

# Brooklyn Gardener



SPRING 2001

## Gardening Is For The Birds...too!

**W**hether it's the daily loss of endangered species or global warming, the facts about our planet's health are pretty shocking. So, you want to do something good for yourself and for the planet, plan your plantings this spring with birds in mind. Each community and backyard garden in Brooklyn can be part of a patchwork quilt of welcoming sites for birds disrupted from their natural habitats due to urban sprawl.

Wildlife is also a great way to keep children interested in your garden. In fact, in our workshop for adult leaders, "Gardening with Children and Youth," we find one of the most appealing activities is making birdfeeders from recycled milk cartons. Children are often more excited about the creatures of the garden than the plants. Maybe that's why composting is also such a hit with kids, with its myriad wriggling worms, pillbugs and zillions of other organisms.

If you really want to pursue wildlife gardening, especially with youth, explore The National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat program by calling 703-790-4100 or visiting their web site at [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org).

How do we attract wildlife, particularly birds, to our garden? Our BBG Handbook on Bird Gardens includes "12 Ways to Design a Bird Friendly Garden":

- Re-create the layers of plant growth found in local natural areas.

# E

• Select plants with an eye to providing nutritional foods during different seasons.

- Plant small trees and shrubs in same-species clumps.
- Provide at least one clump of conifers.
- Spare a dead tree (snag) for the birds.
- Plant vines and leave them in winter along with seedheads from other plants.
- Limit the size of the lawn.
- Use native plants; avoid invasive non-native plants (See article, "Spotlight On... Native Plants" for details).
- Supply a source of water.
- Provide nest boxes.
- Leave some leaf litter for the birds (and the worms they like).
- Avoid using pesticides.

In the coming months, Brooklyn GreenBridge will be encouraging various ways of sustainable gardening, which simply stated is gardening in harmony with nature. Give us your suggestions, problems, solutions, concerns. We will be exploring old and new ideas for recycling, water conservation, attracting wildlife and other earth friendly practices.

—Ellen Kirby, Director

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION, CALL 718-623-7250

**March 1, 15, and 29, 6–8 pm.** Market Gardening Workshop Series at the United Community Centers, East NY. Free. For details, call Aley Schoonmaker at East NY Farms, 718-649-7979.

**March 17, 10 am–4 pm.** "Making Brooklyn Bloom... with Sustainable Gardening" at BBG. Kick off the garden season with free workshops, exhibits, and tours.

**March 19.** Compost Bin Blowout deadline for ordering. \$20 each; pick up at BBG March 31.

**March 27, 10 am–12:30 pm.** Horticultural Therapy Networking Group at BBG. Free. Call for details and to register.

**March 24.** GreenThumb GrowTogether. Free. For info, call 212-788-8070.

**April 20.** Deadline for ordering Window Box Kits. \$17 each; pick up at BBG May 12.

**May 1, 2, and 3.** BBG Annual Plant Sale. For info, call 718-623-7220.

**May 5.** The Beetle and Beyond. Community Action Day for Urban Forestry and the Asian LongHorn Beetle. 8am–1pm. Small fee. Call 718-522-1130.

**May 12.** Window Box Kit Pick Up Day (must be pre-ordered; see above).

**May 12 and 13.** Community Gardening Performance at BBG. Produced by NYU Drama Department in cooperation with Brooklyn GreenBridge and BBG Spring Garden Renaissance Program.

**May 6 and 19.** FREE COMPOST! and bins for \$20! (For NYC residents) Locations will be announced in April. Look in the mail for confirmed site information or call the Compost Help Line: 718-623-7290.

(NOTE: TO LIST YOUR GARDEN'S PUBLIC EVENTS IN THE JUNE–SEPTEMBER COMMUNITY CALENDAR, CALL 718-623-7209 WITH DETAILS BY APRIL 2.)

PLEASE POST!

## GreenBridge Workshops

*Pre-registration is required at least one week in advance for these workshops. Call 718-623-7220. Free unless noted.*

**Seed Starting Basics.** Sat., March 3, 10 am–12 pm

**Worm Composting for the Classroom.** Sun., March 4, 10 am–12 pm -OR- Thurs. March 29, 5–8 pm (\$10 for NYC teachers; \$28 for others)

**Indoor Worm Composting.** Wed., March 14, 6–8 pm -OR- Thurs., May 17, 6–8 pm (\$10 for NYC residents; \$28 for others)

**Gardening with Children and Youth: For Adult Leaders.** Wed., March 28, 5:30–7:30 pm -OR- Thurs., April 26, 6:30–8:30 pm

**Battle the Asian Long Horn Beetle!** Sat., March 31, 11 am–1 pm

**Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest Tips.** Tues., April 17, 6–8 pm

**Composting in the City.** Thurs., April 19, 1–3 pm -OR- Sun., May 13, 10 am–12 pm

**Perennial Flower Basics.** Wed., May 23, 5:30–7:30 pm

CELEBRATE THE 20th ANNIVERSARY of "Making Brooklyn Bloom" Saturday, March 17 Brooklyn Botanic Garden (10 am–4 pm)



## Seasonal Tips

### MARCH

- Start flower seeds and early vegetable seeds indoors (like broccoli, kale) in a sunny spot or under lights.
- Cut back dead material on perennials, shrubs, small trees.
- Prune summer-flowering shrubs (like roses, beauty berries).
- Chop your cover crop, turning it under. Let it break down for a few weeks before planting.
- Direct-sow cold weather vegetables (like peas, radishes) and cool-season annuals (like nigella, sweet peas).



