer organic vegetables, eggs, flowers, honey, poultry and trout—all raised onsite without anything synthetic.

What makes Neversink Farm different is that it is a handcrafted farm, meaning that planting, harvesting and cultivating are done by hand, without the aid of a tractor. "We started off as gardeners.

We wanted to farm at a garden level to maintain the

continued on page 8



Photograph | contributed

The Ant Hill Farm



Photograph | contributed

Neversink Farm



Photograph | contributed

Neversink Farm



Photograph | Tina Spangler

Willow Wisp Organic Farm

quality of everything we do,” Crickmore explained. “We treat the farm as a single unit, so that each part of the farm supports the other. Instead of ordering feed for the animals, we grow as much as we can on the farm. The animal manure feeds the vegetables, and so on.”

Neversink Farm offers a free choice CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), entitling members to shop at the onsite farm stand, selecting the vegetables that they want. The cost is \$460 for a 20-week share (if paid by May 31). Fresh eggs and flower shares are extra.

“We try to connect the dots between growing vegetables and the people who eat them. So, we also have dinners, brunches, family days, cooking demonstrations, donkey rides, that kind of stuff,” said Crickmore. Visit the Neversink Farm website or check them out on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Neversink-Farm/151064301578478?ref=ts>) to learn about upcoming events or to sign up for the CSA.

Willow Wisp Organic Farm

Over the Delaware River and through the woods, **Willow Wisp Organic Farm (25 Stone House Rd., Damascus, PA 18415, 570/224-8013, www.willowwisporganic.com)** in Abrahamsville, PA is owned and operated by Greg Swartz and Tannis Kowalchuk. While Kowalchuk grew up working in the family garden in Winnipeg, Canada, for Swartz the urge to get his hands dirty came later. “At some point in college, it became clear to me that eating and agriculture were central to so many environmental, socio-economic and health issues,” he recalled. Today, their 12-acre farm produces a diverse mix of organic vegetables, herbs and cut flowers.

Nearly a decade before founding Willow Wisp, Swartz apprenticed at other area farms, and also served as executive director of NOFA-NY. In 2009, Swartz and Kowalchuk were ready to put down their own roots, so they bought some land with an old farmhouse in the back hills of Pennsylvania and got to work. “One thing that Tannis and I share is a love of food,” Swartz said. “And what better way to have good food than to grow your own?”

Willow Wisp, now in its second year of full production, grows a staggering variety of vegetables, from the common (red leaf lettuce and sugar peas) to the unusual (watermelon radishes and red Russian kale). Kowalchuk runs the flower aspect of the farm, raising organic sunflowers, lupine, peonies and more. A trip to the farm during blooming season is a sight to behold.

Like Neversink, Willow Wisp’s summer CSA (June through November) gives the customer free choice of the farm’s bounty. Some vegetables have a limitation on quantity, some do not. Swartz feels this is more customer-friendly. “One of the biggest complaints people have is that they don’t have choice in what they get. With our farmstand-style pick up, members skip something if they don’t like it, and for some items when there is enough supply, they can take more of what they want.” CSA pickups are at the farm on Fridays between 5 and 7 p.m. Cost for the summer share is \$600 (by April 16). Payment plans are available.

The Ant Hill Farm

The Ant Hill Farm (1114 Beech Grove Rd., Honesdale, PA 18431, 570/ 253-5985, theanthillfarm@gmail.com, www.theanthillfarm.com) outside Honesdale, PA is a family affair. The farm was founded by the four Ballentine siblings: Sky, Galen, Steven and Rebecca. Born and raised in Northeast Pennsylvania, the foursome converted a 35-acre dairy farm into an organic vegetable farm in 2007.

The day-to-day operations are run by Sky and his partner Monique Milleson, who grow everything from tender and spicy mixed greens to hearty root vegetables like beets and carrots. They also devote an entire acre exclusively to garlic.

While The Ant Hill Farm is not certified organic, it is committed to sustainable, holistic and chemical-free farming practices, not an easy task in a region better known for its stone quarries than for its fertile land. “The soil here is not classified as grade A, but it is totally doable. It’s all about learning about your soil and learning what it needs,” said Milleson. “You can maximize the plants you’re growing by conditioning the soil with compost, manure and growing cover crops.”

Milleson and Ballentine are investing now in an expanded vision of the farm that goes beyond field crops: young pear, chestnut and hazelnut orchards have been established for future yields. Maple syrup and eggs are in development. And new beehives will soon be producing enough honey to harvest.

