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On the cover:

Bees in the hand are worth... a lot in terms of education. Here, SUNY Sullivan professor Art Rieggar holds out some bees for the camera's perusal. Photo by Prof. Larry Reeger, contributed by Art Rieggar

Editor's letter:

Welcome to spring

I haven't seen flowers yet—it's a bit early—but the ice is melting and the earth is muddy with promise.

The news is not good but we can step away from the headlines, look around us, and seek a moment of quiet.

This season, writer Jane Anderson has an update for us on the state of real estate here in the country. People are still buying—but there are fewer houses for sale. If you're considering jumping into the market, now's a good time.

Sharon Peduto reminds us that it's also time to prune your trees and bushes. Check them for damage or disease, remove the ailing branches and twigs. Your garden will thank you for it.

Jude Waterston is thinking about leeks and other spring onions. She'll tell you how to treat your leeks and how to cook them to bring out their velvety goodness.

Are you renovating your home? Barbara Winfield, the River Reporter's decorating expert, has tips on choosing the right contractor and keeping within a budget—and the latter, in particular, is not easy.



Photo by Charlotte Coneybeer on Unsplash
When do lilacs bloom? I actually don't know—but something about them makes me think of spring.

Finally, we meet Art Rieggar, apiary expert, who explains the magic and wonder of bees, and gives you tips on starting your own hives.

It's spring, and the earth is opening up. Breathe deeply.

Annemarie Schuetz
Section editor

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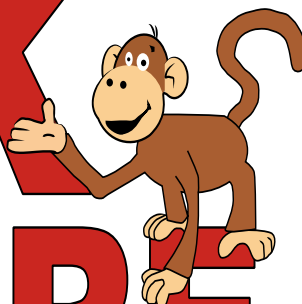
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Springing a leek

By JUDE WATERSTON

For years, right after celebrating the New Year, my sister Janet and I would have the pipes drained, take down the bird feeders and wind chimes, clear out the fridge and freezer, and close our little house in the country for three months. We'd return to our apartments in the city to wait out the coldest months of the year. Now we spend our winters in Oaxaca, Mexico, but we still go through the same rigamarole before leaving.

We return sometime in late April. While lugging our suitcases up the steps of the front porch, I always steal a peek at the garden that abuts the house. Like magic, the true harbingers of spring are revealed. Clumps of bright green chives have sprouted, welcoming me home.

Chives are the smallest and most delicate members of the onion family. Their faintly oniony flavor and vibrant color make them a useful, tasty, and versatile herb. They are most often used as a garnish along with the edible pom-pom-like pinkish-purple flowers that eventually bloom atop their stems. Chives can also make an appearance as a bonafide ingredient in egg salad, butter-based sauces, biscuits, savory scones and cheese omelets. One year I steeped the flowers in white wine vinegar and produced a sprightly ingredient, along with extra-virgin olive oil, for salad dressings.

Next up on the onion food chain is something I always have in the crisper drawer of my refrigerator, and that is a bunch of scallions. Scallions are commonly referred to as green onions and are a type of young onions with a long, thin white base that has not yet developed a bulb, and long straight green stalks that look like giant chives. Scallions are milder than mature onions but have a stronger flavor than chives. Both the white base and the lightest green part of the stalk are eaten. As with their diminutive relative, chives, they are most often used fresh and raw in salads, mixed into cream cheese, or placed on a crudité platter. In the Asian kitchen the ever-so-slightly crunchy scallion is often thinly sliced and showered over soups and entrees as a garnish just prior to being served.

Finally, we move on to the majestic, most refined, and underrated member of the garlic and onion families. The noble leek. Leeks are prehistoric plants. Serious cultivation of this oversized scallion in the

Mediterranean world led to a long-standing Roman predilection for leeks.

I worked in an Italian-owned pasta shop for ten years. Besides selling fresh and dried pasta we had a kitchen in the back overseen by the Venetian matriarch of the family. Senora spent her days preparing a multitude of dishes for take-out. I had never seen leeks used in so many dishes. "The southern Italians use onions, while the northerners like myself prefer the more delicate and subtle leek," she once explained to me with more than a touch of arrogance.

