June 2024

Road Trip!
Genesee Country Village & Museum

While others are jetting off to far-away places like Europe and the Rocky Mountains for a summer vacation, my wife Toni and I decided to do something we've always said we would: see more of our beloved New York State. A highlight of our recent road trip was Genesee Country Village and Museum, near Mumford and south of Rochester. It's called America's third-largest living history museum, but no one I told of our plan had ever heard of it, so we weren't sure just what to expect.

Simply put, we just loved it! The Village is composed of 68 restored and furnished buildings, arranged into three time periods representing western New York: Early Settlement (1790-1820), Center Village (1830-1870), and Gas Light District (1860-

1900). Being a fan of old architecture, I enjoyed examining each structure and taking in the streetscape views. Well-maintained gardens, for both beauty and food, as well as heritage livestock, brought color and movement to the scenery. Costumed craftspeople, including a printer, a cooper, a furniture-maker, and a blacksmith, were practicing their trades and shared information about their work. A friendly gentleman creating wood spindles on an ingenious lathe gave me a wealth of information on Windsor chairs, teaching me that mine at home probably wasn't a priceless heirloom. Enthusiastic interpreters in the houses and stores told of nineteenth century life, the actual people who built and lived in the homes, and answered just about any historical question which came up. A common thread with everyone we met was just how much they liked talking about bye-gone America: these folks really are living history!

At 600 acres, GCV&M is big, so wear your walking shoes. A trolley, restaurant, and gift-shop are all welcome accoutrements. Since we're the kind of folks who like to read all the interpretive signs and stroll at a leisurely pace, we didn't have time to see the vintage baseball park or the art museum, but that also gives us an excuse for a return visit.

For more information on Genesee County Village and Museum, visit:
https://www.gcv.org/

Story and photos by David Chinery

Trouble In The Tomato Patch

For the many joys in gardening, there are darker shadows. A tremendous number of home gardeners seek the simple pleasure of homegrown tomatoes. Tomatoes are grown in huge rural gardens, in neat suburban lots, and on urban rooftops in five gallon buckets. Gardeners with shady backyards plant them in wheelbarrows to move them with the shifting sun. A favorite photo I took years ago is of a tomato garden squeezed between the Bronx River Parkway and a mausoleum in Westchester.

Tomatoes often grow rapidly and happily up to mid-July. Then brown spots start to appear on the bottom leaves. The area around the spots turns yellow and enlarges, and soon the entire leaf is spotted and pale. This malady progresses up the plant, from lowest foliage moving skyward, until the devastation becomes painful to view. While a few ripe tomatoes may be produced (and are still safe to eat), production is cut short, far from what was dreamed of, and well below the plant's potential.

With an email last week, we knew that 2024's appearance of the disease called early blight was here super-early, in mid-June. The question accompanying the ugly photos was the usual "What can I do?" And while there are many steps you can take to thwart early blight, none are foolproof. Since the fungus lingers in the soil, mulch to prevent soil splashing up on the lower leaves from the rain. Don't plant tomatoes in the same place where any member of that plant family (the nightshades), including potatoes, peppers, eggplants, and of course tomatoes, grew in the last three years. This pointer is especially important, but gardeners with small spaces have trouble re-locating their tomato patch each season. Avoid getting the foliage wet when watering, and don't water in the evening. Give your plants lots of room and don't work around them when conditions are wet. Thoroughly clean up the dead plants, rotten tomatoes, etc. in the fall and don't compost the mess. Pinch out leaves as soon as they show signs of the disease, and keep the area weeded. Use of fungicides is also possible, but many home gardeners don't relish the thought of spraying their tomatoes.

For many plant problems, Extension types like me enthuse about disease resistant plants. The plant breeders should create early blight resistant hybrids, right? Not so simple. The genes for early blight resistance are many, and linked to other tomato traits. Therefore, a blight resistant tomato could be created, but it is difficult to get other good characteristics, such as fruit size, color, and taste included in the new plant. With multiple genes involved, it also is difficult to get complete disease resistance (which would be easier to achieve if just one gene were involved).

There are tomato varieties, however, which while not resistant to early blight, exhibit tolerance to the disease. According to NC State Extension, the following varieties are more tolerant to the disease than most: 'Mountain Magic', 'Mountain Fresh Plus F1', 'Bush Celebrity Hybrid', 'Big Beef Hybrid', 'Celebrity Hybrid', 'Rutgers', 'JulietF1', 'Tommy Toe', 'Old Brooks', or 'Cabernet F1'.

So while early blight and other tomato diseases may give us and our prized plants some trouble, with a little knowledge and planning, its still possible to enjoy these delicious fruits of summer.

Story by David Chinery and photos from

https://blogs.cornell.edu/livegpath/gallery/tomato/early-blight/

Tomatoes are so important to gardeners, as well as to most people's diet, that scientists are working hard to create great tomatoes which can avoid plant pests.