The Ant Hill Farm CSA runs for 22 weeks, June through October. Full shares (\$400) and half shares (\$250) are available—a full share is suitable for a small family and half shares are best for individuals. Members pick up on Wednesdays either at the farm or at the farmer’s market in Honesdale. Sign up by end of April (deposit required).

What is a CSA?

Over the last two decades, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has caught on as a mutually beneficial way for people to buy local, seasonal food directly from the farmer. In the spring, a farmer will offer a certain number of shares, or CSA memberships, to the public. Interested consumers buy a share early—around the time planting begins—and in return receive a mix of produce each week during the growing season.

The benefits of CSAs for consumers include exposure to new foods, establishing a connection to the farm where their food is grown, meeting other members of the CSA community and, of course, gaining regular access to ultra-fresh locally grown produce.

Farmers benefit from CSAs in that they are able to publicize and sell their shares before the busy growing season begins, aiding not only their growing plan, but also their cash flow. This frees them up during the spring and summer to focus on what they do best: cultivating a bountiful harvest.

For a complete listing of small and organic farms and CSAs in the area, visit Shop Local Save Land (shoplocalsaveland.com) for Pennsylvania farms, and Pure Catskills (www.purecatskills.com) for New York farms.

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[EAT] Slow Food for Spring

Text | Jen McGlashan

I don't know about you, but I am so grateful for spring's arrival that I still get a little weepy when I wake up and see green. And so, I thought it might be a lovely idea to have a little spring thanksgiving featuring delicious seasonal ingredients from our illustrious local farms.

So, my fellow members of Slow Food UpDeRiVa have put together a meal—from first course through dessert—worthy of the miracle of spring. Our local farms are wide and varied, so the possibilities for your own spring thanksgiving are endless. But here are a few of our favorites—and there are more recipes from us at ourcountryhome.wordpress.com.

Kale and Collard Salad

Stem the leaves, wash, and dry. (In early spring, you can also add some small tender dandelion leaves.)

Then stack and cut thin as confetti. In a large bowl, throw in lots of good olive oil and lemon, tons of smashed raw garlic (maybe a head!), salt and black pepper.

Work the dressing into the greens vigorously.

This salad keeps for days in the fridge and can be added to soups and stews. You can add all kinds of things like potatoes, beans, toasted nuts and especially **Linda Smith's** basket cheese. **Tonjes' Farm Dairy** (845/482-5971) mozzarella cheese and kale salad make an amazing sandwich on **Lucky Dog Farm** (www.luckydogorganic.com) crocodile bread.

You can get kale, collards, garlic, potatoes, and beans from **River Brook Farm** (845/932-7952).



Roasted Rosemary Garlic Potatoes

6-8 cups potatoes (red, yukon gold or fingerling), quartered with skins on
2 heads of garlic, whole cloves
½ cup olive oil
2 tablespoons rosemary
1 tablespoon red pepper flakes
Salt to taste

Place all ingredients in a clean plastic bag and shake well so everything gets coated evenly.

Put in a roasting pan and bake at 350° for an hour or more until potatoes get browned, stirring occasionally. Add oil to bottom of baking dish if they are sticking too much.

You can find all these ingredients at **Willow Wisp Organic Farm** (www.willowwisporganic.com).

Spinach Frittata

1-2 pounds spinach, cleaned and stemmed
4-6 potatoes with skins on, sliced as thinly as possible
4-6 eggs, depending on size (I have bantam eggs, so I use 6)
1 onion, finely chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
½ cup vegetable or chicken broth
Olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Coat the bottoms and sides of a large cast iron skillet or dutch oven with olive oil, then line with potato slices, slightly overlapping—you're basically making a pie crust. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and olive oil. Bake at 350° until potatoes are cooked through (about 40 minutes).

Meanwhile, saute onion and garlic in a large pan until fragrant and soft. Add broth and spinach and cook down until most of the moisture is removed. Let it cool.

Combine eggs with salt and pepper, add cooled spinach mixture and pour into your potato pie crust.

Bake until firm, about 30-40 minutes.

This is a specialty of **Channery Hill Farm** (http://www.facebook.com/pages/Channery-Hill-Farm/124749434233909#), **Heller Farm** (607/316-2251 or 607/967-8321), and **Campanelli's Poultry Farm** (845/482-9809).