Words like sweet, silky and velvety describe how leeks react to various cooking methods. They lend themselves to braising and baking, both of which render them meltingly tender. They are great sauteed with other vegetables as a base for a hearty soup and are a terrific component in egg dishes such as omelets, French tarts, Italian frittatas, and Spanish tortillas (a thick omelet cut into wedges and served at tapas bars).

Because of the way leeks grow, dirt and grit get trapped between the tight leaves. Split them lengthwise and rinse well under cool running water, then pat dry. The white and pale green shank of the vegetable is edible; the upper darker-green leaves are tough and better off thrown onto the compost heap.

Leeks are most often used in combination with other ingredients in the preparation of a dish rather than as a vegetable in their own right. I have a mammoth collection of cookbooks and did some investigating to find recipes that showcase leeks. In "The Foods of the Greek Islands," by Aglaia Kremezi, I was intrigued by such recipes as leek patties and coiled spinach, leek, and feta pie made with filo pastry. In "Verdura (Vegetables Italian Style)," by Viana La Place, I found a leek and spinach frittata and a rich-sounding, impressive dish of leeks in pink mascarpone sauce. The "Gourmet Cookbook," edited by Ruth Reichl, offered creamed leeks, poached leeks with warm vinaigrette, and grilled leeks with Spanish romesco sauce. The French "Bistro Cooking," by Patricia Wells, had a recipe for leek tart. Finally, in "Contorni (Authentic Italian Side Dishes for all Seasons)," by Susan Simon, I found a mouthwatering recipe for gratinéed leeks. Any dish with a creamy, cheesy sauce and browned, golden crust wins me over immediately. This dish is perfect with crisp-skinned roasted chicken, pork chops, or a nice, juicy steak. A dressed green salad nicely cuts the richness of the leeks. And the garnish of snipped chives brings us back to the start of spring.



A dish of gratinéed leeks.

RR photo by Jude Waterston

Gratinéed Leeks

Serves 4

- 1 pound (four leeks) trimmed of dark green parts (leaving each leek about 6 to 7" long)
- 1 cup firmly packed grated Gruyère or Emmentaler cheese
- 1/3 cup firmly packed finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup half & half or whole milk
- Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup fresh breadcrumbs
- 3 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons snipped fresh chives (garnish)

Carefully cut the leeks in half lengthwise, leaving the inner layers intact. If gritty, rinse thoroughly to remove any trace of dirt.

Fill a large pot or Dutch oven with 3 inches of salted water and bring it to a boil. Lower the heat so that the water is simmering and add the leeks. Poach, partially covered, for 6 minutes. Use tongs to remove them carefully from the water so they stay as intact as possible. Let them drain on paper towels. Slice the leeks in half width-wise.

Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a small skillet and when hot, add the fresh bread crumbs. Sauté about 2 minutes until pale gold. Set aside.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Make the béchamel sauce by melting the butter in a saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the flour and cook, stirring continuously, for 2 minutes. Pour in the half & half or milk while stirring continuously, then raise heat to medium. When mixture thickens to the consistency of pancake batter, add the nutmeg, salt, pepper, and Parmigiano-Reggiano. Remove from heat and stir a few seconds until cheese is melted.

Grease an 8 x 8" gratin dish with the final teaspoon of oil. Pour half the béchamel sauce into the bottom of the gratin. Spread evenly with the back of a spoon. Line the dish with the stacks of leeks until the bottom of the gratin is covered with leeks. Pour the remainder of the béchamel sauce over the leeks and spread with the back of a spoon to completely cover leeks. Sprinkle with Gruyère cheese and then the breadcrumbs. Bake until bubbly, 20 to 25 minutes.

Turn on the broiler and broil the top of the gratin for 2 to 3 minutes until the top is deeply golden. Remove from the oven and garnish with the snipped chives. Serve.


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BUYERS' APPEAL

The strong real estate market is chugging along, alive and well, Realtors and agents say

By JANE ANDERSON

REGION — An unexpected effect of the coronavirus pandemic was a massive leap in the local real estate market. According to local real estate agents and brokers, that wave of homebuying hasn't receded.

