



March, 2012

## SPRINGTIME IS HERE!

*Dear friends,*

Welcome spring, the season of rebirth. Even though we had a pleasant winter with many warm days, there is nothing like late March and April to remind us all that it's great to be alive and live in New England where the cycle of the seasons has a rhythm all its own. Ah, the smell of muddy earth. The sound of the peepers in the marshes. The return of our beloved bulbs, perennials, flowering shrubs and trees. A time to turn over the vegetable garden and sow seeds. Time to stretch our muscles, breathe in deep gulps of fresh air, sharpen our tools, inflate our wheelbarrow tires and get to work!

At Natureworks, we have been hard at work all winter long. Seriously, we haven't taken much of a break at all this year. The first week of the year brought an onslaught of new computer software and hardware as we began a conversion to a new bookkeeping system and a new cash register system, complete with bar codes scanners for ALL of our products. That has been a mind boggling endeavor and we are working until the very last second before we open on the first day of spring. We did a bit of traveling, first to Atlanta to accept our place as one of the Top Revolutionary Garden Centers in America for the second year in a row! What a thrill that was to spend three days sharing ideas and learning from some of the brightest folks in our field. Oh, and we also shopped as the conference was attached to one of the biggest wholesale markets in the country. Next, we headed up to Boston for a large, regional trade show and professional classes. We saw amazing speakers and pre-viewed many new products that you will be seeing in our store when you visit. I traveled all around the state, giving talks and setting up vendor booths at many garden events.

We had a blast at the CT Flower and Garden Show and saw many of you there. Now that spring has officially arrived and Natureworks is open full time, seven days a week, I invite you to stop by and see what's new!

One of the themes that prevailed wherever I went this winter was that everyone wants to **shop local** and buy products that are **Made in America**. We put a laser beam focus on where the products we ordered were made. You will see a "Made in America" sign on every line we carry- we found wonderful sources of statuary and pottery, hand crafted birdhouses, metal sculptures and a lot more. But, what is the largest line of "Made in America" products we carry? OUR PLANTS! Think about it. We buy our plants mainly from Connecticut growers. We deal with a few wonderful nurseries on Long Island, one or two in New Jersey and points south, but primarily our plants are Connecticut grown. The nurseries we buy from are an integral part of their local economies, hiring tons of local people to work in their fields, their offices and drive their trucks. It doesn't get any more American than that!

This winter I was inspired by a woman I met who owns a nursery on the West Coast. She wrote a daily blog for 365 consecutive days on Heucheras. I thought "if she can do it, so can I." Not write on Heucheras, mind you, but do a daily blog for one year. I started on January 18<sup>th</sup>. It's been quite an adventure so far. I have written on a wide range of topics including fragrant plants, the passing of our beloved meteorologist Dr. Mel Goldstein, cottage garden style, outdoor rooms... pretty much anything that comes into my head during the day. If you don't blog, you can still read blogs. You just can't respond to them and join the conversation. Check it out. Then call me crazy!

This year we are paying special attention to kids in the garden. We have named our

new focus **Grow Organic Kids** and are starting out by offering some really cool, free kids workshops this spring. We will work with the children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews in your life to teach them how to plant seeds and flowers, how to identify and learn to like bugs and a LOT more. Our children's garden will continue to receive the loving attention of Karen Gallagher. She created a neat I Spy garden last year. Make sure to check it out and play our I Spy Garden Game when you come to visit with the kids.

We have an amazing lineup of free workshops this spring. Enclosed in this newsletter is an insert that you should take out and post on your refrigerator showing how we are structuring our events and giving you the highlights. We have lots of guests coming to share their knowledge with us including Sal Gilbertie, Colleen Plimpton, Karen Bussolini and Steve Silk. Of course the best way to get all the details is to sign up for our weekly emails. They remind you of that weeks special events, sales, horticultural happenings, and offer timely garden advice.

Natureworks is now in its 29<sup>th</sup> year! We have grown to be the experts in organic gardening in our area. At last, people are hopping on our bandwagon and joining together with us to create healthy and ecologically sound landscapes. We are living in amazing times. The power to create change has never been greater as our connections to each other become faster and more immediate. It is heartwarming to see everyday people waking up to the reality of what we have done to our food supply, our planet and our children's futures. One thing we CAN control is what we do in our own back yards. Let Natureworks be your guide in 2012. Let's grow together.