Roasted Brined Chicken with Mushroom Gravy

Brine ingredients

½ cup salt
2 cups veggie broth
¼ teaspoon black peppercorns
¼ teaspoon allspice berries
Thyme, rosemary, bay leaves
Ice water to cover

Combine brine and chicken in a large covered pot or, if it fits, a plastic Ziploc bag. Let chicken soak in the brine for at least an hour (or even overnight—the longer it soaks, the more moisture it absorbs). Once removed from brine, rinse and stuff cavity with:

1 quartered onion
4 smashed garlic cloves
1 cinnamon stick
1 apple, quartered
Rosemary, sage, bay leaf

Line the bottom of a large dutch oven or covered roasting pan with:

Quartered onions
Smashed garlic cloves
Thickly sliced Portobello mushrooms

Rest chicken on the vegetable bed, sprinkle with salt and olive oil, cover and place in a 400° oven. Roast until a meat thermometer registers 180° in the thigh, or 161° in the breast (about 1 hour for the first four pounds, adding 8 minutes for each additional pound).

Gravy base

Remove and rinse giblets and neck, brown in a sauce pan with oil or butter and cook until tender:

1 minced onion
2 cloves minced garlic

Add:

½ cup white wine
1 cup chicken stock
½ cup minced celery
½ cup chopped carrot
Bay leaf, rosemary, sage, thyme
Salt and pepper

Reduce heat and simmer for 45 minutes. Strain out the solids.

Once the bird is done, extract from the pan and let rest for at least 15 minutes before carving. Remove onions and garlic from pan, and add strained gravy mixture. Cook mushrooms and gravy until thick and reduced.

You can find all the ingredients for this recipe at **River Brook Farm** (845/932-7952), **Heller Farm** (607/316-2251 or 607/967-8321), and **Campanelli's Poultry Farm** (845/482-9809).

Ricotta Cheesecake with Dutch Chocolate Cookie Crust

Filling

¾ cups ricotta cheese
2 whole eggs
3 egg whites
1 cup buttermilk
½ cup sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla
2 tablespoons lime or lemon juice
Grated rind of 1 lime or ½ lemon
¼ teaspoon salt

Cookie Crust

Combine:

1 ¾ cups dutch chocolate sugar cookies, crushed
1 tablespoon butter

Preheat oven to 325° Grease a 9-inch springform pan. Press cookie crust in an even layer over bottom and side, and bake for 10-15 minutes. Remove pan and cool. Increase oven temperature to 375°

Combine ricotta, eggs, egg whites, buttermilk, sugar, vanilla, lime or lemon juice, grated rind and salt in electric blender or food processor. Puree until light and airy. Pour into prepared crust. Place a large pan of water in the bottom of the oven.

Bake cheesecake for 50-60 minutes or until set, checking pan of water occasionally to make sure it hasn't evaporated. Cool.

Ricotta cheese can be found at **Tonjes Farm Dairy** (845/482-5971), and **Flour Power Bakery** (www.flourpowerbakery.net) makes the best cookies around.

Contributing cooks Wendy Townsend, Anne Willard, Tannic Kowalchuk, and Jen McGlashan are all members of **Slow Food UpDeRiVa** (www.slowfoodupderiva.com, email upderiva@gmail.com), a local not-for-profit organization that celebrates and teaches the value of food that is good, clean and fair. UpDeRiVa has a season full of events, classes, and potlucks lined up, so come join us!

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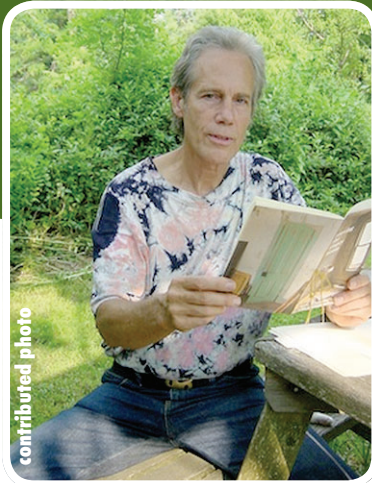
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Meet Master Gardener **Will Conway**

“Challenges can be hard, but the rewards sublime.”

Will Conway, a resident of Mongaup Valley, NY, received his Master Gardener training from Cornell Cooperative Extension. In addition to working on his own multiple gardens, he is available to assist others with theirs. He can be reached at 845/583-4077 or scoopcat@cheerful.com.

QCH: What are the most important elements for choosing where to site a new garden?