"The strong market continued through 2021 and into 2022," says Debbie Jagel, owner of Cabins & Canoes Real Estate in Forestburgh, NY. "COVID struck, and it opened up a new generation of buyers; and because of omicron, we're still feeling some push."

Technology had a hand in it, as well, Jagel says: "The initial rush to buy homes around here was fueled by a new-found freedom unleashed in 30-somethings, who woke up to realize they could work from anywhere. This past year, those who didn't purchase in the first wave may have felt left out, and they wanted to buy their own homes."

"It is very busy right now," concurred Joy Romano, from Malek Properties in White Lake, NY. "It seemed to get a little slower when COVID restrictions let up in the summer; it slowed down quickly as people wanted to enjoy themselves, get married, go on vacation, etc.... A month or two after that it got a little busier, but by January 2 it got very busy overnight, and has stayed that way so far."

In the 58 years that Davis R. Chant has owned his Pennsylvania real estate business—with offices in Hawley, Lords Valley, Milford, and Honesdale—the business has seen peaks and valleys, but nothing that compares to this.

"2021 was our best year ever in 58 years," Chant says. "People want to either commute to work in the city, retire here, or have a vacation/weekend home. They are highly motivated to get out of New York City and into the country. They're willing to commute from Port Jervis on the train, or drive from any place that's about an hour and a half by car."

As buyers flooded the market, though, the availability of houses began to decline.

"Buyers are there with healthy budgets, but the inventory is not there," says Caroline Akt, real estate broker and owner of Caroline Akt Realty in Mongaup Valley, NY. "I cover a large area; my listings range from Grahamsville to Narrowsburg and all towns in between, and I see it happening everywhere."

Chant agrees: "This is a good time for the real estate market, and it would be a more active time, too, if more houses were available."

Multiple offers, and offers that are above the asking price, are becoming more common. "I feel strongly that the anticipation of increased interest rates had a great deal to do with it," says Carol Malek of Malek Properties. "It seems everyone is anxious about locking in their rate right now. Inventory is super tight so far this year. Not that many people list their properties in the winter months, for obvious reasons, and things are selling, so there is very little on the market, especially in the residential marketplace."

Ripple effects have begun, some say. "The pressure is turned up on everything now, but a rising tide lifts all boats, and a strong real estate market will lift everything up," says Tom Freda of Matthew J. Freda Real Estate in Callicoon, NY. "Towns are responding to the new life that's being injected by the homebuyers. People who are moving in are



Photo by Kostiantyn Li on Unsplash
Realtors warn that although buyers are still piling in, at some point this will change. If you're thinking of selling, start the process now.

opening stores and restaurants; they are really waking up the area."

Jagel has noticed that trend as well. "If you sell a lot of residential property, commercial isn't far behind. Livingston Manor and Narrowsburg already had a solid Main Street presence. What we're seeing now are businesses being bought in towns like Barryville. The diner is redone, a general store is up and running, the local gas station was bought... We're seeing similar action in Glen Spey, Forestburgh."

"There's an integration of people buying houses, but they still want to escape their four walls locally and have fun—so they'll hit the Cocheton Pump House and then go to Narrowsburg or Barryville," Jagel says. "Callicoon, too, has been amping up. We are all bringing a new synergy, and we're not even in the middle of it. We have so many houses that need to be renovated, it's like Aspen [Colorado] in 1974."

With all of that interest from outside, are locals being priced out? "No, but the word on the street is that they are," Jagel says. "There are deals out there. Buyers need a little shimmy to their vision. The house will never be perfect; the bones are important, but location is key. You can add a new kitchen, but you can't add a river view to a house in the woods."

Jagel notes that her most important role as a Realtor is educating her buyers and ensuring they have realistic expectations. "We can definitely give you country and Catskills, but sometimes we have to reel in what the buyers are expecting to get."

Short-term rentals—like Airbnb and VRBO—are a good way for potential buyers to get a taste of the area, and for potential sellers to test out the attractiveness of their homes while gaining income. Many municipalities have restrictions regarding short-term rentals, so potential landlords are advised to check everything out first. But as long as rules are followed, "Airbnb gives people a very fluid way to experience life up here, and some of those visitors turn into straight-up buyers," Jagel says.

