CONNECTICUT Woodlands

VICTORY GARDENS REVISITED • *Everyone can farm*

The Magazine of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association Summer 2009 Volume 74 No. 2

CONNECTICUT
Woodlands

The Magazine of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Bob Lorenz

Shoreline Soup Kitchen volunteer gardeners harvest spinach. See page 11.

Connecting People to the Land

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association protects forests, parks, walking trails and open spaces for future generations by connecting people to the land. CFPA directly involves individuals and families, educators, community leaders and volunteers to enhance and defend Connecticut's rich natural heritage. CFPA is a private, non-profit organization that relies on members and supporters to carry out its mission.

We envision Connecticut as a place of scenic beauty whose cities, suburbs, and villages are linked by a network of parks, forests, and trails easily accessible for all people to challenge the body and refresh the spirit. We picture a state where clean water, timber, farm fresh foods and other products of the land make a significant contribution to our economic and cultural well-being.

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George Purtill, the accountant turned lawyer and farmer who owns and operates Old Maids Farm in Glastonbury, is checking the condition of the turkey and chicken eggs incubating. Two turkeys have hatched within the last few hours.
Penelope Overton

FEATURES

On the Cover:
Homegrown vegetables, fresh from the garden of Jennifer Benner.

Photo by Jennifer Benner.

DEPARTMENTS

CONNECTICUT Forest & Park ASSOCIATION

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Big doings in a (relatively) small organization

BY DAVID PLATT

CFPA President David Platt

For a relatively small organization in one of the smaller states in the union, the Connecticut Forest & Park Association had no shortage of significant events this year.

MMM Trail. As most are aware by now, in late March, President Obama signed into law a bill establishing the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattebesett trails in Connecticut and Massachusetts as the New England National Scenic Trail. The CFPA, which maintains the route of these trails in this state, supported this designation, which gives these trails visibility. Now we are busy extending the MMM Trail south to Long Island Sound and figuring out ways to work with willing trail-host landowners to protect the lands that host the trail.

Strategic planning. Many organizations treat this as a necessary evil. At CFPA, we recently embraced it, adopting a new plan and renewing energy and commitment among our board and staff. (See Eric Hammerling's message for more.)

WalkCT. WalkCT is our newest initiative to get people out on trails of all kinds across Connecticut, promoting active lives and keener appreciation of the outdoors. See the new WalkCT Web site at www.walkct.org.

The economy. Not surprisingly, CFPA has responded to the financial downturn by reducing our expenses and restructuring our organization.

Membership. Historically, this has been a quiet association that tended to operate in the background to accomplish big things. As a result, we have fewer members than we would like. This is changing. We are working to raise our public profile in the conservation community by publicizing our programs. We are putting more signs on the more than 800 miles of Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails to make sure hikers are aware that CFPA's volunteers established and maintain these trails. We are sponsoring more events for our members and the general public (including the bigger and better Trails Day weekend that offered more than 130 hikes June 6 and 7—the nation's largest) and we have launched our CFPA News & Notes newsletter that, together with Connecticut Woodlands, provides us with another way to reach our members with timely information about CFPA programs and activities. We are getting bolder at asking loyal members to introduce others to the Association.

Stop by our headquarters in Middlefield, come to one of our member events, or drop us a line and let us know how we are doing. We want to hear from you.

EDITOR'S NOTE

My farming ancestors, my father's attempt at tomatoes, and my first lousy garden

BY CHRISTINE WOODSIDE

One of the stupidest articles I ever wrote came slipping out a few decades back, when a community group in Philadelphia planted a vegetable garden and invited the press to the seed planting. I was a 23-year-old associate editor of a city weekly. At the seed planting, community activists handed me a trowel, and I reluctantly knelt down in my pointy flats and blue-jean skirt in the newly turned soil. My heart was not in it because I was then so principled that I had something on my mind separate from the vegetables. The fence around the large garden irritated me. It did more. It led me to proclaim in print that a community garden hidden by a fence was wrong.

In a column I wrote on the Philadelphia community gardening movement that appeared the next week, I clung to my notion that everyone should have access to public gardens, and that to lock them behind chain-link fences — a typical approach in Philadelphia gardens I visited that year — was to act exclusive in a place and during a movement in which the most serious participants claimed not to be so. On paper, my idea was not terrible, but it reeked of inexperience.

My ancestors farmed in South Jersey for centuries. My grandfather, Amos Woodside, left that life for a union job. But farming doesn't leave your blood. My father, a banker who had grown up poor in Trenton, tried to grow tomatoes one year in our Princeton, New Jersey yard. When one tomato struggled to life, he came running into the kitchen exclaiming with delight. That was the sum total of my gardening training when I encountered the Philadelphia gardeners, who told me that if they left it unlocked, the garden was not going to be safe from loiterers, litterers, or perhaps the homeless. They were charitable enough, but they knew that to grow food, you must be practical, while I was on my high horse.

But the farming gene revealed itself several years later, when I found myself living on a school campus in Westbrook, Connecticut, on the ground floor of an old house with wraparound porch and back and side yards. I planted my first garden with our then-2-year-old, Elizabeth, and I never missed a year gardening after that. I have learned that no matter where you grow food, protecting it from harm—whether litter, deer, moles, dogs, or your friend's feet—must come first.

What I had failed to see in Philadelphia was that setting up a garden is enormously difficult. Just securing the lot must have taken months, perhaps years. Placing and paying for a fence was another hurdle. I should have cheered.

In this issue, we explore the many ways that people have turned unlikely plots of land into productive vegetable patches, and how unlikely people may—if they spend the time and care—do the same against many odds. Look at what happened to me: I transformed from skeptical reporter who thought environmental justice meant loosing the crowds on Eden to a vegetable gardener who every year struggles (with my patient husband) to erect a net-covered scaffolding to keep the birds off my blueberries.

How gardening resembles strategic planning

BY ERIC HAMMERLING

CFPA Executive Director Eric Hammerling

It may seem strange at first to compare gardening to strategic planning. One is primarily an indoor pursuit, but beyond that difference are many more similarities. Gardening and strategic planning start with basic questions: "What do you want to grow?" and "Where do you want to grow it?" Both endeavors consider other questions: "What resources do we need to be successful?" and "How will we know if we are successful?" Both consider contingencies and mid-course corrections that depend on prevailing conditions. Both involve multiple approaches to overcome obstacles and build upon successes. There are tried and true methods as well as innovative and untested ones, and both have a fighting chance. Timing is everything, a little luck is involved, and both involve getting your hands dirty with focused, hard work.

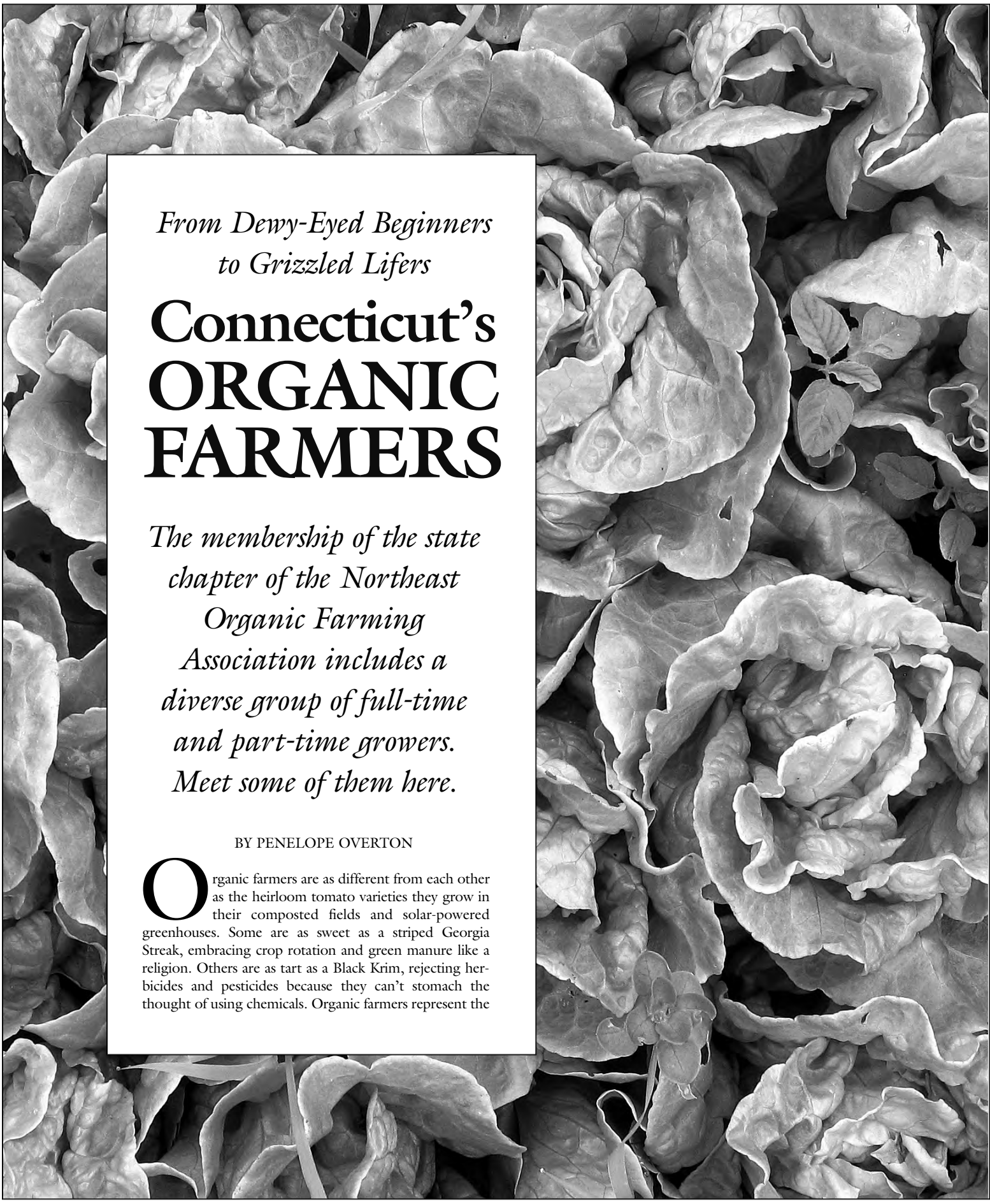
Much of this issue is focused on gardening, so I'll take this opportunity to give our readers insight into the development of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association's strategic plan for 2009–2012. Before looking forward, we evaluated our last strategic plan and felt optimistic.