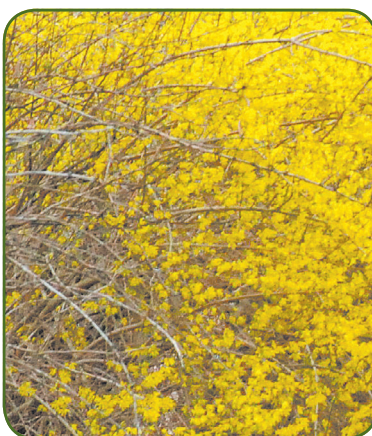
WC: Well, you have to start by asking a few questions. Will the plants you want to grow thrive in the chosen garden space? For instance, if you are planning a vegetable garden, do you have six hours of sunlight on it each day? Plants tagged for partial shade should end up protected from harsh sun in the middle of the day. Another key consideration is soil quality. Testing for alkalinity and acidity can tell you how much to correct the soil with amendments, if needed. [Cornell Cooperative Extension in Ferndale will test your soil for you.] An ample supply of water should be near your site. The site you choose should be easy to get to, and a pleasure to be in. Always keep the sun's movement in mind, when planning your new garden.

QCH: What are raised beds and do I need them?

WC: Raised beds are garden beds with raised and often exposed sides, creating lower pathways in between. This expands aeration to roots of crops, allowing rapid uptake of nutrients. Raised beds tend to be made from well-turned enriched soil. Watering a raised bed is a pleasure, as it will both drain excess and simultaneously hold enough for optimum growth. It is the fattening with manure and turning of raised bed soil that gives it its success. I highly recommend raised beds for many planting situations.

QCH: I have heard about “lasagna” or “cake layer” methods for starting a new garden. Can you explain what this is and do you recommend it?

WC: “Lasagna” gardening is a method for building raised beds from a layered mix of raw organic materials, including straw, leaves, soil, compost, peat moss, grass clippings and what-have-you. An advantage to this “cake” method is its versatility, in that it can be employed without digging the soil below. A bottom layer of cardboard or several layers of newsprint will suppress weed growth and permit new plantings to get a firm foothold. Delightfully, this method has proven successful for fresh planting as a new garden. You can find more information about it on the Internet, or by getting a copy of “Lasagna Gardening” by local gardener Pat Lanza.



QCH: How important is fencing for my garden?

WC: Dwelling in the country, we are competing for forage space with deer and all of wildlife. In order to enjoy fruits of your labors, it is wise to fence vegetables with a fence at least seven feet high. Ornamentals tend to be hardier, if they are native species. There are many beautiful shrubs and flowers that deer will not eat. Cornell Cooperative Extension has a good list.

QCH: Can I grow both vegetables and flowers, or should I choose one or the other? What about herbs?

WC: Please grow all three! Growing diverse cropping attracts health to the land. Pollinators and beneficial insects protect the living garden. Planting flowers with veggies can brighten your garden and add fragrance. Climbing beans, cucumbers and squash can save precious garden space. Easy herbs to begin with are chives and basil.

QCH: Do you recommend annual or perennial plantings?

WC: I recommend both. Supplement perennials with accents of colorful annuals to fill gaps and add charged hues and textures. Perennials serve best as foundation growth under larger plantings or in dedicated beds or “rooms.” Surprising effects can be created with whimsy. Morning glories can honk their graceful trumpets from a mailbox or lamppost. Textures and shapes of leaves and grasses can bring visual sparkle to a mixed planting.

QCH: What challenges can I expect to face?

WC: Expect all of the orneriness of weather, weeds, insects and garden pests such as moles and groundhogs. Challenges can be from too much of one type of weather, or not enough of the other. Seeds can fail. Birds or slugs can eat your seedlings. A late chill can be discouraging. Start again. Gardening harbors an unbroken faith in rebirth. Every garden is an experiment, even for the most seasoned gardeners.

QCH: What are the rewards I can expect to find in growing a garden?

WC: Challenges can be hard, but the rewards sublime. Mostly, the best reward is found in the time you spend in your garden reclaiming an organic connection with the rhythms of the earth. Sweet scents and tastes pull at the senses. Visually, a garden rewards you with slow motion explosions of shapes and blooming colors. A few moments with a hummingbird can brighten one's whole day.

QCH: Do you have any other suggestions?

WC: Enjoy your beginning garden successes and failures. There is always more to learn no matter how long you are at it. Because they turn tons of soil, worms are essential helpers in the garden. Cultivate them by keeping an ongoing compost pile. Always strive to add nutrition to your soil, in the form of compost or aged manures. Mulch is a good moderator of soil surface microclimate, keeping sun, wind and rain in check. Many weeds are edible. I recommend the use of flowering bulbs, like daffodils, for their ease and reliability. Keep fragrance, shape and height in mind when choosing blooming shrubs and flowers.



QCH: You grew up in the Italian enclave of Endicott, NY. What was your experience like there growing up, and how did it lead you to gardening?