*Nancy*



# THE NATUREWORKS ORGANIC LAWN CARE PROGRAM

Natureworks does not install or maintain lawns for our landscape clients. In fact, we teach Lawn Elimination classes! Why then, you may ask, do we put such a strong focus on organic lawn care in our garden center? Allow me to explain...

Many years ago, the dominant paradigm in the garden center industry was and still is called "the four step program". This included applications of chemical herbicides, pesticides and petroleum based fertilizers four times a year. The result was a green lawn, completely devoid of anything but lawn grass and a soil devoid of life. The organic matter in chemically fed soils eventually wore out making the lawn dependent on a steady dose of chemicals to keep it going. I was so upset by this scenario that even though I wasn't in the business of taking care of lawns, I felt I had to offer an alternative. Thus the Natureworks Organic Lawn Care Program was born.



Over the years, it has changed and evolved to represent the latest, greatest advancements in sustainable, ecological practices for the home landscape. As stewards of the land we inhabit, it is our duty to tend it with loving care. What we place on our lawns leaches into our water system. Kids and pets run barefoot over the lawn, absorbing all of the products through their feet (or unprotected paws). All of the creatures in our world interface with our lawns: the birds that dig up worms and eat insects, the insects that make the earth their home and even the myriad of inhabitants that tunnel below the surface of the soil. They are also part of the food chain, food for hawks, foxes and snakes. Everything is interconnected.

Let us help you learn about a safe, effective alternative to chemical lawn care! Stop in and ask for our [2012 Organic Lawn Care Program](#) handout or access it online at [www.naturework.com](http://www.naturework.com).

To get you started, here's what you can do this month: Before you begin, you should test your soil. Our goal in organic gardening is to feed the soil and the soil will then feed the plants. The very first step is to **take a soil test** from various sections of your yard. Natureworks offers a high end soil testing service and evaluation. The results will be emailed to us and to you from a professional soil testing laboratory in Virginia that is recommended by NOFA/CT. We will then help you interpret the results and choose the best organic products to feed your

soil. The cost is \$40 for up to 2 samples, \$20 per sample thereafter. The results of the soil test will tell you if you need lime, and if so, *which kind* based on the calcium and magnesium in the soil. It will tell you the cation exchange capacity, which will in turn indicate how well your soil can absorb and hold onto organic nutrients. It will tell you which basic nutrients you are high or low in, which will help us to fine tune your organic fertilizer and mineral powder recommendations. We may suggest additional products to quickly help the soil recover from chemicals, compaction or neglect, things such as Organic Plant Magic (a dehydrated fresh brewed compost tea powder) and Stress-X (a powdered form of liquid seaweed that reconstitutes to up to three gallons of product.)

- Apply corn gluten in April (while the forsythia are in bloom) to prevent crabgrass and other weed seeds from germinating in your lawns and garden beds. There is a very specific window of time when this organic product works. We carry both granular and liquid corn gluten (which can be easily applied with a hose end sprayer). If weeds are a big problem for you, this is an excellent tool in your organic arsenal.

on the other hand...

- If you are renovating your lawn, plant your grass seed as early in April as you can. The longer you wait, the more likely you will have weed seeds sprouting. NEVER use corn gluten if you are reseeding your lawn as it will inhibit the grass seed from sprouting as well! We carry two wonderful ecologically sustainable grass seed blends.
- If weeds in the lawn are not your issue, you should still feed your grass in the spring. We have a few excellent products to choose from, all explained by application rate and square foot coverage in our handout.
- Japanese beetle grubs feed actively from late April until early June. Timing is critical when using organic controls.



When the soil warms up to 50-60 degrees, apply Milky Spore Spreader Mix to control grubs. Beneficial nematodes can also be used when the soil warms up to around 50 degrees. Both of these biological controls are completely safe for children, pets and the environment. This is all explained in our 2012 Organic Lawn Care Program handout.

## LIVING WALLS AND VERTICAL GARDENS

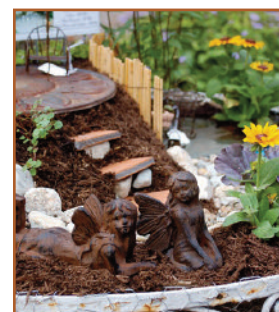
One of the coolest trends in the gardening world right now is growing food on vertical surfaces. One of my favorite authors, Rhonda Massingham Hart (author of the invaluable book *Deerproofing your Garden*) has recently published a wonderful new book that we are carrying at Natureworks entitled *Vertical Vegetables and Fruit*. It focuses on creative gardening techniques for "growing up" in small spaces. With everyone wanting to try their hand at growing some of their own food, and with most of us living on small properties, it makes sense to grow UPWARDS.