Information on efforts to breed disease resistant tomatoes at Cornell: https://www.vegetables.cornell.edu/pest-management/disease-factsheets/disease-resistant-vegetable-varieties/new-york-adapted-tomatoes-with-resistance-to-multiple-fungal-and-bacterial-diseases-created-at-cornell/

A bewildering list of tomato varieties and their disease resistance: https://www.vegetables.cornell.edu/pest-management/disease-factsheets/disease-resistant-vegetable-varieties/disease-resistant-tomato-varieties/

What to do in JUNE

Maybe the heavy work winds down as the weather warms up,
but there is still plenty to do.
July is the perfect time for:

* Pinching annuals (such as some petunias) to transform them from lean and lanky to bushy flower bearers.

* Spraying fungicide on susceptible roses every 7 to 10 days.

* Staying sharp. A keen edged mower blade cuts cleanly and reduces lawn stress.

* Weeding out the weak. Those annuals that are stunted or an unusual color should be pulled. Why let their virus spread to neighboring healthy plants?

* Saving water. Have you considered using drip irrigation or soaker hoses?

* Harvesting: Get those ripe veggies onto the table. You'll encourage additional production.

* Giving the hummingbirds a break. Clean the feeder and keep it filled with nectar.

You'll love the pay-off.

* Deadheading old rose blossoms and other perennials to promote more flowering. You can also deadhead rhododendrons to make them neater, but be careful not to damage the developing buds

* Staking and tying tall plants like tomatoes and delphiniums to keep them tidy

* Fertilizing container plantings with a liquid product every two weeks

* Watering, watering, and watering some more as long as your community isn't under drought restrictions or your well can handle the demand

* Checking the undersides of leaves and new shoots for aphids, spider mites and other pests

* And, when the work is done for the day, chase fireflies.

Compiled by Master Gardener Don Maurer and the Rensselaer County Master Gardeners

Those Darn Ditch Lilies

If you want to get Americans talking, just throw out one of the hot-button issues of the day. The same holds true for gardeners. While normally a placid lot, a group of gardeners are almost guaranteed to line up against spongy moths, late blight or squash bugs. But what if the subject in the crosshairs might be portrayed as both a plus and a minus? Case in point: the orange daylily.

Although it is everywhere, *Hemerocallis fulva* is not native to our neck of the woods. Sources say it hails from the Caucasus Mountains through the Himalayas to China, Japan, and Korea, but with such a good spreader, who knows where it all started? In the case of this aggressor, it's vibrant root system has taken it places, since the orange daylily is a sterile triploid and therefore cannot reproduce via seeds. Another key to its success is an ability to inhabit many habitats, from dry shade to damp, low spots to hot, dry sun. An essential toughness of character, elusive to modern horticultural science, also lets *H. fulva* remain on a site long after gardens, gardeners and buildings all crumble. The orange daylily doesn't need us to thrive.

So should we celebrate or denigrate the orange daylily? Visually, it seems an essential part of summer in the Hudson Valley. Come July I'll see an impressive stand on the steep hillside along Stimpson Avenue in Castleton, spot more in a foundation planting, and gaze at it along the Moordenerkill – all within less than a mile. It will hold a bank better than most other plants, is more attractive than many other weeds, doesn't need to be pruned, isn't poisonous and can be had for free. A patch of orange daylilies doesn't shout neglect like a swath of nettles or garlic mustard, so it is mildly social acceptable to have them around the periphery, if not in the garden itself. All this makes them useful to gardeners who are stretched for time, money and energy. No need to fret over orange daylilies when so many other things need attention.

On the reverse, we should dislike *H. fulva* because, just like Artificial Intelligence, it wants to take over the world. It pushes out native plants and isn't a correct source of pollen or food for our insects and animals. Invited inside, it may take over your garden. It can be dug out, but if a small piece remains, it rebounds. Herbicides bounce off the waxy leaves, and a low crown helps it resist mowing. The American Hemerocallis Society, in a special release, identifies it as invasive, while noting that clump-forming daylilies are a breed apart and not to be confused with the orange interloper. Nurseries rarely sell *H. fulva* because they can't make a dime on something as common as air (although that doesn't explain the mysterious appeal of bottled water).

Personally, I employ *H. fulva* along the driveway, but my favorite orange daylily is the clumping 'Krakatoa Lava,' pictured below. I'm happy sitting on the fence.

Text and photos by David Chinery

The View From Here

The recent sultry weather reminds me of one thing that no garden should be without: shade. Without some sun protection, even the most heat-tolerant among us is sometimes forced to throw in the trowel and head indoors. Luckily, one thing my old un-air-conditioned house is blessed with is a porch, which is the coolest place to be when things get toasty.

A porch is like a dog or a pick-up truck: once you've owned one, it is hard to live life without. Ours is a side porch, smallish at only about ten by sixteen feet, which provides a capacity for up to eight or so sitters. It was built with the rest of the house in 1937, and has two sets of three columns in either corner, a common design element at the time. Although there are columns to spare, railings or steps down to the ground were never added in the almost sixty years the original folks lived here. At four feet off the ground, I needed pole-vaulting skills to climb up and skydiver nerve to get down, so the first thing I did was add some wooden stairs. That little job started our porch preservation adventure.