Between 2002 and 2008, some of the Association's most notable accomplishments (not an exhaustive list) included: launched the WalkCT program to provide a statewide resource for rural, suburban, and urban walking opportunities and broaden CFPA's constituency; established a full-time land conservation staff position to protect significant forest parcels, land associated with the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails, and provide stewardship of more than 1,700-plus acres of Association lands or conservation easements; and initiated efforts to secure a permanent research forest for the University of Connecticut, protect more than 5 miles of the Blue-Blazed Nipmuck Trail, and conserve more than 550 acres of forest in addition to conserving more than 400 acres of additional lands.

CFPA also remains a strong advocate for sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, funding for the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, and regulation of all-terrain vehicles; provides hands-on environmental education experiences and training for educators, students, and families; maintains the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System with hundreds of volunteers and thousands of hours of volunteer time; and publishes what we believe are outstanding publications, such as Connecticut Woodlands and a new newsletter, CFPA News & Notes.

At the same time that the Association's garden continues to bear sweet fruits for Connecticut, the metaphorical soil, nutrients, and roots that support our vitality are growing thin. We must tend our garden with the fundamentals of sustainability—fundraising, membership development, and organizational governance—while ensuring that we are growing the right mix of programs that will secure the Blue Trails, ensure healthy forests, educate the public, and continue to connect people to the land.

I invite you to get involved with CFPA's "garden" to help lay the groundwork for conserving Connecticut. Although you may not always see immediate returns, keep in mind the Greek proverb, "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in."



From Dewy-Eyed Beginners to Grizzled Lifers

Connecticut's ORGANIC FARMERS

The membership of the state chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association includes a diverse group of full-time and part-time growers. Meet some of them here.

BY PENELOPE OVERTON

Organic farmers are as different from each other as the heirloom tomato varieties they grow in their composted fields and solar-powered greenhouses. Some are as sweet as a striped Georgia Streak, embracing crop rotation and green manure like a religion. Others are as tart as a Black Krim, rejecting herbicides and pesticides because they can't stomach the thought of using chemicals. Organic farmers represent the

old and new. They champion the cultivation methods and seed strains of long ago, but they exhibit a certain hipness that draws a crowd at the farmers' markets.

The membership of the Connecticut chapter of Northeast Organic Farming Association is just as diverse and as colorful. They are a different breed than conventional modern farmers, and no two NOFA members are alike in motivation, principles, or practice. As a group, their diversity helps keep organic farmers strong. As the movement to eat local and organic food grows, the farmers must survive the trials of a rampant aphid infestation and the tribulations of a proposed ban on the retail sale of raw milk. The demand for organic food has never been higher, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Organic products, including food, grew 17.1 percent in 2008 despite the weak economy. Organic food accounts for 3.5 percent of all food sold in America. The number of farmers' markets in Connecticut has climbed to about 120, including a few, like New Haven and Stonington, that remain open all winter. Despite a growing number of Connecticut farms, now at about 40, that sell shares of their harvest to customers who pay up front, the state's organic farmers report long waiting lists of customers from as far away as New York and Massachusetts seeking weekly harvests of fingerling potatoes, sweet peas, or pears.

In light of the increased demand, coupled with a rash of food recalls, the dwindling supply of good, affordable farmland available to the next generation of farmers, and the debate brewing over the subsidies and food-safety requirements of the new federal farm bill, now is a good time to take a look at these most principled of farmers, those who try to earn a living growing chemical-free food.

The farmers of NOFA, which number about 110, include dewy-eyed beginners as well as grizzled lifers farming their family's lands, "save-the-planet" crusaders and Harvard-educated pragmatists, weekend hobbyists, and full-time professionals. There is the martial arts instructor who blends natural farming with the study of Aikido, the lawyer who runs the state's largest certified organic farm in his spare time, and the former PhD chemists who now grow chemical-free mizuna and celeriac.

"People Thought We Were Crazy"

The state chapter of the organic farming organization started with Bill Duesing. He began farming in 1969, when he and four artist friends created a small commune in Oxford called Harmony Ranch. His first herb garden stirred up childhood memories of his uncle's farm in upstate New York as a kid, and soon he was growing his own food.

By 1971, Mr. Duesing, a soft-spoken art and architecture graduate, had founded the state chapter of NOFA. Soon after, he began Old Solar Farm in the Oxford woods. He's still there, farming, and acting as the state chapter's executive director. "NOFA was born out of the whole stuff of the 1960s and '70s," Mr. Duesing said. "We were reading Rachel Car-

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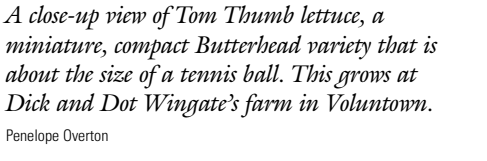
Bill Duesing, the executive director and founder of the Connecticut Chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association, in its Oxford headquarters, which was where Duesing and his family once lived. Duesing also raises chickens and vegetables on the property.

Penelope Overton

Penelope Overton

Melynda Naples, the owner of Deerfield Farm, a raw milk dairy in Durham. She is a member of Northeast Organic Farming Organization and, at age 26, is one of the new generation of organic farmers in Connecticut.



A close-up view of Tom Thumb lettuce, a miniature, compact Butterhead variety that is about the size of a tennis ball. This grows at Dick and Dot Wingate's farm in Voluntown.

Penelope Overton

Nature's Ally
Carole Miller grows medicinal and culinary herbs in Coventry on land her grandfather bought shortly after emigrating from Lithuania in 1914. She uses organic approaches such as plant-based fertilizers and beneficial insects to become nature's ally.

From Finance to Farming
At the age of 51, Mark Palladino had never grown a vegetable in his life, but the school teacher turned finance director quit his white-collar job to apprentice at a Roxbury farm before growing organic vegetables on 10 leased acres at the Bristol Farm in Canton.

Green Gardens and Grocers
A one-time truck driver, Alice Rubin started working at the Willimantic Food Coop about 25 years ago and is now general manager of the 5,000-member organization that buys local organic produce. She also grows herbs and flowers in her Lebanon greenhouses.

Next Generation of Organic
Like many agricultural school graduates, Paul Bucciaglia thought he couldn't make a living farming. But a decade ago, the young Naugatuck native quit his lab job, maxed out his credit cards, and launched Fort Hill Farm on leased land in New Milford. It's one of the biggest organic CSAs ("community supported agriculture" farms) in Connecticut.

Diversify, Diversify, Diversify
Three generations of Wingates farm organically along the border of Voluntown, North Stonington, and Rhode Island. The eldest, Dick and Dot, grow everything from asparagus to zucchini. Their daughter, Belinda, also raises chickens, pigs, and beef cattle. Their grandsons are launching a dairy operation.

Penelope Overton

Dick Wingate, a former Ledyard High School shop teacher who has been farming for 46 years, prunes flowers growing with his rhubarb at Studio Farm in Voluntown. This saves more nutrients for the rhubarb until harvest. In the background, his drip irrigation system and a former gas station, now tractor shed.

Organic farmers

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son, horrified by Agent Orange and yearning to reconnect with the land. Nobody was talking organics. People thought we were crazy."

Mr. Duesing raised pigs for 30 years to recycle food waste from New Haven and to enrich his soil. Now he raises chickens for eggs, and greens and vegetables in greenhouses, and gazes out on a forest filled with healthy chestnuts, butternuts, and black walnuts. From inside a house he built on a high ledge there three decades ago, Mr. Duesing works the phones and the computers to lobby politicians, organize educational seminars, and edit NOFA's quarterly publication, Gleanings. The group serves as a launching pad, an educational forum, and a networking tool. It teaches farmers how to sell their products and how to farm organically—such as how to make natural fertilizer out of nettles, horsetail, and comfrey.

The Connecticut chapter began with 50 members, mostly people who wanted to learn how to farm naturally and were looking for guidance they could not seem to find anywhere else. It has grown to 750 members and includes gardeners, landscapers, and consumers. For the last several years, about 50 people have attended the state chapter's annual introduction to organic farming conference. Every week, Mr. Duesing fields calls from people seeking information on how to get started.

The state chapter has worked to expand the image of the "organic farmer"—that is, anyone with the energy and commitment to grow plants and raise animals naturally—by reaching out to gardeners and landscapers who want to leave their chemicals behind. The state chapter wrote the nation's first standards for organic land care and now offers a five-day accreditation course in organic land care.

"If You Want to Farm, Do It Right"

Despite the trendiness of local, organic food, Mr. Duesing and other chemical-free farmers laugh at the idea that people are diving into organic farming, or farming of any kind, to capitalize on a food fad or a shift in the agricultural market. For organic farmers, their livelihoods intersect with their environmental ethics. "I think they really believe local organic food is very important," Mr. Duesing said. "How do we feed ourselves without destroying this planet? That problem must be solved if we want to continue our existence."