Another really cool way to grow plants vertically is to install a living wall. I have been looking at this concept for years, but the systems I considered carrying at Natureworks just didn't seem like a good fit. Not any more! We are now stocking the GroVert System, a super efficient and easy to plant and maintain method of creating living walls indoors or outside. Our goal is to not only offer you free workshops on how to do this, but eventually cover the south side of our building with plants!



## A WORLD IN MINIATURE

At Natureworks, we are totally enchanted with fairy gardens, terrariums and miniature landscapes in all forms. We have been slowly gathering together quite a nice collection of dwarf plants, tiny furniture, mosses (including real LIVE moss that has been dehydrated and is sold by the bag), pretty rocks and decorative mulches, mushrooms, tiny birds and other accent items. We have found good sources of really neat, inexpensive glass bubble containers as well as low bowls to hold mini-landscapes. This concept can also be applied to succulent gardens which are all the rage right now. You don't need ANY tracts of land or a large home to grow miniature gardens. We are offering lots of free workshops where we will demonstrate how to put it all together. We encourage you to stop in and enjoy this new "world in miniature" department at Natureworks.



## SEED SOWING TIME

It's spring and time to start thinking about seeds! Experienced gardeners grow plants from seed all the time. It's a very inexpensive way to grow lots of plants. It allows you to grow varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers that may not be available in your local garden center. The lure of seed catalogs and seed racks appeals to the desire to nurture plants in all of us. If you have always wanted to grow plants from seed but aren't quite sure how to do it, let me share with you some basic ground rules.

The first thing to realize is that you can direct sow seeds right into the ground. Not all seeds need to be started ahead of time in the house. The secret to this is timing and knowing which seeds to choose. The first month that you can direct sow in our part of Connecticut is April. This is when the seeds of cool temperature loving plants go into the ground. Lettuce, beets, spinach, carrots, peas, sweet peas, poppies and larkspur are all good choices for early spring. Each seed packet has directions on the back about how deep to plant the seeds. Turn over the soil, rake it smooth, add some compost and plant your seeds. Water gently and monitor the rainfall, making sure the seeds are kept moist as they are germinating.

In the middle of May, after the danger of frost has passed and the ground has warmed up a bit, you can sow seeds of a whole new range of plants— those that prefer warm temperatures to germinate and grow. The list is very long and includes marigolds, beans, corn, cucumbers, squash, sunflowers, morning glories and nasturtiums.

Some plants won't work if you sow them directly in the ground as they won't have enough time to mature. These are the plants that need to be started indoors 6-8 weeks before they are set into the garden. These can also be divided into cool and warm loving crops. Tomatoes, peppers and eggplants are warm lov-

ing crops that are commonly started indoors in late March or very early April. They cannot be set into the garden until the danger of frost has past and the soil has warmed up, usually mid-May to Memorial Day.

Use an organic seed starting soil and sow the seeds in pots or trays according to the directions on the package. Once they have germinated, be sure to thin them so that they are properly spaced. You can use a sunny windowsill or an indoor grow light setup. Be sure to turn the seedlings so they grow straight and don't bend towards the light. Feed weekly with an organic liquid fertilizer to assure strong, sturdy growth. Monitor the temperature. You don't want it to be so warm that the seedlings stretch and get leggy. A week before you are ready to plant your seedlings outdoors, you need to harden them off. This means bringing them outside, at first placing them in dappled sun on mild days to get them used to outdoor air and gradually, direct sunlight. You should bring them back indoors at night. After about a week of this process, you can plant them directly into the garden.

There is a group of seeds that can go either way.

Lettuce, for example, can be direct sown into the garden in April. But, if you want to harvest lettuce for many months and you are anxious to start eating from the garden very early in the spring, many folks start their first crop of lettuce indoors, set out the seedlings in early April AND sow seed directly in the garden at the same time. Then, they sow seed every two weeks until late spring, when it gets too warm to grow lettuce until the fall. The cycle starts over again in late summer for fall crops. If you want to start picking zinnias early in the summer, you can start zinnia seeds at the same time that you

start tomatoes. They love warm temperatures. If you forget to do that, or just don't want to bother, you can sow zinnia seeds directly in the garden, but you have to wait until it is really warm, late May at the earliest. You will still get armloads of zinnias for picking, but they won't start flowering until later in the summer.

