

GREEN HERITAGE

The Newsletter of Monmouth County's Open Space, Parks & Recreation Agency Vol. 44 No. 4 Winter 2010/2011



SLIDE, SURF, HIKE, PADDLE, RIDE, LEARN, EXPERIENCE...ALL IN A COUNTY PARK

The program staff in the Park System's Visitor Services Division select the line-up of classes, programs and activities offered in the county parks each season. Their choices are based, in part, on some of the county's unique recreational resources.

Special Settings Turn the Ordinary into Extraordinary

Because of its many special facilities & resources, the Monmouth County Park System is able to offer many authentic outdoor and nature programs which aren't available anywhere else nearby. Summer camps, for instance, include bicycling, hiking and camping because there are paved trails, nature trails and cabins/campsites in the county parks. Fishing, boating (canoe/kayak), surfing and sailing programs are offered at the county's many waterfront parks. And, if its bird or plant identification, or gardening you're into, the county's many meadows, fields and gardens offer the perfect setting.

Park staff are constantly on the look-out for new ideas to create programs that help people get the outdoor time they need to relax and stay healthy.

In addition to offering many different ways to get outside and enjoy area wildlife and wide open spaces, park staff are constantly on the look out for new ideas to create programs that will delight park visitors, teach a new skill, or simply help people get the exercise or outdoor time they need to relax and stay healthy.

Comparing Local, County and State Parks & Recreation

While most towns have local, neighborhood parks developed for recreation (think ball fields, playgrounds, and basketball courts), the state focuses on large, expansive tracts of land of state significance that remain largely undeveloped. The county does both.



Prefer action on the water? Learn how to surf at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park.



Not just any cooking class... At Historic Walnford's "Bread and Butter," participants prepare bread using historic utensils and ingredients—and churn their own butter in a 200 year old kitchen.



Dancing around the maypole has made a come-back at Deep Cut Gardens.



It's so nice to live near the water, where you can learn to kayak or canoe with park staff, then visit more than a dozen boat-friendly park sites... including the Manasquan River (pictured here).



Children engage their inner architect, parents engage their inner child and everyone engages their imagination building fairy houses in the garden (using all natural materials of course).



Recreation trends may come and go, but kickball, tennis and in-line skating are still very much alive in the county parks.



Take a deep, cleansing breath at an outdoor yoga class.



What better subject for a painting than Holmdel Park's spectacular cherry blossom display.

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Like the state, the Monmouth County Park System preserves large tracts of county land for open space and wildlife/watershed protection, that helps shape development. The county also provides for many different types of recreation. This means that residents can enjoy the wide open spaces nearby and they can also access these spaces for exercise, hobbies, or just a breath of fresh air.

County park and recreation facilities meet regional priorities. There are sites within 20 minutes driving distance of most county residents—such as Turkey Swamp Park in Freehold—where you can do many different activities.



Oak Glen Park in Howell Twp. At 63 acres with baseball fields, soccer fields, basketball courts and other amenities, this is one of the larger local parks.



At just over 3,000 acres, Allaire State Park protects a large tract of land in Howell and Wall Townships. Trails, campsites and a historic village are main attractions.



The largest county park at over 2,100 acres, Turkey Swamp Park offers soccer fields, playgrounds, trails, campgrounds, rental boats, picnic shelters and many more recreational opportunities while preserving open space.

Special Facilities in Monmouth County's Parks

The county also provides facilities that may fall outside the resources of individual towns. Here's just a sampling of some of the county's specialized recreational facilities:

Unique Playgrounds in Monmouth County

- SkatePlex at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park
- Two barrier-free playgrounds for children of all abilities
- Sprayground (water playground) at Dorbrook Recreation Area



Sprayground

Sports Facilities for School Teams

- Golf courses for local golf teams
- Tennis courts for local tennis teams
- Manasquan Reservoir for an area crew team
- Holmdel Park, a nationally ranked cross-country course for runners



A local crew team practices on the Manasquan Reservoir

Sites for Hands-on Environmental & Nature Education

- Huber Woods Park (Reptile House, Lenape Indian programs & displays)
- Manasquan Reservoir (wetland education programs, boat tours)
- Holmdel Park Activity Center (bat, insect, and other wildlife programs)
- Bayshore Activity Center (bayfront/estuary activities like seining)
- Seven Presidents Activity Center (classes feature ocean and marine life)
- Fisherman's Cove Activity Center (bird, wildlife and nature walks by the Manasquan river)



Free seining demos at the newly renovated Bayshore Activity Center help visitors get to know the estuarine life of Raritan Bay.

Beautifully maintained athletic fields are another way that county facilities serve the region—especially when the demand for local ball fields exceeds supply. There are 15 rentable ball fields in 3 different parks that offer extra space for school teams and intramural and community based sports leagues to practice and compete.



Two beautiful soccer fields can be rented at Turkey Swamp Park.

Areas to Enjoy Specific Activities

- Two off-leash dog areas where county residents can let their dogs run free (Thompson and Wolf Hill)
- Two historic sites that preserve the county's rich agricultural and cultural past (Longstreet and Walnford)
- A horticultural park and library at Deep Cut Gardens
- An oceanfront site (Seven Presidents), riverfront sites (Hartshorne Woods Park, Shark River Park and Fisherman's Cove), and bayfront sites (Popamora Point, Bayshore Waterfront Park)
- Sunnyside Equestrian Center for therapeutic horseback riding
- Beautifully maintained family and group campsites, and cabin rentals at Turkey Swamp Park
- Dozens of sites to go boating and fishing; two with boat rentals
- Full-service Monmouth Cove Marina
- Creative Arts Center at Thompson Park, a state-of-the-art ceramics facility



This newly opened site at Claypit Creek in Hartshorne Woods Park is a picturesque site to watch birds, picnic, or walk your dog.