What does the future hold? It's hard to say, but most Realtors say this market can't last forever.

"I believe we will see a strong sellers' market throughout this year, but introduction of foreclosures and new home construction could level out the prices," Malek says. "I don't foresee the prices continuing to rise as they have in the past two years."

"I think this strong market is going to continue in eastern Pennsylvania, New York and northern New Jersey," Chant concludes. "I think we're going to continue to see very nice growth. In Pennsylvania, especially here in Pike County, there are residential lots available that people will be willing to build upon."

Freda agrees that the market won't slow down overnight: "Take advantage of that market while it's here," he advises. But the beauty of the region will continue to attract buyers, no matter what the market looks like, he says. "You can't deny the appeal of this area—I walked out of a café this morning and a bald eagle flew overhead. What price do you put on that?"

Tips for buyers and sellers

Local real estate agents' best advice for this busy time

By JANE ANDERSON

"I would suggest that anyone seriously looking to buy should have their financials in order. Get a preapproval from the bank; if you look at a home and like it, if you are not ready to make an offer because you don't have a preapproval or proof of funds, you can easily lose the home to another buyer."

"For sellers, I say list ASAP. Some sellers prefer to list in the spring, but people are looking now. There's no need to wait, because you have less competition in the market if you list when the inventory is low."

—Joy Romano, Malek Properties, White Lake, NY

"Buyers—be patient, get preapprovals and be ready financially to go. If you wait a week, the property you want might not be there."

"Sellers—If your house has been on the market for a period of time, it's probably overpriced. If it's polished up, clean, and painted, those houses are in high demand."

—Tom Freda, Matthew J. Freda Real Estate, Callicoon, NY

"If you are looking to sell, I say get it on the market sooner rather than later. The market is strong now and spring inventory, as well as the imminent wave of foreclosures, will be competing soon enough."

"If you are looking to buy, you need to be prepared and act fast. I suggest having your prequalification in order and proof of funds ready. Making your terms very agreeable with the sellers' desires is one sure way to strengthen your offer." —Carol Malek, Malek Properties, White Lake, NY

"Sellers, choose listing agents who are available 24 hours a day; find out how many sales they've completed; and check how many referrals they've had. A good listing agent knows the correct price range for a house; educated buyers nowadays know what's the best price. It is a sellers' market, but not for a house with an avocado refrigerator or one that needs \$50,000 worth of work."

"People don't remember street names when they're looking for a house. They remember the house with the green carpet, the house with five dogs. It comes down to location, price and condition—which can be adjusted with proper staging. You want people to feel at home and picture themselves living there."

—Debbie Jagel, owner/broker, Cabins & Canoes Real Estate, Forestburgh, NY

"If buyers see something that interests them, they need to get in their car and see the home ASAP. Also, be aware that low-ball offers will not work in a sellers' market."

"For sellers, get your home on the market because now is the time you'll get the most for your home. And clean out your home beforehand, as less is more."

—Caroline Akt, real estate broker and owner of Caroline Akt Realty, Mongaup Valley, NY

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Get ready for pruning!

Huh? What?

By SHARON PEDUTO

IN OUR GARDENS—Why prune at all?

Because it helps trees become stronger and healthier. Foliage becomes more lush. Leaves grow bigger. Flowering bushes produce more flowers; some say bigger flowers are produced. Pruning fruit trees makes it easier to pick fruit. Inspecting and pruning yearly makes your life much easier as your beauties grow.

If I only knew how simple it was to prune, I would have saved thousands of dollars. But I was afraid of killing my trees and bushes. The closest I ever came to pruning was pulling off dead flowers, generally known as “deadheading.”

Research before you prune. This is important. Again: Research your trees and bushes before attempting to prune. Every tree and bush has limits on how much can be removed. And sometimes branches need to be cut at different times of the year because they pose a risk.

There are times when tree specialists are necessary. But you have to research (again) before you hire someone else to do your pruning. A lawn maintenance company cut two-thirds of a butterfly bush and whacked up a cherry tree so much that neither recovered to their original healthy condition.