George Purtill runs the largest certified organic farming operation in Connecticut, but ask him why he chose to grow organic, and he'll give you a strange look. The kind of look this licensed lawyer usually reserves for his courtroom opponents. "I didn't choose to go organic," Mr. Purtill said, perched in the seat of a big John Deere tractor on a sunny April morning. "I wanted to farm. To me, there was no choice. If you want to farm, you do it right, and that means organic."

His family admits that some conventional farmers see Mr. Purtill as someone who plays farmer on the weekend. He does not "make his sandwich" on the farm, they would say. (The expression means that farming is a sideline business for him; if he fails, he will be all right.) He isn't under the same pressure. If his peppers fail, he'll simply try another case. That might be true, but Mr. Purtill's operation is too big to be a lark. He grows vegetables and organic grain corn on rotating fields across 86 acres

The Meaning of Organic in Connecticut

Although they embrace natural methods, and belong to a group with the very word organic in its title, most farming members of the Connecticut Chapter of Northeast Organic Farming Association aren't certified as organic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the only agency that can bestow that title.

Only 22 of the 110 farms that belong to the state chapter of NOFA have endured the rigorous annual inspections and paid the substantial fees required to call themselves "organic" in the federal government sense. Another dozen Connecticut farms are certified as organic, but do not belong to NOFA.

All but two of the remaining farming NOFA members have signed the NOFA chapter's Farmer's Pledge to reject chemical enhancers, like pesticides or hormones in the feed, treat their farm workers and livestock humanely and leave the land better than they found it.

Members of Connecticut NOFA who take the Farmer's Pledge receive a signed copy that they can display for customers and neighbors to view, but NOFA does not investigate the farm or guarantee the farmer is honoring the pledge.

Farmers cite different reasons for not seeking federal organic certification, such as the certification fee, the prohibition against using antibiotics to treat sick livestock, and the burdensome record keeping that documents a product from field to table.

Some do both, obtaining organic certification and signing the Farmer's Pledge. Some have gone even farther, using solar power to fuel their farms or paying their farmhands, including migrant workers and apprentices, a living wage or allowing their consumers to trade labor in the field for fresh produce.

along the Connecticut River, raises grass-fed and pastured heritage chickens and turkeys, and runs a cider mill. He's in deep, economically and emotionally.

He supplies organic vegetables to Whole Foods and area restaurants, makes farm brand tomato sauce and salsa, and has launched a successful compost and mulch operation that has him scrambling most weekends.

Some agriculture officials have wondered if the poor economy would weaken public demand for organic food, which is usually more expensive than produce grown with chemical assistance in huge, far-flung farms. So far, that has not happened. Mr. Purtill said he believes that the contamination of spinach, lettuce, tomatoes, and peanut crops have made many people more conscious of the origins of their food, and that naturally pushes consumers toward small, local organic farms like his. Actually, Mr. Purtill admitted that perhaps he had become a little too successful. His operation had grown so large over the last few years that he decided to stop selling his produce through shares to consumers—a practice known as community-supported agriculture, or CSA. This year, his faithful customers will have to take their chances at his farm stand.

The success means a lot to him, but Mr. Purtill, who grew up working on his neighbor's farm and wanted his children to have that same experience, considers Old Maids Farm equal

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Like any modern farmer, George Purtill, the owner of Old Maids Farm in Glastonbury, has his cell phone in his hand as he works — here, stacking squash crates while talking to a customer.

Penelope Overton

Organic farmers

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parts business and philosophy. "I'm a Whole Earth Catalog kind of guy," Mr. Purtill said, "but I don't go to sleep at night thinking, 'Thank God I saved the planet today.' More like I'm thinking, 'Oh gee, did I close the barn door?' I've got too much accountant in me for all that cosmic talk."

In Hard Times, Encouraging Statistics

Every year, the National Agricultural Statistics Service takes the temperature of the farming world. At the rate at which farms are disappearing across the United States, NASS reports can sometimes read like a grim prognosis for a dying patient. In 2008, 4,900 farms were operating in Connecticut—16 fewer than the year before. The number of acres used for farming had dropped by 56 to about 400,000. And, as it has been for years, the average age of farmers increased, inching up to 58.

Despite this worrisome scenario, the reports indicate Connecticut's organic farmers are doing well. They are younger than their conventional counterparts, averaging just under 54 years of age. In dollars and cents, the average organic farm in Connecticut earns $38,000 a year; conventional farms earn $25,081 a year.

The fact that NASS is even documenting organic agriculture is a sign of success. It wasn't so long ago that NASS, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, had nothing to say, good or bad, about organic operations. This spring, the U.S. Department of Agriculture sent out its first census of organic farmers. Even though it arrived in the spring, at what is one of the busiest times on a farm, Connecticut's organic farmers say they welcome the attention. "It's like they just woke up and realized we're here to stay," said Dick Wingate, a certified organic farmer in Voluntown. "They want to know how much money we made from organics, which gave us a chuckle. Didn't see any place on the form to write in how many families we keep healthy."

The government, banks, and schools that underwrite conventional farmers have not completely embraced organic farmers, who are still at a disadvantage when asking bankers for a loan or getting market value from insurers for a lost organic crop, according to Mr. Duesing. But that may be changing. In May, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced organic farmers would be getting $50 million from the 2009 Organic Farm Initiative to meet the Obama administration's promise to encourage more organic agriculture production.

Filling a Niche

At 7 a.m., Melynda Naples and her fiancé, Jeremy "Stu" Larkin, march into the long milking barn that sits on top of Parmelee Hill in Durham, hopscotching around their daughters' plastic toys and the friendly barn cat to begin their morning ritual. In between sips of their Dunkin' Donuts coffee, they spread hay for their 21 Jersey cows, usher them into their milking stalls, and clean their teats with an iodine spray that they gently remove with a soft cloth dipped in warm water. Then Ms. Naples hooks a vacuum-operated milking machine, which weighs about five pounds, up to four cows at a time. At four to six minutes per cow, the whole milking takes no more than 35 minutes. The process repeats each morning and afternoon.

What happens next — or, rather, what does not happen next — makes Deerfield Farm unusual. Each of Ms. Naples' Jerseys makes about 40 to 50 pounds of milk per day, but most of the milk will not be pasteurized. That makes her farm one of the few raw milk producers in Connecticut. It is a niche that the 26-year-old, who grew up drinking raw milk, is eager to fill. Although she feeds her cows grass, allows them to graze in pastures, and does not inject them with growth hormones, Deerfield Farm is not officially organic. Ms. Naples signed the Connecticut NOFA Farmer's Pledge, but refuses to give up occasional medicinal antibiotics.

"If my kid was sick, I wouldn't refuse them medicine," she said. "I rarely do it. I'd guess maybe three or four times a year I have a sick cow that needs it, and when I know they need it, I don't hesitate. I'm not going to let a cow die to get certification." But her cows don't get sick very often. A healthy food stock and life style keeps the Jerseys healthy and vet bills low, which is exactly what a four-year-old farm short on capital and long on dreams really needs.

It hasn't been easy for Ms. Naples. She said that people told her she was crazy to sell raw milk, then that she was crazy for not seeking organic certification. Then the state's Department of Agriculture tried to outlaw the sale of raw milk in stores. Although the bill died before it could get to a vote, Connecticut Agriculture Commissioner F. Philip Prelli supported it, and Ms. Naples knows it could come back at any time. But her customer base is loyal, driving up to an hour on weekends to buy her milk, yogurt, and cheese that she stocks in her farm stand, which, like so many others in Connecticut, still operates on the honor system.

Most important, Ms. Naples, Mr. Larkin, and their young daughters, Reba and Gabrielle, are having fun. Naples will sing along to Carrie Underwood songs while Reba, otherwise known as "Peanut," pokes a patient, grain-munching cow. Even Naples's mom, Ruth, helps out.

In the graying farming community, such youth and optimism tastes even sweeter than Ms. Naples' strawberry yogurt, which is just a shade lighter than the cotton candy colored nail polish that coats her milk and iodine-stained fingertips. "I know this is a business, but they're my family, too," Ms. Naples said as she stroked the head of a cow named Tara. "We don't work them too hard because it will break them down. I want to have these cows 12, 14, 16 years. They'll grow up with my girls."

Penelope Overton of New Haven is a newspaper and freelance journalist with more than 15 years' experience covering the environment, ethnic communities, and eccentricities of New England and the Southwest.

Penelope Overton

This is Tara, one of the 21 Jersey cows that provide raw milk at Deerfield Farm in Durham. The owner, Melynda Naples, knows the name of every cow, and limits the amount of milk she takes from the cows each day to prolong their usefulness and their lives.

Tales from the field

Community Gardens Thrive

BY CHRISTINE WOODSIDE

"In a healthy town every family can grow vegetables for itself. The time is past to think of this as a hobby for enthusiasts; it is a fundamental part of human life." So wrote Christopher Alexander and his architect colleagues in a book that sketches ideal towns, common space, and houses, *A Pattern Language* (Oxford University Press, 1977). In this giant little book — about 8 inches high but 1,171 pages long — the team laid out 253 principles of good living, or "patterns." This book can change your life as it reminds you that people really prefer living in little communities — whether within or without cities. The book identifies what you need or want. That is, hourly access to water, plants, sunlight, the hearth, conversation, private nooks, a big kitchen table, animals, walkways, and our food sources. Our apparent need to grow something edible for ourselves, or to know how to do so, falls under Pattern 177, Vegetable Garden.

In America, gardening is the number one hobby, and lately many people are thinking more about the sources of their food. But the interest in growing food communally began in Connecticut three decades ago and has never stopped.