Some plants just don't transplant well and it makes no sense to start them in advance unless you are using peat pots or cow pots and will be planting the seedlings, pot and all in the garden and not disturbing the roots. All legumes fall into this category— peas, beans and sweet peas. Carrots, beets and other root crops should also be direct sown as you could easily break the tap root and get misshapen carrots.

In my gardens, a lot of things self-sow every year. That means that seeds drop from the previous year's plants and sprout in the spring. I am always on the lookout for free plants! I usually find lettuce babies growing in the walkways between my raised beds. I carefully scoop them up and transplant them into rows inside the beds. Tomatoes self-sow, but I rarely let them remain as they are often a strange cross between different varieties and I wait all summer only to find I have nurtured something that doesn't have the flavor I am looking for. I grow 'Ruby Streaks' mustard, a spicy green that comes up for me every year after just sowing the seed once. Flowers seed abundantly in my gardens as well, sometimes too abundantly! I have feverfew, borage, asters, coneflowers, black eyed Susans and sunflowers popping up everywhere. I have learned to recognize them as babies and thin them out if they look like they will take over an area or dig them up and transplant them to a spot in need of some color. Once you start recognizing self-sown plants, you will realize just how natural it is for plants to grow from seed and you will become more comfortable with the concept.

If you are new to seeds, don't be afraid. Start with a few simple seed sowing projects on your windowsill and in your garden. Once you see how many plants you will get from a simple packet of seeds and once you nurture your plants from seed to maturity, you will be hooked. Just pay attention to timing and temperature and you will be successful.



## IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP THE GARDEN

The plants have been joyously LEAPING up out of the ground at a breathtaking pace since the middle of winter. If you haven't done it already, you should cut back your herbaceous perennials and butterfly bushes, prune your lavenders, Montauk daisies and sages and open prune and shape your roses. If you are nervous about exactly what to do, we are having a free workshop on Saturday morning, April 14<sup>th</sup>, where I will demonstrate how to do this in our Natureworks gardens. You can also stop in and ask for our comprehensive handout Waking up the Garden or access it on line at [www.naturework.com](http://www.naturework.com) in our information/handouts section.

Our process is to cut back and clean up first, then feed the soil, then apply mulch ONLY after the soil has warmed up a bit. Other chores to hop onto as soon as you can include dividing asters, hardy mums, perennial sunflowers and other late season bloomers. Scared to dig up and chop apart your perennials? You are not alone. That is why we are offering 2 free work-

shops demonstrating how to do this: Thursday evening, April 19<sup>th</sup> and Saturday morning, April 21<sup>st</sup> as a part of our annual Earth Day Festival. April is the month for planting cold tolerant vegetables, herb seedlings and seeds, starting tender bulbs and scouting for slugs, red lily leaf beetles and other pesky pests that you can begin preventing or controlling now.

What do you feed and how much do you add? This should be based on a high quality soil test. In general, plants need nitrogen in the spring as that nutrient is NOT held in the soils organic matter and must be constantly replenished. Most gardens enjoy a topdressing of high quality compost, with the exception of what we call the lean feeders.

As usual, we offer our Magic Formula. I hope you will take advantage of our new soil testing program to fine tune what you really need for your soil. We are all striving to reduce our inputs, no matter how wonderfully organic they may be!

## OUR MAGIC FORMULA TO FEED THE GARDEN

First, test your soil to see what's going on. Stop into Natureworks for the details on our high end soil testing program or access the information on our website [www.naturework.com](http://www.naturework.com). You can get a free and very basic test at the CT Agricultural Experiment Station and a more detailed test for \$8 at your local UConn Cooperative Extension Service.

Fill a large wheelbarrow with compost (*if you don't make your own, use three 40-50 lb bags*). Add 8-10 shovelfuls of Pro-Gro organic fertilizer (5-3-4). If your soil test indicates that you are very low in phosphorus, add extra rock phosphate. If you are very low in potassium, add extra greensand. Mix this up well with your shovel. Add 1-3" of this mixture around the crowns of your perennials. Add 3-4 shovelfuls to the base of each rose and butterfly bush. Be sure to generously top dress shade gardens that have tree root competition.