### APRIL

- Transplant cold weather crops started indoors.
- Start hot weather vegetable seeds indoors (like tomatoes, peppers, eggplant) in a sunny spot or under lights.
- Apply organic fertilizer (like fish emulsion) as new growth begins.
- Plant trees, shrubs; divide perennials.

### MAY

- Mid-May, plant transplants and direct-sow warm-weather seeds.
- Let bulb foliage yellow completely, then cut back.
- Weed, mulch, and fertilize.
- Prune spring-blooming shrubs (like forsythia, lilac) after they flower.

-Julie Warsowe  
Community Horticulture Manager

Call 718-768-5488 for information on  
Wild Ones Native Plant Society

Brooklyn Botanic Garden gratefully acknowledges support for these programs from the Altman Foundation, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Con Edison, The Dime Foundation, EAB, Greentree Foundation, The Independence Community Foundation, LSR Fund, New York City Environmental Fund, The Tow Foundation, The New York City Department of Sanitation, the Brooklyn Delegation of the New York State Assembly and State Senator Martin Connor.



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## From the heap... MAKE THE MOST OF COMPOST!

**T**oo bad compost shrinks so much between the time we put it in and take it out—most of us imagine we could use infinite quantities of compost to make the soil richer, more fertile, with better texture. Luckily, even a little compost can go a long way.

- Rather than broadcasting compost, focus on spreading ½" to 1" of compost around plants which could use extra attention.
- Potted plants respond dramatically to the water-retaining and nutrient-holding benefits of compost. Mix up to half of the container with compost and see how well the plants do.
- What if you have only semi-done compost now, but really need some compost for spring plantings? Use the partly finished stuff as mulch – just laid on top of soil, not dug in.
- Mix in some compost when you start seeds, to get those plants off to a great start. Though some people and books

warn of the dangers of damping-off and other diseases, we've had excellent results and super-strong seedlings. Turns out the sticky stuff that critters leave behind in compost encourages seedling growth; even some of the microorganisms themselves may prevent diseases.

- Compost tea is another way to spread compost goodness with many plants. No real recipe—just drop some compost in water, let steep for a few days, and then sprinkle on the garden, seedlings and houseplants. Spraying the tea on fungus-susceptible or infected leaves has been found by some to make plants healthier.

Still don't have enough compost?! Then stop by one of our free compost giveaways this spring—the Community Calendar has more information.

-Patricia Jasaitis  
Urban Composting Project Coordinator

## Spotlight on... NATIVE PLANTS

**G**rowing native plants—those that thrived in our region before farms and cities changed the landscape, before settlers introduced plants from other regions—is the best way to attract and sustain wildlife in your garden. When we talk about wildlife we're not talking rats and cats—how about butterflies, hummingbirds, toads, and bees! Critters prefer native plants over exotic ones because animals and native plants have adapted, side-by-side, to our local environment. Native plants are crucial to a healthy "food web."

Native plants like *Vaccinium angustifolium* (Lowbush Blueberry) and *Juniperus virginiana* (Eastern Red Cedar) provide valuable food, shelter, or nesting material for animals. They are also beautiful display plants.

Now you're ready to grow native plants—but where do you buy them? Walk into a Brooklyn nursery and you're likely to find a limited variety of exotic plants, identical to plants in nurseries across the country. There are nurseries that specialize in native plants, and more nurseries

are selling native plants alongside non-natives; below is a small list. For a longer list of nurseries or more local native plants, call 718-623-7209.

Also ask your favorite Brooklyn nursery to stock some native plants – let them know there's a market for these precious, beautiful varieties.

### ALL NATIVES

**Toadshade Wildflower Farm** • Frenchtown, NJ: 908-996-7500, [www.toadshade.com](http://www.toadshade.com)

**Wild Earth Native Plant Nursery** • Freehold, NJ: 908-780-5661

**some NATIVES, some NON-NATIVES**  
**BBG's Annual Plant Sale!** See the Community Calendar for details.

**Crownsville Nurseries** • Crownsville, MD: 410-849-3143, [www.crownsvillenursery.com](http://www.crownsvillenursery.com)

**Eastern Plant Specialties** • Georgetown, ME: 732-382-2508, [www.easternplant.com](http://www.easternplant.com)

**Fort Pond Native Plants** • Montauk, NY: 631-668-6452, [www.nativeplants.net](http://www.nativeplants.net)

-JW

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