Half of the state's towns are home to at least one community garden, as Cordalie Benoit, president of the Connecticut Community Gardening Association, explained recently. Many of these gardens have been growing every year for decades. We were sitting inside her door in the New Haven row house she shares with her husband. Outside their city door sit potted herbs catching the sun. They moved here only a year ago but have been spending much time in New Haven since 2001, when Ms. Benoit began pursuing her master's degree in environmental management at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. Before that, they lived in the more country setting of Newtown, in western Connecticut, for many years. Ms. Benoit, a retired lawyer and community manager, said that in America gardening is the number one hobby and that lately many people are thinking more about the sources of their food. But the interest in growing food communally began in Connecticut three decades ago and has never stopped.

That sounds a little surprising in a state with some of the classic bedroom communities such as Darien and Greenwich. Census statistics still reveal a giant wave of people in Fairfield County who commute to New York and look at their home soil only at night. But wait. Darien and Greenwich have community gardens. The face of the state in this regard does not yield to that tired stereotype of a land of disconnected commuters.

Consider one of the older community gardens in the state, which claimed a floodplain near the Pomperaug River in Southbury in the early 1970s. The Heritage Village River Garden is a large complex of raised beds tended by retired residents of Heritage Village, a condominium complex. In the late winter and early spring, the beds sometimes sit under water. For a garden, seasonal flooding is desirable. Wasn't this what drew farmers to river valleys in New England in the first place?

In New Haven, several neighborhood gardens, both for vegetables and for other kinds of gardens, have taken over vacant lots after volunteers spent hours clearing them of debris. The New Haven Land Trust Inc. helped residents bring in compost, soil, and expertise.

In the mid-1960s, in memory of a woman named Betty Knox, the Knox Parks Foundation started in Hartford. Its main garden is Elizabeth Park, but it manages community gardening space in several areas. Residents pay a modest fee to secure a garden plot for the season and help with the work.

In Bridgeport, three years ago, the Connecticut Community Gardening Association wrote a plan to have the city buy vacant city plots that were being eyed for other sorts of development. "We testified before the Common Council," Ms. Benoit said. "We try to make communities see that gardens are development." People need to have some connection to plants, especially food on the vine or bush, as keenly as they need housing.

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Photo above, watering broccoli at the Shoreline Soup Kitchen garden.
Bob Lorenz

His Father's Voice Echoes:

TIME TO GROW FOOD

"If he had lived long enough, he would have gotten a kick out of seeing me come around to this planting."

BY LEE MAY

This is the year. It's been a long time coming, but finally, I'm starting to feel like a food grower. Although I have been an impassioned ornamental gardener for decades, my relationship with food plants has been less than steady; over the years, I've flirted with this crop and that, reaping mixed results. Fortunately, I got the hang of tomatoes years ago, realizing that if I didn't grow my own, I'd have to eat those cardboard ones from the grocery store.

Similarly, this year I decided that life's too short to eat less than the best asparagus, so, on a perfect blue-sky day in April, I dug three trenches and planted 15 asparagus crowns, anticipating years of good eating when the flavorful spears are ready to harvest. Depending on which expert you read, that'll be in the second or third growing season, but as I've waited this long to plant the crop, what's another year or two?

As my father used to say, "A garden and a home are for people who got patience."

If he had lived long enough, he would have gotten a kick out of seeing me come around to this planting. Years ago, I was admiring his garden in Meridian, Mississippi, a long, narrow space filled with rows of tasty food—collards, corn, butterbeans, peas, tomatoes, peanuts, okra, and much more.

"So, what are you growing in your garden over there in Atlanta," he asked.

"Oh, I'm growing rhododendron, Japanese black pines, azaleas, Japanese maples, bamboo, ferns, and a lot of other plants."

"But what do you grow for food?"

"Well," I said, "there's rosemary, sage, thyme, cilantro and some others."

He just shook his head, not saying it but no doubt thinking, "Boy's wasting space." His space was a marvelous Victory Garden, inspired by a belief among generations that land, precious land, was designed to grow food for people who could not afford to buy from stores. Flowers instead of food was a frivolous thing.

And, now, Victory Gardens are here again, or, this time around, recession gardens, gardens for the environment, gardens of good food. As such gardens go, mine is fledgling, and not nearly as polished as the one at the Obama White House. But I'm heading in the right direction, down a road of harmonic convergence marked by a push-pull effect—the push of the economy and the pull of environmentalism. Many of us are convinced that home gardens can save us money and do something to offset the damage done to land, water, and air by huge agricultural businesses that run on too many poisons, fertilizers, and fossil fuels.

Those who are new to food growing likely will discover the simple truth that for me is reason enough to grow something to eat: It tastes so much better than store-bought.

Take tomatoes, or 'maters, as we natives of the South call them. What can you buy that compares to a sun-warmed tomato, plucked from the vine and popped into your mouth, its juice drizzling down your chin? Or sliced and put between two pieces of bread, along with a few basil leaves and some salt, pepper and olive oil? (These days, I'm growing my tomatoes upside down, each plant in a hanging bucket, its top sticking through a hole cut out of the bucket's bottom.)

Like so much in life, my food growing has been a process of evolution. Back in May of 1993, sometime after my confession about favoring rosemary over radish, my father tried to help me grow real food. As my wife, Lyn, and I were about to end our visit with him and head back to Atlanta, he thrust a little cardboard can at me, a starter collection of seeds, including okra, cayenne pepper, tomato, watermelon, corn kernels, peanuts. "Take these," he said, assuring me I could

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Move Over, Kentucky Bluegrass

The veggies are back in Washington

BY JENNIFER BENNER

When I first signed "Eat the View," an online petition for a victory garden at the White House last January, I thought I was supporting another good idea that would never come to fruition. I knew I was one of many passionate gardeners out there, but was our collective voice loud enough to be heard? Could our cause possibly rise to the top with so many other worthy initiatives out there?

This is one case where I was absolutely delighted to eat my words. In March, First Lady Michelle Obama and a group of shovel-wielding fifth-graders participated in the ceremonial groundbreaking for the first White House vegetable garden since Eleanor Roosevelt's plot was planted in the 1940s. The 1,100-square-foot garden will supply fresh greens, herbs, and vegetables for the First Family and White House guests. It will also supply something more — a good example.

Vegetable gardening nourishes our bodies, wallets, and the environment. In a time when obesity, diabetes, and heart disease are becoming more the norm, it is now more important than ever to make healthy dietary choices. Part of the challenge is the expense. Many vegetables at the grocery store cost more than unhealthy foods such as potato chips or cookies. Growing your own bounty at home is a healthy option with big rewards and few expenses. Most seed packets cost a couple of dollars yet yield pounds and

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Helpful Sources

Soil testing and gardening information:
Take advantage of our wonderful Connecticut Cooperative Extension System (www.extension.uconn.edu). Besides its eight offices in each county, it maintains a toll-free help line at 877-486-6271.

Bon appetit, President Obama: The White House posted this map of the new victory garden this spring.

Starting a Garden

VEGETABLES AND HERBS NEED:

Light: Edible plants like full sun. Be sure to place them in a spot that receives at least six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day to optimize growth and get the highest yields.

Soil: Well-draining, humus-rich loam is the ideal soil. Give your plot an annual boost of organic matter (preferably in the fall) by turning a 2- to 3-inch-layer of compost or rotted manure to help build and maintain your soil's structure. If you do not have the best soil, consider building raised beds or growing your plants in containers.

Water: If Mother Nature is not doing so already, be sure to give your kitchen garden plants a regular drink of water. These plants do not like to dry out, but also do not like overly wet conditions. Consider using soaker hoses or drip irrigation (placed in the garden at planting time) to water because overhead sprinklers can encourage leaf diseases.

Nutrients: Many vegetables, such as squashes, are heavy feeders. Giving them a few doses of organic fertilizer throughout the season will keep plants healthy and productive. To find out which nutrients your soil is lacking, have it tested.

Ideal placement: Move your crops to new places each year. Wait three years before growing them again in the same spot. Crop rotation helps to prevent insect and disease problems as well as nutrient depletion.

Feed Others

Some vegetable plants produce more than we can ever possibly eat, which is not always a bad thing. Contact Connecticut food bank organizations to learn how you can donate or lend a helping hand and provide healthy food to those who need it.

Foodshare: 860-286-9999
www.foodshare.org

Connecticut Food Bank:
203-469-5000
www.ctfoodbank.org

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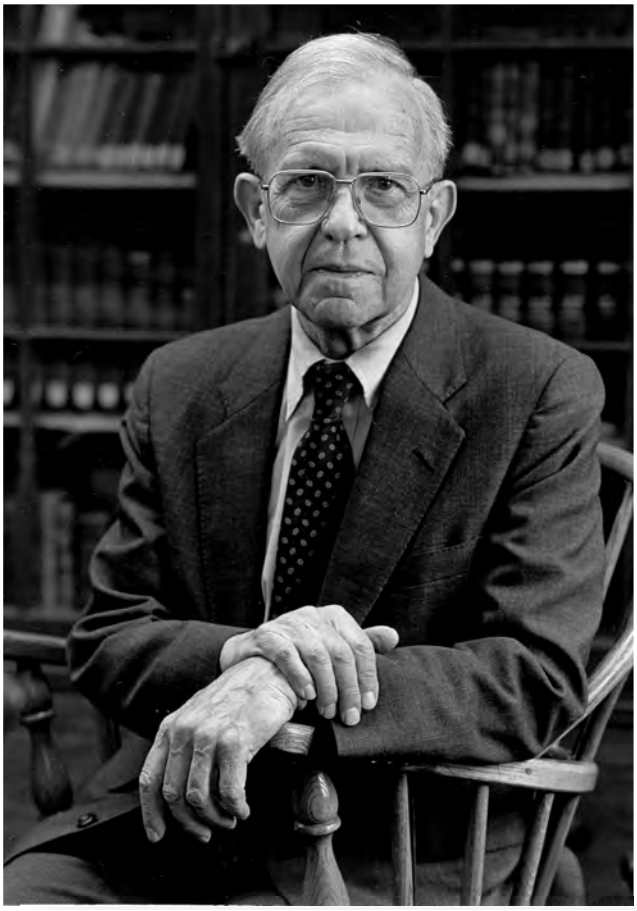
A Career in Trees

An illustrated tribute to the late David Smith, the influential forester who left a legacy in Connecticut

David M. Smith left a legacy in Connecticut forestry. The emeritus professor of silviculture at Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies died on March 10. With the help of his family, we have assembled a small album of photographs of the camera-shy Dr. Smith. (*To read his full obituary, see Connecticut Woodlands, Spring 2009, page 26.*)

All photographs courtesy of Ellen Smith



In 1990, his retirement year, Dr. Smith posed for this rare portrait.