Avoid over-fertilizing or adding lots of compost to lean feeders such as sedums, yarrows, dianthus, Russian sage, lavender, and catmint. If these are grown in soil that is too rich, they will be floppy. Ask for our handout Feeding your Garden for all the details, or access it online on our website



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518 Forest Road • Northford, CT 06472  
Phone 203-484-2748 • Fax: 203-484-7621  
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Web: [www.naturework.com](http://www.naturework.com)

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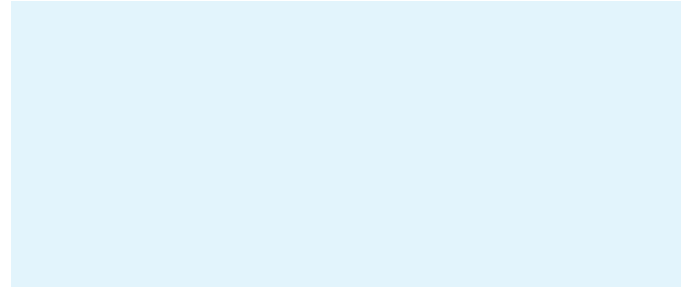
**SPRING HOURS**

Monday-Saturday 9 a.m.-6 p.m.  
Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
Beginning Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012, we will be open  
Thursday nights until 7 p.m.



The 2011-2012 Natureworks Catalog is the Last Printed Version – *What's Next?* Last winter we made the difficult decision to stop printing our Natureworks catalog. The 2011-2012 edition is 93 pages long and filled to the brim with plant descriptions, written by yours truly based on my nearly 30 years of experience in CT gardens. It also has lots of useful lists such as Succession of Bloom in the Shade Garden, Succession of Bloom with Native Perennials, My Top Ten Favorite Plants in many categories, Deer Resistant Plants, Dry Shade Plants and a LOT more. The catalog is available for \$5 each. It is available for FREE online at our website.

We have also eliminated our Early Spring Pre-Book Order Program. We will not be publishing a price list as we have found our plant stock is ever-changing as to sizes, varieties, and prices. We welcome orders for any plants listed in the catalog or for plants described on our website or in our weekly emails. Please contact Natureworks and ask for a Plant Request Form or download one from our website: [www.naturework.com](http://www.naturework.com).



**THE NATUREWORKS MISSION STATEMENT:**

Natureworks offers organic and ecologically friendly products, services, and information to our customers. We are deeply committed to education in all we do. We beautify our surroundings with colorful, creative designs and cutting edge plant material. We proudly provide fair living wages and benefits to our employees, and constantly strive to further their knowledge of plants, design and organic practices. We are a stable, financial entity working to strengthen and build our local economy.

Visit the Natureworks booth at the Hill-Stead Museum's May Market in Farmington on May 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> | 10-4 p.m. [www.hillstead.org](http://www.hillstead.org)



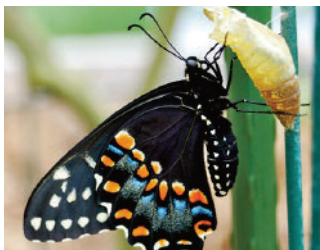
**Incredible Edibles List is ready!**

If you don't want to grow your own vegetable seedlings, or if you are looking for organic seed potatoes, organic onion sets, and a wide selection of blueberry, strawberry, and raspberry plants as well as a host of other wonderful edibles, you MUST check out our 2012 Incredible Edibles list! We accept pre-book orders for our plants until Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. Get your order in fast-many plants sell out quickly! Stop in and pick up a list today, call to have it mailed to you, or download a copy from our website at [www.naturework.com](http://www.naturework.com)



**We're Having A Party!**

For many years, I have been a member and a great supporter of The Connecticut Horticultural Society. This large group of avid gardeners meets once a month to hear an acclaimed speaker and share their love and knowledge of plants. I contributed my design talents and labor for many years heading up the CHS flower show committee where I was honored to put together, along with a group of REALLY talented and dedicated volunteers, some amazing gardens.



The Connecticut Horticultural Society is celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year! Natureworks has decided to join the party by hosting a birthday party weekend for CHS on June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. Steve Silk, the president of CHS, gardener and garden writer extraordinaire, will be offering a free workshop on Saturday where he will show us how he puts together his awesome tropical containers. All CHS members will receive 20% off all of their plants both days. If you are not a member, you can sign up at the event. Then, all members can enter to win a \$125 gift certificate from Natureworks. If you are reading this newsletter and are a fan and supporter of Natureworks, then you will LOVE the Connecticut Horticultural Society. I urge you to go on line to their website: <http://www.cthort.org>, learn about them, and then join us.



**We have been Connecticut's organic gardening experts for the past 29 Years!**  
We grow our gardens the way nature intended, creating healthy and beautiful ecosystems right in our own backyards.