AP: The North side of Endicott was where most of the Italian immigrants settled, so there were lots of grapevines, fruit trees, vegetable gardens and rabbit hutches. My best friend's family made their own wine, sausage and prosciutto. When I was a teenager, our elderly landlady who spoke little English had a huge garden that took up most of our yard. She would leave buckets of tomatoes and jugs of homemade wine on our stoop, and she convinced my parents to work the gardens and grow our own produce, which they did for a couple of years.

QCH: When did you arrive in Sullivan County, and how did you happen to move to this area?

AP: I moved here in 2003 from the Adirondacks, where I was assisting with outdoor education programs for the Adirondack Mountain Club. I had my first garden there, and it was a hit. I decided I wanted to learn the skill of growing food, so I looked for farming internships closer to where my family is, but still in the mountains, and found a three-month assistant gardener/educator position at Horizon Farm in Livingston Manor, which is no longer there.

QCH: What parts of your interning experience were valuable in creating the degree of expertise you have today?

AP: The vegetable gardens at Horizon Farm were the most abundant and well tended I'd ever seen. The head gardener there was religious about composting all the barnyard manure and everything, and the plants really thrived. I soaked everything up like a sponge, and was simultaneously teaching kids and their families about the marvels of growing food and raising livestock, so I learned very fast. It was the first time I'd eaten only what the garden and animals offered, so everything was extremely fresh. I went on to work for other small farms in the area where the work was intensive and done by hand, and the repetition reinforced what I was learning about crop planting, rotation, soil building, irrigation and pest and disease control.

Meet 'Dirt Diva'

Adrienne Picciano

“I want to be able to design something that functions like a web, in that everything is connected, so I am not fighting nature and forcing something to be.”

QCH: You received your Permaculture Design certificate from the Hancock Permaculture Center in 2010. What is permaculture, and what attracted you to the study?

AP: I really like knowing how things work, and what makes them work efficiently. Permaculture is a broad concept that is really difficult to define, but it is a way of thinking about entire systems, and understanding how one system affects another, so when you set out to create or alter something, you are not creating a problem somewhere down the line. It relates to garden design because ultimately you are changing something about the environment to create a garden. I want to be able to design something that functions like a web, in that everything is connected, so I am not fighting nature and forcing something to be. Jeff Lawton and Bill Mollison are most often credited with coining the term and they both write and teach extensively about it.

QCH: What services do you offer to clients as the Dirt Diva?

AP: I do the physical part of gardening, such as installation and maintenance, with a focus on edible plants and building soil. I also consult with people who'd like design guidance in starting a new or renovating an existing garden, be it edible or not. The quality of my work depends largely on the quality of materials I have available to work with. I am grateful for the local nurseries who supply healthy plants suitable for our short season, and to the local farmers who supply me with the most fundamental elements, such as manure, compost and hay.

The Dirt Diva can be reached at 845/482-5078. Visit her at www.gardensforeatin.com.



Turn the page for more garden tips

Text | Cass Collins

Photo | Sandy Long

Meet Heirloom Seed Expert

Trina Pilonero

“It’s in our cultural heritage to save seeds.”

QAH: How did you get started as a gardener?

TP: I was born in Kansas and, out of necessity, Dad had a garden. As children (there were five of us), we were expected to help in the garden. I learned it was fun but it was also a lot of hard work. I vowed never to have a garden.

QAH: Are all your vows so successful?

TP: Well, I married my college sweetheart 41 years ago! We moved to the Catskills in 1990 with our two then-teenage daughters. I was a professional stay-at-home mom. I made my own goat cheese, which I liked doing. I liked goats, wanted some, got some, and made cheese in the kitchen.

QAH: Is that when you became a Master Gardener?

TP: Yes, well, I finally had to choose between my plants and my goats. I quit dairy goats and started a nursery because I got mad.

QAH: Mad?

TP: Yes, I remembered how good tomatoes are supposed to taste and that’s not the way the plants I was growing from transplants tasted. I started using open pollinated and heirloom seeds. I was an exuberant grower and always grew too many of everything, so I started putting them out by the side of the road. Then I helped form the first farmers’ market up here, as a venue for my tomato plants. I thought it was the dumbest thing I ever did. But the next year, I was vindicated. People liked the way our plants produced and they came back.

QAH: What does “open pollinated” and “heirloom” mean?

TP: Open pollinated plants have two genetic parents, male and female, that are the same. The hybrids, which came into prominence after World War II, have genetically different parents. They are bred for their vigor and productivity. The only way to get hybrids is from a corporation. But if you save seeds from an open pollinated plant, you get the same plant you started with. It’s in our cultural heritage to save seeds. We are relearning how to be self-sufficient. Heirloom plants are like me—over 50. They have been around for at least three generations.