Next I was troubled because some of the fir flooring seemed a bit spongy on the east side. Fixing this involved propping up the porch roof, then removing a set of three columns and the dodgy boards. Exploration revealed, unfortunately, that part of the subfloor and two of the columns were also in decay. After replacing it all with new wood, I breathed a sigh of relief, but just a few short summers later, rot returned. This time I decided to part with a bit of brass, called in professionals, and the substructure was entirely replaced, the columns are now fiberglass and the floor is plastic-composite lumber. While using non-authentic materials makes my inner Williamsburg cringe, things are holding up nicely, and I tell myself Jefferson would have used vinyl on Monticello if given the option.

Planting your porch is easier and more fun than preservation. On our western side, I built some simple trellis work and planted a Dutchman's pipe vine (*Aristolochia durior*). Vigorous but not obnoxious, it has giant heart-shaped leaves and makes beautiful shade. Go through any venerable upstate New York town and you'll see *Aristolochia* on at least a few porches. On our south side, two towering maples provide all-day shade. The more ambitious add hanging baskets and planters, but I come here to get away from work, so I don't.

Gardening magazines show elaborate porches, and elaborately decorated porches, like the Vanderbilt's, pictured below. These are porches much beyond ours. We have an ancient Sears lounger, two mis-matched rockers, a surplus army cot and a mosaic table – more yard-sale leftovers than photo shoot chic. An elaborate wrought-iron railing from an Albany salvage yard, said to be from New Orleans but perhaps a modern Chinese knock-off, keeps us from falling off. Sky blue paint on the ceiling (another traditional touch) completes my outdoor paradise. It isn't fancy, but in summer it's all I need.

Text and photos by David Chinery

GREENSHOTS: Notable Gardening Pictures

"One application of fertilizer made the lawn look great. It was the second, over-application, that was the problem."

Walter Nelson, CCE Educator Emeritus

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County's

Summer Gardening Programs

FREE Admission!

Rain/inclement weather at program start may cancel

Held at: *The Demonstration Garden at The Robert C. Parker School, 4254 Route 43, Wynantskill (North Greenbush) 12198*

"The Dirt On Garden Soil" ***Wednesday, July 17 from 7 to 8 PM.*** Gardeners know that good garden soil is the basis for all success, but how do you know what "good' soil is? David Chinery, CCE of Rensselaer County Educator, will show you how to evaluate pH, nutrients, drainage, texture and microorganism levels by using some fun and easy tests you can do at home! We'll discuss how to amend poor soil, too.

"Late Summer Is For Lawns" ***Wednesday, July 31, 7 from 7 to 8 PM.*** Mid-August to mid-September is the best time to tackle lawn weed management, overseeding, fertilizing, and renovation. Bring samples of problems, such as weeds and insects, and we'll discuss options to improve your lawn for the future. Hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension Educator David Chinery.

"Why Garden With Native Plants?" ***Wednesday, August 7 from 7 to 8 PM.*** Interest in using native plants in home landscapes is growing! Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners will show you some of the native plants growing in the Demonstration Garden, and explain why gardeners throughout the United States are now choosing to re-discover the plants which grow in their own regions. Be prepared to walk around the garden.

"Using Herbs Throughout The Seasons" ***Wednesday, August 14 from 7 to 8 PM.*** Join the Demonstration Garden Herb Garden Team for a discussion of the wonderful world of herbs. Learn about cultivation, preservation, and uses of these valuable plants. Tour the herb garden where you can see them as living specimens (not ground up in a jar). Enjoy sampling products made from herbs... .products you can make yourself.

"Treasuring and Preserving Your Harvest" ***Wednesday, August 21 from 6:30 to 7:30 PM (note earlier start time).*** What can you do with piles of tomatoes and too many cucumbers? Rensselaer County Master Gardeners will share the many ways to save your harvest for delicious dining in the future. Fermentation, canning, and drying are just a few of the processes that we will address. The volunteers have grown vegetables that all lend themselves to preservation. Mocktails from our garden will be offered along with recipes!!

Limited seating provided; bring your own lawn chair.

For more information, call Cornell Cooperative Extension's Horticulture Program at (518) 272-4210 or e-mail dhc3@cornell.edu **Directions: From Interstate(I-90) Exit 8; east onto Rte 43; pass through Rte 4 intersection toward West Sand Lake; (approximately 2.1 miles); Left at Robert C. Parker School.**

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Cornell University Cooperative Extension

The Final Dig

"You can't be suspicious of a tree, or accuse a bird or squirrel of subversion or challenge the ideology of a violet."

Hal Borland (1900-1978, American writer, journalist, naturalist)

"Root Concerns: Notes From The Underground" is a publication of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County. For more information, contact David Chinery at 518.272.4210 or dhc3@cornell.edu.

Websites mentioned in Root Concerns are provided as a courtesy to our readers. Mention of these websites does not imply endorsement by Cornell University, Cornell Cooperative Extension or by the author.

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