Most pruning is done in the late winter or early spring; cherry trees are an exception. Those months are also cabin-fever time for most of us. That’s a good excuse to get out and assess your landscape.

Why prune in the late winter or early spring? Simple. Your deciduous trees and bushes that lose their leaves in the fall are dormant, as are insects. The sleepy period, before buds appear, allows your woody friends to heal with less chance of disease.

With the leaves gone, you’ll have a clear picture of any dead, damaged, diseased and dangerous branches that should be removed.

Dead, damaged, diseased and dangerous

Dead branches take up unneeded space and air, besides looking like crap in the months to follow. If you’re not sure if a branch is dead, scrape a little bark off. If it’s green, it’s not dead. Don’t go all Superwoman or Incredible Hulk and bend it.



An insect-infested limb.

Even a branch with a two-inch diameter can crack and send wood flying all over. I learned that the hard way. It takes two seconds to hurt yourself or your eyes. Could be six months or longer to heal. Why risk it?

How about damaged branches? Cross branches—they look like an X—can potentially rub against other branches and injure them, a perfect opportunity for insects to infest the damaged branches when the insects come out in the spring.

You also want to get rid of diseased branches. Pruning can control plant diseases by keeping the disease from spreading, according to the Oklahoma State University (OSU) Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. Prune the diseased branches back 10 inches from the dieback and into the healthy wood.

OSU extension director Robert Bourne added that if pruning is done with handheld tools, the tools should be sanitized between cuts. (Chainsaws don’t need to be sanitized.)

Dangerous branches can fall down—you don’t want them falling on people or on a vehicle or house—or the branches can be an obstacle for mowing and walking.

Winter or early spring is a good time to buy the tools needed before they are gone. (See sidebar for list of tools you’ll need.) Last year, I waited too long and missed out on badly-needed loppers.

You’ll also soon discover that some people are funny about lending their tools. I don’t blame them. We all have our favorites.

Some pruning tips

First, be sure you’re protected with a hat, long sleeves, pants, gloves and a coat. If you’re using a chainsaw, consider more protection; ask your salesperson.

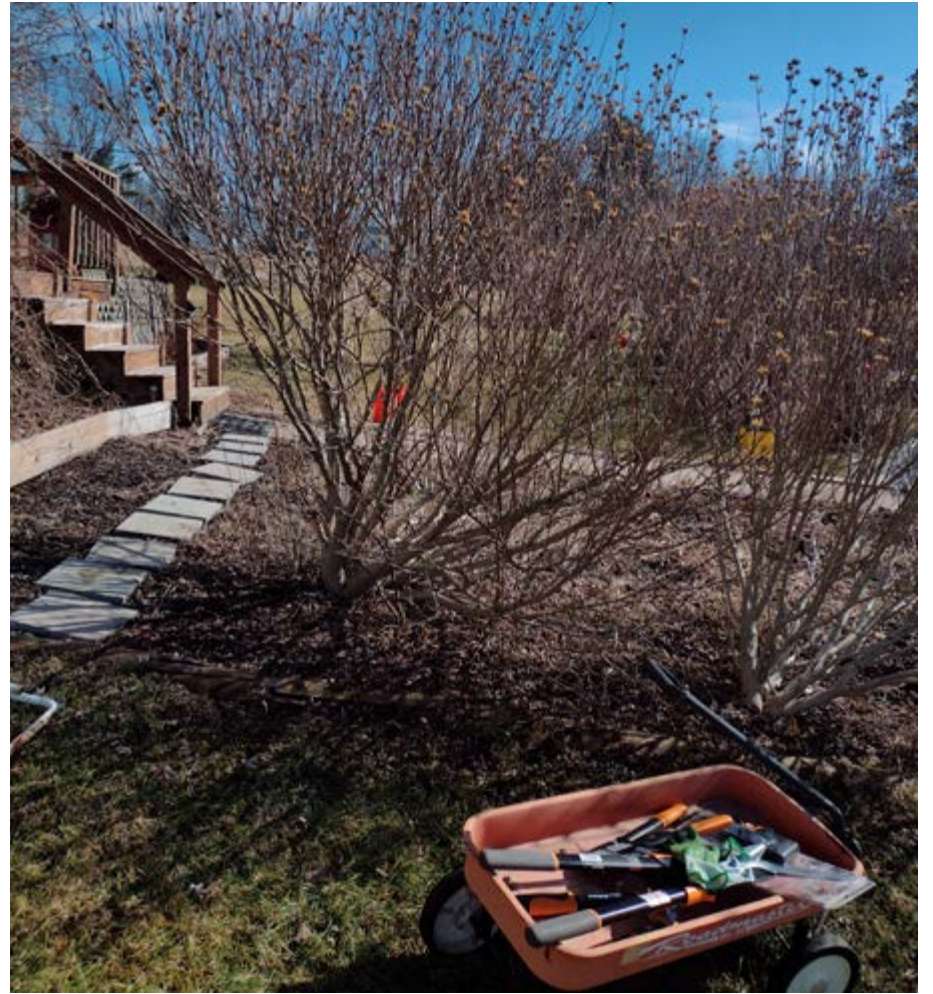
If pruning a large tree branch, with a diameter of five or more inches, get as close to the trunk as possible or to what is referred to as a “collar.” You’ll know it when you see it. The collar resembles a ring on your finger close to the trunk. Thank you, chainsaw!

