

Horticulture HUB

The Place for Horticulture in Chenango County

April 2016

Let's Talk Horticulture



When winter decided to finally rear its head, followed by spring, and then winter again, I started to wonder if spring had changed its mind! If you can't find something to talk about, there's always the weather right? It's always changing and still one of the few things we have very little control over. If affects everyone and everything, especially us gardeners. The first time I planted 500 perennials in the rain I thought it was a bit crazy. But when I never ended up having to water them in, never even had to supplemental water them to get them established I thought, hey, work with nature, not against it. What an idea. When you're gardening, if your planting plan doesn't involve the weather forecast you may be making your life a bit harder than it needs to be!

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Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Chenango County

Roadside Bloomer Report



The month: April

The topic: Hey, what's that plant?

Coltsfoot
Tussilago farfara



Blooming now along roadsides and disturbed places in great profusion, Coltsfoot is common as dirt in our area. Native to Europe, this relative of the dandelion blooms at about the same time.

Coltsfoot is unusual in that the flowers appear before the leaves.



Underground rhizomes can remain alive for many years until a disturbance brings the rhizomes to the shallower depths (plowing, road grading etc.) at which point the rhizome starts to grow and spread. Their flowers last only a short while and they spread their seed the same way as dandelions, with fluffy white heads full of seeds that can be blown by the slightest breeze.

Let these little guys 'worm' their way into your composting heart

By Christian Vischi; Master Gardener Volunteer

"Vermicomposting, it's the craze that's sweeping the nation ... oop, oop, dee, doop."



Ok, that jingle will never make it past the cutting room floor, let alone rise up the billboard charts. However, vermicomposting is spreading across the nation. According to an article published on Sept. 17 by the *Chicago Tribune*, experts say that Chicago's surging worm workforce mirrors a national trend.

So why would anyone want to bring worms into their home? For the black gold they create.

Although "vermi" is the root for the word vermin, it means *worm*; no, we are not attempting to compost with rats, cockroaches and the like.

The essential set-up for your home vermicomposting unit contains three parts: a container, some moist bedding, and some worms. How technical you make this set-up is what determines whether you are forking over the equivalent of a night out at Olive Garden or a nice set of four tires for your car.

The container can be as simple as a Rubbermaid tote or as complex as a multi-tiered housing unit that you can purchase online for \$150 or more. If you are building one yourself, start with a plastic tote between 12- and 18-inches tall and 20 gallons or more in capacity. Cut two rectangular holes in the lid – approximately 5"x8" each, depending on the size of your lid. Using medium-grade sandpaper, lightly scuff the *underside* of the lid around the holes you just cut. Cut two pieces of metal window screen

Learn a Thing or Two

Backyard Composting

May 17th from 1-3pm OR 6-8pm

at CCE Chenango; 99 N. Broad St. Norwich

Learn about several techniques for backyard composting, container design and how to create a well-balanced compost. This class will be held at the Norwich Community Garden on Hale Street so dress appropriately for the weather and to keep your feet dry and warm! Register by May 13th by calling 607-334-5841 x 11 or x 11. Pay \$5 'at the door' and please leave your phone number for alternate location in case of extreme weather.

Growing Small Fruits

May 26th 4pm-7pm

at CCE Chenango; 99 North Broad St. Norwich

Are blueberries a mystery to you? Or maybe your strawberries are just ho hum? This three hour program will focus on growing small fruits. Find out their wants and needs, how best to prune them and general care. Get the most out of your small fruits! This program will cover blueberries, strawberries, brambles and grapes. \$10 per person or \$7 for Master Gardener Volunteers and Chenango County garden club members. Call 607-334-5841 x 11 to register by May 25th. Limit 20 participants.

Fruit Tree Pruning (take 2)

Did you miss the February Fruit tree pruning class? Here's your second chance! Learn how to get the best out of your fruit trees. This class will teach you how to properly prune your fruit trees with a particular focus on apples. If you've never pruned before, come learn about the basic pruning cuts and why pruning is so important. We will go outside to see some examples but this program won't have a hands-on element as the time for pruning fruit trees is late winter/early spring. \$5 per person. Register by June 1st by calling 607-334-5841 x 11 Limit 20 participants.

Vermicomposting continued:

large enough to overlap the holes and then hot-glue them in place.
Next, fill your container approximately half-full with bedding for your wigglers. The best product to use is coir bricks. (These shredded coconut fibers come vacuum-packed as a brick – just soak them in warm water for about 10 minutes and they are ready.) Leaf mold and very well-aged animal manure will also work. Some cautions: Shredded newspaper will work, but it can clump easily, and do not use peat moss singularly – it is too acidic for worms.

For a list of places to purchase worms, try this resource produced by Tompkins County Cooperative Extension (CCE Tomkins): <http://ccetompkins.org/resources/compost-sources-of-composting-worms>.

Keep your soil medium very moist, but not wet – there should not be run-off. A worm's body is between 75 and 90 percent water, and its surface must be damp in order for the worm to breathe. Check the moisture daily; the vents allow air to circulate, but that also means the moisture level will be in flux.

Then, dig a hole and bury your food scraps. Worms do not have teeth; instead, they slurp up the outer-most layer of decomposing food. The smaller the pieces are – and the more surface area they have – the quicker the process will be.

Every five or six months, pull everything to one side of the bin. Add fresh bedding and new food scraps to the other half of the bin, and maintain the center divide between them. After two weeks your worms will migrate to the newer material and you can then remove the old. Congratulations, you now have the best vermicompost available to add to your garden beds or potted plants. If you notice any problems, such as odor – a good vermicomposting set-up should have very little or no noticeable odor – or fruit flies, you can find solutions in this vermicomposting brochure from CCE Tomkins: <http://ccetompkins.org/resources/compost-vermicomposting-brochure-8x11>.

Vermicomposting photo by Michael Noack and Sally Noack, courtesy the Oregon State University Extension.



Plant Rant

Good or bad, this is where a plant gets their due!



Looking for an easy to grow, drought tolerant, deer-resistant perennial that comes in a multitude of colors? Try irises. Irises need at least half a day of sun to bloom. They come in a large variety of colors including the traditional blues and purples but can also be found in golds and yellows. They provide stunning flowers on approximately 28 inch stems. They make wonderful cut flowers and are attractive to both butterflies and hummingbirds.

Plant irises in mid to late summer in well-drained soil. Irises will spread so plant them alone. The rhizomes or roots should

be partially exposed. After flowers are done, don't trim the leaves as they are required for photosynthesis. Irises will become congested in 2 to 5 years. At this point, they can be divided and replanted. Requiring little care and providing great beauty, irises make a lovely addition to anyone's landscape.

NAME: Iris species

GROWING ZONE: Bearded irises are zone 3-9

HEIGHT: Varies but 28" on average

EXPOSURE/SOIL: Full sun, moist but well drained

INTERESTING FACTS: Some noses detect a slight grape scent in the old-fashioned light purple irises like those pictured at right.

Iris cristata is a very low-growing native iris that blooms along route 16 and will be in full bloom in a few weeks



OF interest

Websites (CTRL + click to go to site)

The American Iris Society
<http://www.irises.org/>

An article on our native irises
<http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/beauty/iris/>

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