A sawing contest at the University of Arkansas in March 1995 gave Dr. Smith a chance to work one end of a crosscut saw.

This group shot was taken on July 30, 1992, on top of a hill called South Pole in the Great Mountain Forest in Norfolk, Connecticut. This family-owned forest houses the Yale Camp, where Dr. Smith certainly spent time teaching and doing research. Left to right: Herb Winer, the late Ted Childs, Dr. Smith, Hannah Winer, Dr. Smith's wife, Catherine "Bobby" Smith, and the late Elisabeth Childs.

Forestry students and others affiliated with the Yale-Myers Forest in northeastern Connecticut joined Dr. Smith, second from right, on a trip to mark the centennial of the school forest in October 2000. Also in the photo are Mr. and Mrs. Ian Cameron, center, and Yale Forestry student Alex Finkral, right.

This photo is believed to show Dr. Smith visiting Weyerhaeuser near Olympia, Washington, in January 1988.

David M. Smith outside, location unknown, in 1986, four years before he retired.

Hancock Brook Trail, Waterbury

BY STEPHEN WOOD

I like to tell hikers about trails in Connecticut close to urban centers. These paths feel remote and offer respite from the cities that are so near. Of course, in a relative sense, all of Connecticut's trails are near urban areas (compared with, say, Maine or Colorado), but the Hancock Brook Trail is in the midst of one: a 2.8-mile loop that begins and ends on a dead-end street in Waterbury, very near old factories and a train yard.

Before you prematurely judge it, rest assured that the Hancock Brook Trail is a beautiful and fun hike, despite its apparently not-so-idyllic location. In fact, the trail is located within the Mattatuck State Forest with nary a hint of the nearby population.

The Hike

The trail begins in the lot of the Blue Stone Quarry; this is an active quarry so please sure to park away from the entrance and, once hiking, stick to the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail along the edge of the lot. Once past the quarrying operation, follow the trail along an old woods road about 30 feet above Hancock Brook, which is a "babbling brook" in the truest sense.

Shortly after passing the loop junction coming in from the west, a waterfall across Hancock Brook tumbles 50 feet down a rock face. There is a faint trail to reach the bank for a better view, but the trek down is fairly steep and slippery when wet. The unnamed falls here are impressive after a period of rain, and Hancock Brook becomes more like Hancock River. Be careful.

The first leg of the hike along Hancock Brook is transporting. The wide brook to the right, steep cliffs and overhang caves to the left—all the while you are hiking through a large and apparently healthy hemlock stand. On a hot summer's day, this stretch is sure to offer a cooling oasis. If your hike takes you clockwise (rather than counter-clockwise as described here), you then have the chance to soak your feet in the brook near the end of the hike.

Although Waterbury's populous center is only a few miles away, the serene setting belies this fact. No sights or sounds from the city permeate the little valley as the trail makes its way over rockier terrain toward its northern tip. Once there, a near 180-degree turn begins the short but rather steep climb up Lion Head.

Leaving the hemlock grove below, the trail ascends to the 660-foot summit, passing vernal pools and stands of white birch along the way. You may notice the territorial scat markings of coyotes. These animals deposit their scat in the middle of trails and roads to make it as visible as possible, and there seems to be a rather healthy population of them here.

Lion Head is not an impressive height, but it somehow feels like it. It offers views across the valley to the east, as well as expansive views south and southwest. The rocks of the cliff below is a preferred spot for turkey vultures, and there is a good chance hikers will be rewarded with close-up views of the birds gliding on the updrafts seemingly just out of reach. This is the second of two great picnic or break spots along the trail; the first spot is some large flat rocks along the brook below.

The walk back down toward the brook is steep in some places and has been damaged by motorized vehicles and run-off erosion just before the completion of the loop—but certainly not enough to ruin the hike. Note: The land through which the Hancock Brook Trail traverses is privately owned and should be respected as such. Many of Connecticut's trails exist solely because of the kindness and understanding of these private owners.

If you wish to continue hiking in the area, drive a few miles to the northwest just across the Plymouth town line. The Whitestone Cliffs Trail offers another loop (1.7 miles) with rewarding views, this time to the west and of the Naugatuck River. From the Whitestone Cliffs, a connector trail links up with the Jericho Trail, which links to other trails and beyond.

Spend a day along the Waterbury Area trails and put any preconceptions of the area to rest.

Directions

Off Route 8: Exit 37. Go east off the ramp, across a bridge over the Naugatuck River, then turn right onto Route 262 (Waterbury Road). Continue south for 1.8 miles—the road becomes Thomaston Ave—and turn left onto Sheffield Street. Follow to the end and park. To reach Whitestone Cliffs trailhead, retrace that route and turn right onto Route 262 (Spruce Brook Road) and then bear left at Mount Tobe Road. There is room for four cars to park on the left, after a quarter mile.

Stephen Wood lives in West Hartford and chronicles his ongoing quest to hike all the CFPA trails at ctmuseumquest.com. Visit the site and click on "Hikes."

Visit the site and click on "Hikes."

Lion Head is not an impressive height, but it somehow feels like it.

Stephen Wood

Growing young gardeners

BY LORI PARADIS BRANT

Getting dirty is good. What a wonderful message for young, potential gardeners to hear. Gardening with kids is not necessarily about growing the most aesthetically pleasing flower garden or cultivating a bumper crop of eggplant. It's about cultivating wonder and discovery and leaving behind our own ideas of a perfect garden in the pages of flower catalogues.

Education Director Lori Paradis Brant

Exploring the dark soil and the critters living in it excites many children. Give a boy or girl a fun task in the garden (or related to outdoor exploration), and he or she will want to help you again. My 5-year-old son will often help at home by dumping the contents of our fruit and vegetable scraps into the compost pile. He also enjoys digging the worms out of the compost pile when he gets ready to go fishing with his dad. His shouts of joy when he finds a big, juicy worm reverberate around the neighborhood. Knowing my son's interest in these wiggly soil creatures, I recently enlisted his help as I prepared materials for a teacher workshop I was leading. About two-dozen teachers would be hands-deep in worms the following day as I led them in experiments they could easily replicate back in the classroom. I asked my son if he would be my official worm wrangler and dig up a mere five to 10 worms for me from the backyard. His eyes lit up like sparklers as he grabbed the container from me and he rushed to the garden to begin digging. About 20 minutes later, he triumphantly ran back inside and placed the worm container carefully on a shelf in the refrigerator. I thanked him enthusiastically for helping teachers this way.

Later that night, my husband opened the fridge door in search of a late night snack. A crash and a holler told me he had found the worms. He was dismayed at the mess of soil spread around the floor, and I was dismayed to learn that a certain 5-year-old had collected one worm. The next morning, I ran out in the rain and quickly gathered a bunch of worms from under the mulch in the garden. The experience was a realistic lesson: When you engage a child in a positive outdoor experience, be ready to complete the legwork if necessary.

In the garden, and the outdoors, the most important strategy with kids is to create positive experiences. Try providing the kids their own garden plot, no matter how small. Expect them to pull a potato up too early or bite into an unripened tomato, discovering on their own how plants grow. It is their experience, not our telling them about ours, that they will remember. Kids with their own gardens to nurture develop pride and ownership. With child-sized gardening gloves or tools, children can dig their own holes, plant their own seeds, and water the growing greenery.

Much of the fun comes from your child's experiment. Maybe you are eating a peach and your child wants to plant the pit. Encourage him to do so and watch what happens. By planting some things that tend to be easy to grow and

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ISTOCKPHOTO

We acknowledge the wonderful source of www.kidsgardening.com for several of the ideas in this article.

Child's Garden Themes

Rainbow Garden — Plant the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

Pizza Garden — Basil, oregano, garlic, tomatoes, eggplants, or other vegetable topping.

Salsa Garden — Cilantro, peppers, tomatoes, onions, and garlic.

Alphabet Garden — One plant that starts with each letter of the alphabet; label things already in your yard/existing garden; kids can design a fun letter-shaped sign for each plant.

Five Senses Garden — Nasturtiums and other edible flowers, mint for iced tea, strawberries (taste); scented geraniums, chocolate mint, onions, lavender, lemon balm (smell); tall native grasses, make and hang wind chimes (hear); marigolds, zinnias, cosmos, and other brightly colored flowers (sight); strawflowers, ferns, sunflowers (touch).

Heritage Garden — Grow plants related to your family's heritage, customs, and recipes.

Moon Garden — Moonflowers, nicotania, evening primrose, four o'clock, and other white flowering plants.

Story Garden — Create a garden based on a child's gardening book, such as *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter (carrots, lettuce, blackberries, fir tree, etc.), *Tops & Bottoms* by Janet Stevens (a rabbit grows plants that are harvested by either their tops (carrots/radishes), bottoms (lettuce/broccoli), or middles (corn), *Flower Garden* by Eve Bunting (container gardening), *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney (lupines).