There is no shame in making two or more cuts from different angles, as long as the cut eventually lies flat against the trunk of the tree or collar.

Avoid branch blindness. This year I’m marking the branches before pruning. Eventually, they all look the same and you end up cutting the wrong branch.



Dangerous low branch needs to be cut closer to the tree.



RR photos by Sharon Peduto

A Rose of Sharon, ready for pruning, and a red wagon full of pruning tools.

Take the time to stand back several times throughout the process of pruning. View your masterpiece. You want to see the blue sky and sun coming through the branches.

Remember, it’s not the end of the world if things are lopsided. Usually nature is very forgiving. Like a bad haircut, everything will grow back, giving you another chance to practice pruning.

Pruning terms made easy

Heading: Shortening a branch should not be confused with deadheading.

When you head a branch, you are shortening branches that have grown too tall. It’s easy to find the tools that are most appropriate for the branch or branches. Base your tools on the diameter and location of the branch. Or just get a chainsaw.

Suckers: Twig-like, they grow at the bottom of trees. They, and water sprouts (below) need to be removed as they suck energy from the tree. Usually they can easily be pruned with hand shears.

Thinning: Taking out a large, older branch at the bottom of your bushes or tree limbs. (They may be tall.) If working on a bush, prune close to the ground. Loppers and/or pruning saws are the best way to treat this area.

Water sprouts: Generally are thin twigs that grow straight up off a larger branch. They look like a row of soldiers at attention. The most common cause of water sprouts is—you guessed it—the tree needs water. Remove them with hand shears.

Pruning tools

Having all your tools with you saves time when you’re pruning. With this list, you’ll have the tools on hand.

Here’s what you need:

Safety glasses. You may not like them, but they can save you an eye. I have been wearing an old pair of plastic-framed eyeglasses that literally saved my eyes on many occasions, but this season I’ll be wearing both the glasses and safety goggles.

Pruning shears.

Loppers.

Ratchet pruners.


Pruning saw, one or more.

Hedge shears.

Pole pruner for those hard-to-reach tree branches.

The small but mighty chainsaw—my favorite! (Buy from your local farm and garden store or a chainsaw specialist like Eschenberg, and discuss safety tips with the salesperson. Pruning is important, but don’t lose a limb over it.)

It seems like lots of stuff, but almost all of it can fit in a kid’s wagon. Not counting the chainsaw, tools should not cost more than \$100, and most have lifetime warranties. It’s a good investment for the future of your landscaping needs.



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For Any Occasion



Bees, please

They pollinate. They give us honey and beeswax. They are cool. Professor Art Riegel shares the joys of beekeeping.

By ANNEMARIE SCHUETZ

LOCH SHELDRAKE, NY — “Oh, I was always interested in bees,” said Art Riegel. “I saw the beekeepers in their white hooded suits and gloves. To a nine-year-old they looked like astronauts.” This was 1969, and the moon landing was in the news.