When plants are bred for disease resistance, they tend to lose flavor—they look beautiful, but they are tasteless. To me, flavor is incredibly important.



QAH: Are all the plants you grow native to the region?

TP: Oh, no. The biggest challenge to growing up here is our short season. I grow what performs well here. Four out of five gardeners grow tomatoes, so we carry a large variety of all sorts of tomatoes. But we grow many, many other things as well. The extent of the challenge is to grow what performs well in our environment. I’m growing something now from Egypt called Melo Khya, a short spinach-like plant that gets taller as it ages and becomes fibrous. Its mature strands can be made into rope. Somebody told me about it and I found it on the Internet. We pay attention to what our customers ask for.

In addition to our vegetables, we have herbs and some perennials, like the butterfly bush and other cottage garden plants. If I like them, we sell them. There’s a breeder, Tom Wagner, who grows a tomato that is named Green Zebra because it has stripes. It lacks a color gene but it tastes great! There are fads in the vegetable world as in every world.

QAH: Do you still sell at the farmers’ markets?

TP: Well, I go to Union Square in New York City, so we don’t do the Liberty Farmers’ Market on Fridays anymore. We still sell at the Sunday market in Callicoon. I love and support my local farmers’ markets.

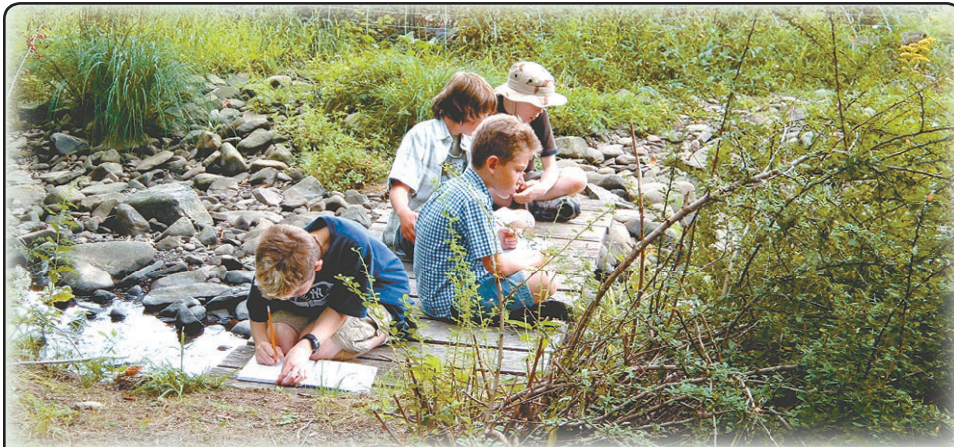
QAH: Do you still keep farm animals?

TP: We have five head of Scottish Highlander cattle. They are from a hardy, ancient fifth-century breed. They have long shaggy hair and big horns. We keep chickens—also heritage breeds.

QAH: You moved some of your operations away from your farm in Jeffersonville. Why is that?

TP: We just found it was hard for some people to get to us up at the farm. Now we share space at Gorzynski’s Farm on Route 52. It works out well for us.

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Children engage on their level at the Homestead School in Glen Spey, NY.

Bethany Children's House, Homestead and Homeschooled

Three education alternatives

Text & Photographs | Marcia Nehemiah

Children come in different shapes and sizes. Some are round, some square, and a few are pentagons. For a lot of children, school can be a constant struggle to fit in to narrowly defined learning styles. While public schools strive to address the needs of all their students, some parents want a different environment for their children.

Bethany Children's House

Bethany's Children House (BCH), a non-profit Montessori preschool located just outside Honesdale, PA, is celebrating its 30th year of implementing the educational ideas of Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952). While it is difficult to sum up her contribution to children's education, her impact cannot be underestimated. She said: "Education is a natural process carried out by the child and is not acquired by listen-

ing to words but by experiences in the environment." She also said "that education is not something which the teacher does, but it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being."

As children exercise their freedom within established order, they develop a sense of accomplishment and confidence. Their experience tells them that they can trust themselves and solve problems independently.

Bethany Children's House provides carefully designed hands-on activities that allow children opportunities for discovery. Each child develops at his or her own rate, and various learning styles are respected.

In the Preprimary class, three children sit in child-sized rocking chairs and a bright blue couch exploring books and sharing their discoveries. Another girl sits at the art table, coloring a picture of Da Vinci's Mona

Lisa. Under the picture is an incomplete sentence: "She is dreaming of ...". In the blank space, the girl prints the words, "the stars." Two boys unroll a mat and work with dice they have chosen from the shelf where all the math activities are located. A boy and girl unroll a mat and begin playing with blocks.