Gardening from Children's Perspective

Try growing a tepee garden with climbing plants such as pole beans, cucumbers, or morning glories, and your kids will be drawn to their nature fort. Most kids go through a stage of fort building, whether inside with blankets and chairs or outside in a clubhouse or tree house.

Keep a journal, sketchbook, or photo album. Measure and record the growth of their plants, perhaps comparing them with their own arms and legs. Encourage your child to share their photos with friends and family.

Grab a small stick to use as a microphone and become the green reporter. Bring on the drama and interview your child about what is growing in her garden, how she keeps the slugs away, or how she waters the plants. Then switch roles. Children love role-playing, and your excitement can launch a wave of creativity.

Make things for the garden like plaster casts of your child's hands and feet, which make good stepping-stones. If that broken clay pot is still lingering around, don't toss it out. Help your youngster create a toad abode; these cool, dark homes make great hiding spots for toads and teach children about food webs and natural predators. If you've uncovered rock after rock during the digging and planting process, ask your child to pile them up for a rock shelter for butterflies. The crevices in between the rocks provide great cover from birds, cats, and other predators.

Strawberry Love

Delicate fruits that keep a farmer humble

ISTOCKPHOTO

BY JEAN CRUM JONES

My husband, Terry Jones, has been growing and marketing strawberries for 45 years. It is said that he has been continuously farming strawberries longer than anyone else in Connecticut. One would think that after almost a half-century of growing these first fruits of summer that Terry could easily raise spectacular crops each season. Alas, this alluring heart-shaped fruit remains a challenge, year after year, and it keeps a farmer humble.

The strawberry itself is the essence of vulnerability, from its roots to its fruits. The roots are made of simple tissues, lacking corky bark or covering that protects them from soil born pests. Nematodes and weevil larvae just love to chew up an established field of strawberry roots. Black vine weevils, spider mites, and multiple other bugs enjoy an above the ground strawberry plant buffet, munching on the tender vines and leaves, if they are not deterred. As for the berry itself, it has neither a skin nor a rind to protect its sweet flesh from the predation of weather or pests. The fragility only increases after picking, because even the smallest bruise becomes a site for fungi to become established and rapidly destroy the fruit. Fortunately, Connecticut plant scientists from the Experiment Stations help strawberry growers by providing advice with unanticipated pest outbreaks performing essential long-term research to find safe ways to promote the healthy growth of this easily assaulted plant.

… a real fresh strawberry is a magical fruit that just about everyone loves. When the strawberries are ripe, the fields have an overwhelming fragrance, and the flavor of the strawberry is incomparable to any other food.

Outside the real challenges of dealing with the strawberry's physiology and the soil it grows in, the strawberry farmer has multiple other challenges — many beyond his control. Until quite recently, most customers lacked appreciation for what strawberry farming entailed, and their competing, noncompatible demands — cheap prices, organic methods, weekend times to purchase abundant perfect berries in an easy blissful manner — made it almost impossible to satisfy their wants. At our farm, for 40 years, I have overseen the guest operations because it bothers my husband too much to hear the customers complaining about the strawberries he has worked so hard to grow.

Then, there are the unfortunate food scares. Even when they turn out to be unwarranted, the media coverage seems to emphasize the initial fears. There have been a couple times when we could hardly sell any strawberries in June. One year, there was concern about cyclospora cayetanensis parasites infiltrating American strawberries. (Later that summer, it was traced to raspberries from Guatemala.) Another season, there was an outbreak of hepatitis at a school caused by strawberries. Caused by frozen strawberries from Mexico, this news came out quietly after strawberry season. We have also had our share of strawberry disasters. In 1972, Hurricane Agnes arrived at the peak of the season and flooded out the crop. In 1977, an uncontrollable pest came that destroyed most of the berries. And, there are the less dramatic challenges that take their toll—youth vandalism, rampant deer damage, fussy neighbors that like the looks of a farm, but not the sounds and commotion, and the long, long working hours. Through it all, my ever-persevering husband continues growing strawberries despite my protests that I've had quite enough.

Why? A ripe strawberry, freshly plucked and warmed by the sun, is a captivating eating experience. In the 1800s, after plant breeders developed delicious varieties for commercial growing, strawberries became a food people anticipated through the winter and then gorged on in a brief frenzy in early summer. The newspapers of the day called it "strawberry fever." Churches and civic groups held community strawberry festivals. Strawberry ripening gave women an opportunity to serve their communities the first berries of the season. Luscious strawberry desserts, needlework sales, musical entertainment, and sociability made these events highly successful. In some churches of Connecticut, strawberry festivals continue to be popular.

Terry began raising organic vegetables and strawberries in the 1960s. At that time, the strawberry and most other fresh garden vegetables were being produced nearly year-round in California and had become the preferred choice of supermarket produce buyers. To survive the four-day truck trip to the East Coast, California breeders had developed hearty varieties that looked great but had lost their full flavor. In Connecticut, former strawberry beds were yielding to suburban bedrooms as housing spread rapidly through the countryside. No longer were the truck farms surrounding Connecticut's urban centers economically viable, and these farmlands were being sold off to developers. Terry decided to start a pick-your-own strawberry farm while

Farmer Terry Jones's Advice for Growing Strawberries

EVERY MAY, more than 20,000 little strawberry roots come to us from a strawberry nursery in Western Massachusetts. A machine carefully sets the plants at the rate of 5,000 per acre. By June, each plant has produced several blossoms, each carefully plucked off by hand. Then for the rest of the summer, the plants throw all their energy, not into producing a relatively small amount of fruit but, rather, many vigorous "daughter plants." These form at the end of long "runners"—stems that trail along the ground away from the "mother plants." All summer-long growers must weed by hand to keep the fields free of competing weeds.

BY AUTUMN, the rows have filled in solid with strawberry plants and deep within each plant the tiny fruit buds are being formed. Around Thanksgiving, it's time to spread about 100 tons of straw over the field. The plants and their delicate little fruit buds are tucked in for the winter.

IN APRIL, the winter rest period over, the hay is carefully removed and placed in between the rows where it forms a comfortable cushion for pickers to kneel on at harvest time. The plants resume growth, and by May, the fruit buds have emerged and burst into flower. The fields carpeted white with blossoms are a sight to see. They are also a prime target for old Jack Frost, who may come a-visiting on as many as a dozen nights in May. Then we start our giant irrigation pumps that mist nearly 1,000 gallons of water per minute over the fields. As the water freezes it releases heat—more than 60 million BTUs every hour.

AT LAST — BY JUNE, the strawberries have emerged and ripened and it's strawberry time again.

The Handshake

Connecticut hiking trails exist through landowners' generosity

This year, the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails are 80 years old, and they add up to 825 miles. In 1979, when they were only 50 years old and a paltry 500 miles, Ben Warner wrote about his father's agreement to allow Connecticut Forest & Park Association to build a trail on his family's land.

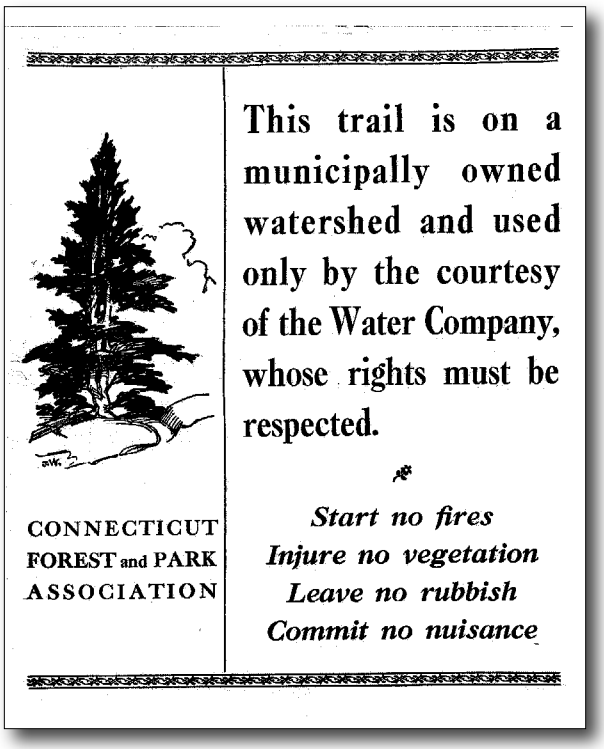
"There come out from Hartford a fellow named Warner, no relation to us, and wanted to mark a trail so folks could walk the ridge up over the mountain. Charlie and I talked it over with Harry and Lena. We all thought it was a pretty good idea, so the next Saturday this fellow Warner and I walked over Ratlum and marked out a trail. I told this Warner fellow that folks were free to hike on our property as long as they behave themselves. We shook hands on it, and I never saw him again."

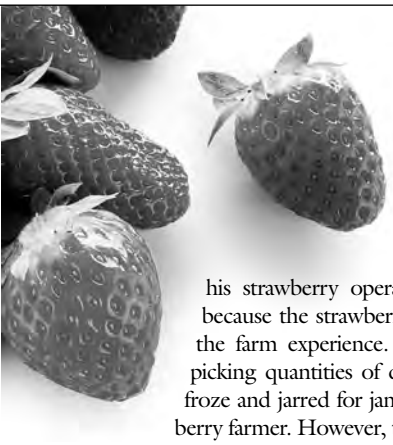
The trails exist largely because of the civic minded generosity of people like Mr. Warner. Other examples of long standing partners are the state's water companies, that allow Blue Trails to traverse their property as long as people understand the need to protect water quality at all times. The sign on this page is an example from a few decades back.