The SUNY Sullivan professor has found in beekeeping a compelling way of life, one he has been able to share with students at the college.

“Like any hobby,” Riegel said, “it can get addictive.”

Consider yourself warned. You can start with one or two hives, as he did eight years ago, and then you add more hives. You grow plants that the bees would like, or pay attention to where you live, to make sure they have the best forage.

You add more hives. You deal with the resulting honey—never taking too much from the bees; they need it too—by giving it to friends. Then you sell some. Then you have a business.

Riegel has taught at the college for over three decades, and cites the addition of Hope Farms to the college’s community involvement as a spur to his beekeeping life.

“It’s agriculture, it’s pollination, and we have 400 acres of this beautiful campus,” he said. “It’s just this rolling pasture... it’s been a resource and a learning lab.”

He works with students who are interested in beekeeping and the significant role that bees play in the environment.

Embrace beekeeping

If you want to actually have hives and your own bees, Riegel advises taking a class. (see box; Lackawanna College is of-

fering beekeeping courses.) You can read books and “YouTube is good, but be careful. Sometimes people make [videos] in their first year, and that’s when you make a lot of mistakes.” Inadvertently inaccurate information can get uploaded and it can stay accessible forever, past the time the novice beekeepers have learned better techniques.

Although Riegel both read about beekeeping and watched videos, he also took a class in Kingston. “I consider those two people my mentors,” he said.

And that’s another advantage of a class. You have access to teachers, to experts, and you can reach out with questions.

Because beekeeping has changed over time, and that’s where experts, with their constantly updated knowledge, are invaluable. “There are new pests, like the destructor mite,” Riegel said. “They provide vectors for disease.”

The climate has changed. Local crops and plants (from which bees feed) change. The honey changes alongside them. “We’re very fortunate where we are, no farms spraying pesticides,” he said. So the bees are eating the best food available.

He advises patience and flexibility. “Bees don’t read books,” he said. So expect the unexpected.

There’s another way you can help bees, if you don’t want to keep hives yourself. You can plant bee gardens. “Plant clover,” Riegel said. “Coneflowers, sweet William, goldenrod and aster.”

You can also talk to your local farm and garden store for plants that would keep the local bee population healthy and happy and fed.



Photo contributed by SUNY Sullivan

Beekeepers, suited up, kind of do look like astronauts.

Educating the bee-friendly

Although right now SUNY Sullivan bee education is restricted to students, Riegel enjoys talking bees, having booths at events like Narrowsburg’s Honeybee Festival, educating people about the importance of bees and how we can play a role in their continued existence.

“The kids were fascinated,” he said of a past festival. Actual bees were part of the booth and maybe a major draw. “Kids would watch these bees, and not one sting at all. Honeybees are gentle if you’re not threatening them. Bees just go about their business,” even if that business is teaching the next generation of humans about their critical role in the environment.

For all its importance, being a beekeeper “can be relaxing,” Riegel said. “I sit in a chair and listen to them hum.”

Pollination matters

Bees and other pollinators play a significant role in increasing food security, improving nutrition and fighting hunger, said the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

This is how bees feed us:

Three out of four crops across the globe that produce fruits or seeds for human use as food depend, at least in part, on pollinators.

Improving pollinator density and diversity boosts crop yields—pollinators affect 35 percent of global agricultural land, supporting the production of 87 of the leading food crops worldwide.

Pollinators are under threat—sustainable agriculture can reduce risk to pollinators by helping to diversify the agricultural landscape and making use of ecological processes as part of food production.

Safeguarding bees safeguards biodiversity: the vast majority of pollinators are wild, including over 20,000 species of bees.

Source: *The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, <https://www.fao.org>.

Cranky bees

At the SUNY Sullivan apiary, there’s a lot of room, so “people can stay away from the bees if they’re concerned,” Riegel said.

Honeybees are less aggressive, but they’ll still defend their hives and the bees can get sour-tempered if they lack a queen, he said.

Or maybe a predator has been at the hive and they’re upset. Or “robber bees” from other colonies have been hassling the hive.