When Miss Katie (Katie Brosky, certified Montessori teacher and directress of BCH) sounds three chimes, the children excitedly find their spots for Circle Time. Miss Katie and the children exchange "good mornings" in English, French, German, Chinese, Spanish, Greek, Italian and Indian. Miss Katie tells the children that the letter of the day is Z and asks them questions to help them understand the concept of "zero."

Every Montessori classroom is divided into eight areas: Language and Reading, Science and Nature, Geography and World Cultures, Math, Music, Art,

continued on page 18



Directress and teacher at Bethany Children's House "Miss Katie" Brosky provides guidance as children in her preprimary class complete a project on opposites.



Students in the Homestead preschool class collaborate on language skills.



A child engaged in her selected activity at Bethany Children's House.



Children at the Homestead School engage in hands-on work in the preschool classroom.

Sensorial and Practical Life, each of which contains materials designed to stimulate interest in the child and to facilitate learning.

The role of the teacher in the Montessori classroom is to direct and guide. Although Miss Katie and Miss Bronwyn are not the center of the classroom, they are constantly observing the children and encouraging them. Their careful preparation is evident. All activities are created so that the children can develop order, concentration and coordination, and become independent thinkers who are actively engaged in the learning process.

The same goals guide the Toddler class. As teacher Miss Lynn reads tells a story using pictures in the book "Berenstain Bears Go to the Doctor," aide Miss Diane quietly helps children focus their attention.

Miss Katie tells me: "We get feedback from the Kindergarten teachers in the public schools that our kids are farther ahead in math and reading skills as well as organization."

Enrollment for the school year at BCH continues until classes are full, on a first-come, first served basis. Interested parents should call the school (570/253-6359) to set up an observation time. Visit bethanychildrenshouse.org.

The Homestead School

At the private Montessori-based Homestead School, set on 85 acres in Glen Spey, NY, the world is the classroom. Children hike nature trails, plant gardens, tend goats, sheep and chickens, work in wood shop and perform original plays in the outdoor theater. The indoor classrooms look out on the mountains, woods and open space that surround the school.

Directors Peter Comstock and wife Marsha opened the school in 1978 with 12 preschool students. It gradually grew to include kindergarten and first grade. When son Jack and daughter-in-law Nisha joined the staff in 2001, "they put their creative imprint on the school" said Peter, encouraging its expansion by one grade a year.

The school now has three levels — preschool through kindergarten, first through third grade and fourth

through sixth grade. "Quite a lot of planning goes into our curriculum. We are trying to integrate the subjects," said Jack. For example, during the unit on Greek civilization in the upper elementary grades, the study of Archimedes incorporated physics. Children learned about his inventions by making levers and pulleys.

Art classes incorporate art history as well as the skills of making art, and one classroom is devoted solely to fiber arts. Students shear sheep who live at the school, spin wool and dye yarn. They learn to knit. This year, they are weaving masks and belts, knitting a baby blanket as a group project, and sewing stuffed animals.

Students have examined issues in the world beyond Glen Spey. Their study of mountaintop removal resulted in a trip to West Virginia. They have raised money to preserve rainforest acreage in Latin America. Most recently, they have studied the issue of gas drilling. These investigations require their use of reading, writing, math, problem solving, public speaking, history and science.

Children from the Homestead School enter public school in seventh grade, well prepared and capable of adapting to the different learning environment. Nisha said that most Homestead grads take honors classes, and excel academically and socially.

Contact 845/856-6359 or homesteadschool.com.

Home schooling

Eduardo Antonetti, a public school educator and administrator, and his wife Lenore Rogan are strong supporters of public education. But when it came to their children, they had reservations.

"We began to feel that school might not be the best match for our kids," said Rogan. "We worried whether their intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for learning were being nurtured in an environment that often emphasized conformity over individuality." They wondered if the kids "were being sufficiently challenged."

So when Gian, 10, and Pancho, 8, asked for home schooling, "We decided to leap into it, and it felt very much like I imagine skydiving might feel — simultaneously liberating, exhilarating and terrifying," said Rogan. They embarked on a home-schooling program

in September 2009. Samantha, 3, is now in the class.

The National Household Education Surveys Program indicates that in 2007, over 1.5 million children in the U.S. were home schooled. Parents choose to home school their children for a variety of reasons including dissatisfaction with academic instruction in public schools, concern over negative peer pressure and the public school environment, a desire for more flexibility and religious considerations.

Rogan does the hands-on teaching, since Eduardo works long hours. He is a resource for her, answering her questions and giving advice. "I am grateful to have a partner who knows as much as he does, but in the end, it really comes down to the kids and me."