CFPA continues to ask landowners if marking a trail on their land might be "a pretty good idea" and tries to document all the handshake and verbal agreements set up over the years so that it can continue to keep the trails intact as a living example of community sharing and good fellowship.

—James W. Little

James Little, a candidate for an American studies master's degree at Trinity College, is the director of development of CFPA.





many local farmers were deciding to leave the land. Truly novel in the 1960s, his strawberry operation became an immediate sensation because the strawberries tasted so good and people enjoyed the farm experience. Housewives, working at home, loved picking quantities of delicious berries on weekdays that they froze and jarred for jam. These were great years to be a strawberry farmer. However, times changed. Many housewives joined the paid labor force and had little time for picking and preserving strawberries. Many Connecticut strawberry growers abandoned pick-your-own marketing in the 1980s. But Terry persisted and continues to persist. That is because a real fresh strawberry is a magical fruit that just about everyone loves. When the strawberries are ripe, the fields have an overwhelming fragrance, and the flavor of the strawberry is incomparable to any other food. My Farmer Jones is beloved because of his special ability to grow these wonderful, delicious strawberries, and his loyal strawberry lovers won't let him quit — yet.

Although strawberries demand a lot of extremely tedious handwork to grow, they offer among the highest cash return to farmers who are willing to coddle them. Strawberries are the overwhelming favorite crop of urban farmers, because it's possible to make a living on less than ten acres. So, I am a full-hearted supporter of small-scale farming and farmer's markets in Connecticut — they hold a key to my retirement!

Jean Crum Jones farms with her husband, Terry, in Shelton. She is a registered dietician.

Digging Deep into a Journey with David Leff

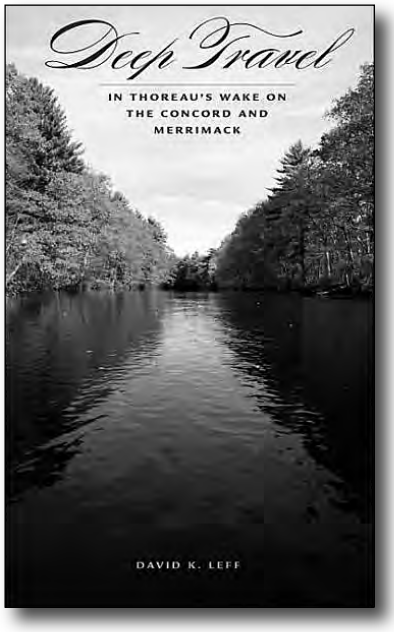
Deep Travel: In Thoreau's Wake on the Concord and Merrimack, by David K. Leff. University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 2009. 264 pages.

BY ROBERT M. RICARD

Kayakers and canoeists typically prefer running rivers in pristine areas void of human evidence. When industrial sites — dams, canals, abutments, bridges, even cars and shopping carts — interrupt the beauty of fields and forests along river banks, enthusiasts usually describe the scenery as "nothing to write home about."

In sharp contrast, David K. Leff loves this stuff — all of it. In fact, a growing number of folks do too. They are finding pleasure in viewing the natural world through a more humanistic lens. Make no mistake — they still have affection for wild areas and unspoiled nature. They still revere purists like John Muir and wild area adventurists such as John Wesley Powell. The difference is they also revel in the interface of humans and nature. To these folks, the jewel is not so much seeing a bald eagle roosting in a tall white pine, but seeing a bald eagle roosting in a tall white pine emerging from the bottom of an abandoned canal or cellar hole.

Mr. Leff retired in 2006 after a long and distinguished career as a deputy commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, where he was responsible for conservation programs involving parks, forests, fisheries, and wildlife. In this world, he was intimately engaged in environmental politics and the political behavior of organizations. In his new world, he may influence peoples' environmental attitudes and behaviors in a much different way. Mr. Leff now encourages us to see the everyday, seemingly ordinary world around us in a new light. He does this with grace, style, and wit. In his latest book, *Deep Travel: In Thoreau's Wake on the Concord and Merrimack*, the author awakens us to his passion and invites us to journey with him.



Mr. Leff is fascinated in the physical evidence of past lives, historic places and events, and punctuated moments in the technological innovation that changed the landscape that appears along the industrialized rivers of New England (and elsewhere). He points out that this can be seen from a canoe or kayak along New England waterways. Influenced by authors such as Harvard University's John Stilgoe (author of *Outside Lies Magic*), Mr. Leff introduces us to a new way of seeing the New England landscape (through "deep travel"), and revels in the often-maligned landscape of decaying factory towns and abandoned mills, their dams and sluices, of eroded farm land.

His journey begins with his plan to paddle the Concord and Merrimack Rivers in much the same way Henry David Thoreau and his brother (who died shortly afterward) had done in 1839. Mr. Thoreau later wrote his observations in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. Mr. Leff takes virtually the same path and with three different companions — his young son Josh, his friend and neighbor Alan, and his sweetheart Pamela. The important difference is the societal changes spanning more than one and a half centuries, ones that reflect both the ecological changes and the lingering evidence of human intervention. By helping us see these things differently, that is by seeking the juxtapositions of culture and nature, he leads us to delight in our past and prepares us to better manage our present and future landscape.

Mr. Leff's deep travel, first-person narrative resonates successfully, tracing ecological change and human history. The reader will leave the journey with a greater appreciation of the remains of a breeched dam, a dam built to harness the power of a river to produce textiles at the same place where Native Americans constructed weirs for their own needs, and much more. You might even imagine dropping through a waterfall that once powered the looms your grandmother worked a hundred years ago as a child. I took just such a journey on the river through downtown Willimantic past the restored American Thread mill. On my trip through time and place, I imagined my grandmother, speaking French only, in a much different life than mine. With this experience, and with David Leff's writing, I am better able to see (and seek) my past, present, and future with more reverence, respect, and appreciation. You might do the same. If you did, you would certainly have a great deal more to write home about.

Robert M. Ricard is a senior extension educator for UConn Cooperative Extension.

Essential facts

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maintain, a child engages his enthusiasm. Along with the traditional and popular vegetable, bird, butterfly, or flower gardens, why not try something different that might appeal to you and your little one? Consider growing a pizza garden or story garden. See the box for other ideas to jumpstart your creative garden themes.

Celebrate! Make a big to-do out of harvest time — whether it's time to cut some flowers for decorating the kitchen table or pick the tomatoes to make pizza sauce. Show off your child's (and your) hard work; positive recognition of a job well done can be a memory they won't soon forget. And when it's time to plant the garden again next spring, your child will have lots of positive stories to share rather than seeing a garden as merely a tedious chore.

Goodnight, Garden

At season's end, tuck the garden into its soil bed for the winter. Feed the worms the plant compost and put away the garden tools. Leave a note about what fun you had with your child on his or her tools for them to find next year when those tools emerge again.

This is our first year gardening with our son, the worm wrangler. I've yet to discover if his interest in all things related to dirt and muck will lead to his very own child's garden. I'll let you know.

Lori Paradis Brant is the Education Director of CFPA.

A Fruitful Walk *Walking without realizing it's exercise*

BY JENNIFER BENNER

Even though we know walking is good for us, we sometimes need to dangle a carrot to get us moving. Walking can be enjoyable in itself. When it is paired with an interesting activity, however, we end up having so much fun, we don't even realize that we're walking. Exploring historic sites, hiking to beautiful vistas, and strolling through Main Street shops and art galleries are all healthy activities in disguise. Many of these activities can be enjoyed year-round in Connecticut, but one that is made just for summer is experiencing our local farms and gardens.

Connecticut has a rich farming heritage that encompasses nurturing everything from livestock to vegetables to honey production. Visiting pick-your-own farms and farmers' markets are great ways to get out for a walk while purchasing fresh, local food and spending time with family and friends. There are many resources available to find a farm or market near you. The Buy CT Grown initiative has a Web site (www.buyctgrown.com) where you can search for local farms. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut also has an excellent farm and food guide as well as a listing of Connecticut farmers' markets available on their Web site (www.ctnofa.org/Farms.php).

Those with green thumbs or looking for some gardening inspiration should consider attending a garden tour or walk. Many Connecticut residents open their gardens to visitors on designated days during the year. Keep an eye out for announcements in community happenings in your local newspaper and bulletin boards around town and at the library. You can also check with local garden clubs or groups such as the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut (www.ctgardenclubs.org). The Garden Conservancy's Open Days Program (www.gardenconservancy.org/opendays) hosts several garden tour opportunities in Connecticut and around the country throughout the gardening season. Although they do charge a small admission fee, the money goes to a good cause that conserves gardens for future generations.

Of course, you can always get a little exercise right in your own backyard. Pulling weeds can be a full-contact sport, but few things are as rewarding as cultivating and harvesting homegrown veggies, herbs, fruit, and flowers from your garden. Another great, fun example of a healthy activity in disguise.

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New England National Scenic Trail is official

The traprock ridge hiking trails in Connecticut have become part of the New England National Scenic Trail. In March, a federal bill that included a provision first introduced two years ago to establish the first new National Scenic Trail in New England passed in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and was signed into law by President Barack Obama. The New England National Scenic Trail is a 220-mile hiking trail in Connecticut and Massachusetts. It starts at the New Hampshire–Massachusetts border and goes south to Long Island Sound, combining parts of the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail in Massachusetts and, in Connecticut, the Metacomet and Mattabesett trails. The whole route is known to many as the MMM Trail. It crosses through 39 municipalities with a combined population of nearly 776,000, but the trails link rural stretches over low ridges in the center of both states.For about seven years, the federal government had been considering designating the trail. (The other National Scenic Trail in New England is the northern section of the Appalachian Trail in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.) The idea came originally from U.S. Representative John W. Olver, a Democrat of Massachusetts, who introduced the earlier version of the legislation early in 2007, following years of a study that recommended pursuing federal designation. The House passed that bill in January 2008, 261–122. The Senate never acted on its version of that bill. In late 2008, during the last months of the 110th Congress, the trail designation was consolidated with dozens of other projects mostly related to public lands as the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009, Senate Bill 22. Senate Bill 22 passed on January 15, 2009, but on March 11, it failed to receive the required two-thirds vote in the House after a motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill. But the bill reappeared the following week in the Senate, which passed it 77–20, after which the House passed the bill with a simple majority, 285–140. The omnibus bill included a long list of public lands bills and two national historic trails, the Trail of Tears and the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route, which passes through Connecticut.