Often the solution is simple: fix the problem. Get a queen. Protect the hive from predators.

Then you’ll have happy bees again.

The awesome bee

Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) aren’t native to the United States, Riegel said. “Indigenous tribes called them ‘white men’s flies,’ because [when the] colonies spread [and bees were spotted], the natives knew that settlers weren’t far behind.”

Honeybees are social. They live in colonies with a single queen, who lives two or three years long, Riegel said. She leaves the hive to go to—no joke—the “drone congregation area,” where the male bees hang out and wait for queens to stop by. “That’s how she gets different genetic material,” he explained. Even bees don’t want to become inbred.

The worker bees work. “They clean the hive; clean out the dead bees, if any; they nurse larva; they feed the queen; collect nectar; guard the entrance of the hive.” They’re also all female.

So where are the males? Called drones, “they just eat,” said Riegel. “Then they go out to mate. Then they die.”

(Go ahead. Get the jokes out of your system. Come back when you’re done.)

Keep in mind, without drones, there wouldn’t be any more bees. A hive doesn’t need many of them. And in the winter, the hive needs none at all. “In the fall,” said Riegel, “the females throw them out.”

At the drone congregation area, the queen collects her lifetime supply of bee sperm, which she takes home. From that supply she makes more bees, choosing whether to produce males or females. (Drones all kicked out the previous fall? Just make more!)



Photo by Peter Finger, contributed by Art Riegel

Professor Art Riegel and a SUNY Sullivan student conduct the fall hive inspection.



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Renovating your home

Tips for staying on time and on budget

By BARBARA WINFIELD

REGION — Remodeling your home can be an expensive undertaking, but overspending can be avoided if you can stay within your budget. Despite the belief that every remodeling project will exceed its initial budget, there are ways to sidestep unnecessary expenses. Here are 10 suggested ways to stay on time and on budget.

1. Make the budget a priority.

Start with a spending plan. Whether your budget is large or small, renovations are going to cost more than expected; build in an extra 20 percent to be better prepared for any surprises.

2. Plan every detail in advance.

Most increases happen because of poor planning. Order enough material to complete the job, plus 20 percent to account for installation wastage and defects. Remember:

3. Don't confuse your wants with your needs.

You may have your heart set on that professional gas range, but what you actually need is a less expensive professional-style range. Keep the focus on your budget and choose items that serve your needs.

4. Be familiar with what things cost.

Do your homework before purchasing any items. Don't assume that anything expensive is always best. An experienced contractor will be able to help by providing you with accurate pricing on furnishings and materials—but you first must know what you want.

5. Choose your contractor carefully; this can be one of the largest costs of your renovation.

Interview multiple contractors and ask for references; be sure to reach out to those references. Remember that you hire a contractor to coordinate every detail of your project. It is essential that he or she do their job well at a fair price.

6. Make sure you have a detailed contract.

A reputable contractor should insist on some form of fixed price contract in order to keep the cost of the project in line. Be specific about each model, number, name, finish and price of every item ordered as well as delivery, taxes and labor cost.

7. Don't skimp on products and services.

Select durable, high-quality materials that you won't need to replace within a few years. Inferior materials will wear out and must be replaced in the near future; this can have a negative impact on your budget. The same is true of trying to cut corners by hiring inexperienced contractors or workers.

8. Ask your contractor about obtaining necessary building permits.

Follow up by checking with your county or local building department to determine whether a permit is needed for your specific project. Un-permitted projects may have to be torn down at an enormous cost to you.

9. Keep in mind that major renovations may require adjustments to your homeowners insurance policy.

Check with your insurance agent regarding this.



Photo by 99.films on Unsplash

The process of getting to a gorgeously renovated room can be arduous and expensive. Decorating expert Barbara Winfield offers tips on avoiding the latter and easing the former.

10. Before you begin, determine whether you will need a general contractor or a specialist.

For example: Are you expanding your kitchen or just replacing the countertops? You may only need a carpenter, plumber or an electrician to complete the bulk of the project. Remember, a contractor will add their own fee on top of the subcontractor fee. You can also save on costs by doing some of the project yourself.

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