Each state mandates that home schoolers follow a core curriculum very much like the ones in public schools. In Pennsylvania, where the Antonetti children live, professional educators evaluate each child's educational progress. Students must take standardized tests and present a portfolio of work. A certified teacher or school psychologist provides an annual written evaluation for each student. According to **The Washington Post**, "All surveys of home-schooled students so far indicate that they have higher achievement rates on average than regular students."

Rogan acknowledges that there are challenges to home schooling. "Finding time to research and experiment with resources that will work for your family while making sure there is food in the fridge, everyone has clean clothes, you have time to develop friendships and to be a mom as well as a teacher can be overwhelming. I am not working outside the home right now, but I did last year; working adds a whole extra layer of complexity to the balancing act." She said that "keeping a hearty sense of humor help a lot, too."

She has found the experience to be a positive one. "I can say confidently that we have grown closer, that we know each other better and respect each other more than we did before. I have no idea what the future holds, but I know that we will meet it strengthened by the mutual respect that only looking long and hard can provide. I feel good about that."

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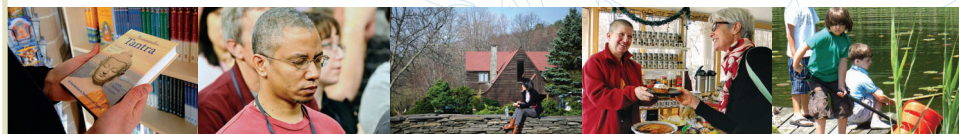
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After your perusal of our gardening articles and advice columns, it might be time to head out into the yard and get to work. The following stores carry gardening tools, supplies, seeds, seedlings, pond and gazebo material, fencing, trees, perennials and plants. (Call first to see what each shop carries.)

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www.catskillharvest.com

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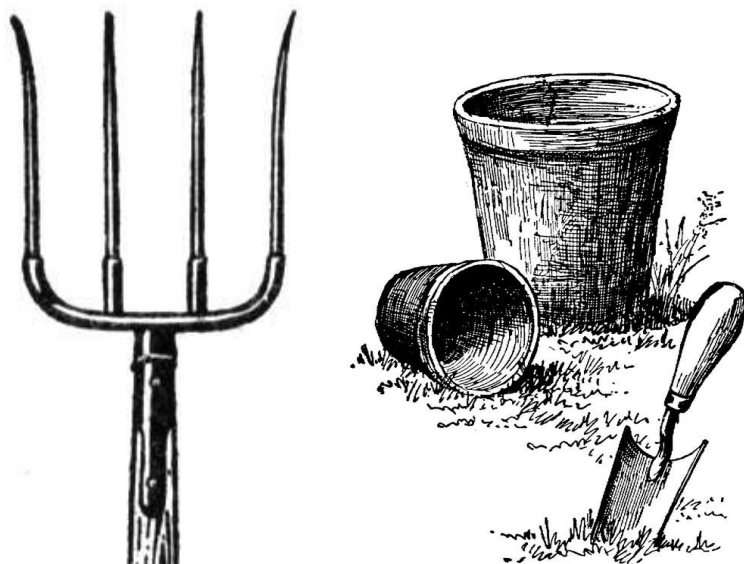
30 Depot Road, Cochecton, NY 12726
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River Gallery is described by owners **Barry Becker** and **Tony Coscia** as "antique style for modern living." Their eclectic shop features Asian and American antiques and gifts for the home as well as original art and locally made, hand-crafted furnishings.

Domesticities & The Cutting Garden owner **Anne Hart** has an eye for country charm, as evident in her shop's collection of antiques, fine and primitive; works by local artisans; fair trade accessories for the home; and garden and vintage collectibles.

During the summer months, **The Cutting Garden** is brimming with lush flowers that beckon to be picked.

Nest offers an exquisite collection of vintage and hand-crafted, country contemporary home furnishings and clothing, artfully assembled by owner **Anna Bern**.

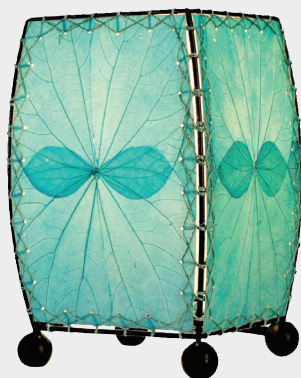


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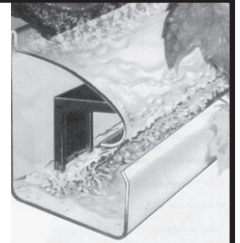
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