The trail route includes a new section, 14 miles long, carrying the route south to Long Island Sound, in Guilford. This new section sets off the easternmost section of the Mattabesett Trail as an alternate route. In Massachusetts, a section of the current Metacomet-Monadnock trail is proposed to relocate to state lands from private property, at the request of property owners. Long sections of the trail route will remain as they have been for as long as 75 years, traversing low traprock ridges at the southern end, and woods and low mountains at its northern end.

CFPA Volunteers Managing Trails

The National Park Service is now authorized to provide funding and technical assistance to help Connecticut Forest & Park Association, the Appalachian Mountain Club, which coordinates volunteer maintenance on the Massachusetts section, and others to maintain and protect the trail. A trail stewardship council with representatives from towns, landowners, trail user organizations, and many other groups will be established to oversee maintenance and protection of the trail's national scenic values. Finally, a "trail management blueprint" will take effect as the framework for managing the trail. This blueprint was designed during the years of the trail feasibility study, drawing on extensive public comments.

CFPA volunteers will continue to maintain the trail in Connecticut. If landowners are willing to sell to state or local entities, the trail corridor could become protected land. The National Park Service will not own or manage any of the trail lands. This is different than the situation with the Appalachian Trail, which follows lands owned by the National Park Service. Landowners along the New England National Scenic Trail will continue to own their land and control what happens on it. This designation does not allow the government to take land through eminent domain.

—Christine Woodside

His father's voice

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"get a good crop" out of the seeds.

Accepting the gift of seeds, I was thinking that while my father and I seemed to be gardening in different ways, we shared an appreciation for the beauty of plants, edible or not. We also shared a kinship with every other person who works with zeal and vigor to mark the land—whether through gardening, building fences and stone walls, or planting trees. We're saying, I am here, and I care about this spot of earth. I want to put my stamp on it.

I did plant some of my father's seeds the following spring, and I managed to get a few tomatoes, along with an okra pod or two, but not much else. This food effort did help me better appreciate the ornamental value of food crops. Okra, for example, blooms as beautifully as its hibiscus cousin. I've met people in Connecticut who grow okra, but I haven't tried. I did grow eggplant, however, and like okra, eggplant produces blooms and sculpted fruit worthy of any ornamental space.

Ornamental is what herbs had always been to me. Rosemary was a path plant, to be brushed when passed, releasing spicy fragrance. Fennel attracted butterflies. Thyme between stones in a path made a fragrant "steppable." As I became more interested in cooking, herbs became—imagine this—edible plants. I began using them in soups and salads, and supplying Lyn for various dishes. If a meal is like an orchestra, then herbs are the strings, providing light, elegant accents, counterpoints to the meat and potatoes, which amount to the drums, trumpets, pianos.

When we moved to Connecticut in 2001, I built an acre of gardens, carving out my first dedicated herb garden, growing plants not only for viewing and cooking but also for teas, discovering that just about all herbs seem suited for hot or cold drinks, many of which are said to have medicinal value. The taste of teas made with homegrown rosemary, mint, or lemon balm is priceless.

To be sure, growing herbs is easy compared with cultivating vegetables and fruits that attract deer, rabbits, squirrels, and every other pest known to gardeners. Still we garden.

In the last few years, I've begun growing strawberries in patches and blueberries in pots. Having gotten used to plucking fruit for cereal in the early morning, I can't stop; I'd have a hole in my breakfast without the dew-fresh berries as tasty as they are beautiful. Yes, the birds want to share the potted blueberries growing on the steps, not satisfied with the wild ones in the ground. And, slugs want all the strawberries. But, as a farmer told me years ago when I asked what he did about squirrels, deer, birds, and such: "Grow enough for them and for me, too."

And, now I have planted asparagus in abundance — enough for Lyn and me and creatures unknown. Enough at long last to make me say with certainty that I am a food man.

Lee May, author of two books on gardening and life, wrote for the Los Angeles Times and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution before retiring to East Haddam. He can be reached at eleemay@gmail.com.

Headlines from around the state

We thank Chris Zurcher's Connecticut Environmental Headlines for tipping us off to these stories. For a daily posting of news summaries, visit www.ctenvironmentalheadlines.com.

Hartford Regional Market to Add Indoor Farmers' Market

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture is planning an indoor farmers' market at the Hartford Regional Market, the largest perishable food distribution facility between Boston and New York. The indoor market will augment an outdoor, seasonal farmers' market that now operates under a 28-stall pavilion. That market attracts an average of 10,000 customers each year, some of them arriving before dawn toting flashlights.

The state agriculture department was granted $116,865 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program to design the larger, enclosed facility to handle more producers and stay open year-round. The number of stalls would be increased from 28 to 80, allowing as many as 52 more farmers to participate on any given day. Officials hope for a 2011 opening.

The outdoor farmers' market is open to the weather, restricting customer traffic and sales to a seasonal basis. Local crops such as honey, maple syrup, and greenhouse plants, however, offer year-round availability. Consumer awareness of and demand for Buy CT Grown products have been steadily increasing during the past two decades, and the popularity of farmers' markets has exploded. Seasonal farmers' markets in the state have increased from 22 in 1986 to 114 in 2008. Last year, approximately 360 farmers participated in the state's 114 seasonal farmers' markets.

— Connecticut Department of Agriculture

State Considering Tax on Plastic Shopping Bags

The Connecticut General Assembly this spring was considering a 5-cent tax on plastic and paper shopping bags as a way to raise about $20 million a year. The proposal called for spending the proceeds on curbside recycling in which cans, bottles, and other materials could be mixed in one bin. Connecticut already has a 5-cent deposit system for beverage bottles and cans.

— Source: Gregory B. Hladky in The New York Times

Scenes from the Soapstone Mountain Trail Races May 17 in Shenipsit State Forest. At right, race directors Jerry Stage and Deb Livingston.

Scott Livingston

Move over

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pounds of produce. Home kitchen gardening allows you to bring fresh food to the table throughout the growing season and beyond, if you also choose to freeze and preserve your harvest. It is a gratifying activity that you can enjoy with your family and friends. It also makes good use of our land and resources. Lawns are taxing on the environment, requiring vast quantities of water, fertilizer, pesticides, and fuel to power mowers, and purchasing produce that is shipped from distant (often foreign farms) has a big impact on fuel and resource consumption.

Trends come and go, and economic times largely dictate them. Although sales of just about everything are down this year, many of the top vegetable seed suppliers are looking at a banner year with sales projected to be up anywhere from 20 to 40 percent for 2009. It appears that the White House is not the only household that sees the benefits of vegetable gardening.

Jennifer Benner is the WalkCT communications coordinator for CFPA. She enjoys harvesting fresh produce from her garden each year.

Community gardens

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Mr. Alexander and his colleagues think so. "Since the industrial revolution," they wrote, "there has been a growing tendency for people to rely on impersonal producers for their vegetables; however, in a world where vegetables are central and where self-sufficiency increases, it becomes as natural for families to have their own vegetables as their own air. . . . every household which does not have its own private land attached to it should have a portion of a *common vegetable garden* close at hand."

Community gardens usually start out with one person's strong idea "but then people come out of the woodwork," said Ms. Benoit, a native of Philadelphia, who was much influenced by the book *Garden Blocks for Urban America* (Scribner, 1969) by Louise Bush-Brown. She has seen this pattern of strong leaders inspiring neighbors over and over again.

One striking example of it happened in the lower Connecticut River Valley about seven years ago. Journalist and avid gardener Claudia Van Nes of Chester was talking to the director of the Shoreline Soup Kitchens, which serves meals to low-income guests at churches in several towns and runs three food pantries. Ms. Van Nes thought it would be possible to start a garden so that even families struggling financially could eat fresh local produce. So she drove around the area looking at the kind of land behind churches that people don't notice. She saw a tangled expanse near the property line behind Grace Church in Old Saybrook, an Episcopal church at 336 Main Street.

She approached Bill Peace, a town selectman who also served on the church vestry, recalled Mr. Peace's wife, Julie Peace, who helps publicize the garden. The Rev. Chuck Hoffman, the rector, "could not have been more wonderful about it," Ms. Van Nes said. The church donated about a third of an acre. Others donated irrigation and a fence. Mrs. Van Nes organizes volunteers, and Betty Palka of Chester does much work. The 119 volunteers include retired people, teenagers, and, recently, 38 sailors from the U.S. Submarine Base in Groton. They moved the compost piles. Working people find connection to the land and their agrarian pasts. "They said things like: Working in this garden sure beats sitting around a board table," Mrs. Peace said. Want to drive, volunteer, or donate your produce to the pantry? Email claudiavannes@aol.com. Or call 860-526-3459.

Christine Woodside, who edits Connecticut Woodlands, edited the 2003 reprint of a USDA agricultural yearbook on small-scale homesteading, Living on an Acre (Lyons Press, 2003).

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Arborist Matt "Twig" Largess showed hikers birds and trees on a 4-mile trek through Heritage Farm and Bolton Notch State Park on National Trails Day June 4. CFPA organized Connecticut's giant roster of hikes that weekend.

Scott Livingston