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR FOR THE FRIENDS

Since 1991, an impressive amount of financial support for the Park System—over 2.2 million dollars!—has come from the Friends of the Parks. How do they do it year after year? Well, if you know anything about fundraising, you know it involves a lot of weekends and evenings. In fact, the Friends' largest fundraising event of the year, the sale of 50/50 Raffle Ticket at the Monmouth County Fair, runs for five straight days at the end of July. And one of the ways that Executive Director Maria Wojciechowski and Assistant Kathy Ferraro get it all done is by involving their families.

It's a charming way to do business and stay close—and many Friends members choose to do the same. Some have joined together as couples, others have joined alone and later invited children or spouses, and a few just bring family members in to participate on an "as needed" basis (volunteers are always welcome!). In any case, to call the Friends a family-friendly organization would be an understatement. Perhaps it's time to rename them "Friends & Family" of the Parks instead.



Maria (far right), and her husband Michael (far left) serve beverages with Friends Bob Neff (left) and Bill Harms (right) at the Ballads in the Woods fundraiser, held each February.



(l to r) Kathy, her husband Stephen, Maria and Friend Curt Schneider call out the winning raffle numbers at the fair.



(l to r) Maria's daughter Katy (center) helps set up the food for the Coastal Activity Center's Annual Picnic in Asbury Park. That's Maria (left) and Urban Recreation Supervisor Courtney Bison (right).



(l to r) Kathy's daughter Maria sells 50/50 Raffle Tickets at the Fair.

Tracking The “New” Invasives

Monmouth County’s parks and precious open spaces are wonderful to look at and explore. Observing the many native plants and animals and feeling their calm and refreshing influence is a true pleasure. At the same time, these wonderful places require ever more vigilance to control the growing list of unwanted and damaging invasive plant species.



Native purple asters in the fields of Sunnyside Recreation Area, Lincroft, attract butterflies.



Native azalea in the forest at Hartshorne Woods Park, Middletown

Through the shared goal of protecting New Jersey’s natural resources, CJSST and the Park System worked together on several eradication projects in the summer of 2010. Park Managers identified an infestation of the aggressive invasive vine, Kudzu (*Pueraria monatanana*) in the Rocky Point Section of Hartshorne Woods Park, Middletown. Kudzu has an extensive root system that can grow to 7 inches wide, travel 9 feet into the ground, and weigh 400 pounds—making it virtually impossible to simply dig up!

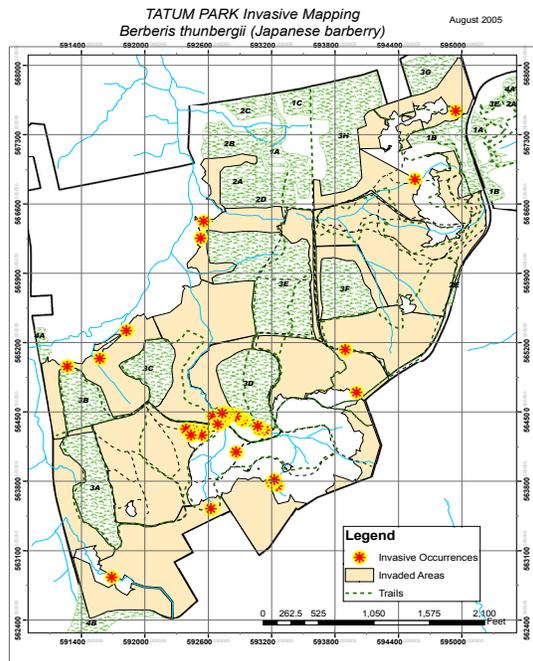
The invasive vine, Kudzu, has an extensive root system that can grow to 7 inches wide, travel 9 feet into the ground, and weigh 400 pounds!

WHEN NATURE NEEDS A LITTLE HELP

As stewards of the land, the Park System identifies invasive plant threats in the parks and develops strategies to manage them. Maps are made to identify their location and the extent of infestation. Staff then monitor the size and scope of spread, and when necessary, target certain species for removal. They also assist in research to determine the most effective methods for control, and they monitor the results.

A PROACTIVE APPROACH

There is a growing trend in land stewardship to proactively manage invasive plant species by identifying threats *as they emerge* and implement controls early on. This is commonly referred to as “Early Detection Rapid Response.” The Central Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team (CJSST; www.cjisst.org) is a relatively new organization that was established to target up and coming invasive species, before they become established. They work with public and private landowners throughout central NJ.



This map shows the known incidence of just one invasive species, Japanese Barberry, at Tatum Park in Middletown. There are now maps like this one for dozens of different invasive species in each of the parks.

Two teams worked together to conduct a “cut and spray” treatment of the few acres of Kudzu vines identified in the park. Once treated, the vine is left to die in place and there is evidence of success from the first treatment. However, given the aggressive nature this plant, the Park System anticipates a 5-10 year treatment process.



This kudzu vine formed an odd-looking “topiary” of sorts on a tree and telephone pole in Big Brook Park.



Treating an invasive kudzu vine in Hartshorne Woods.

INVASIVE SPECIES: HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

The Park System has identified known invasive plant species in all 38 county parks; however, the list of species and extent of invasion differs from park to park, and even within different areas of the same park. Invasive species fall into 5 general categories:

- Forest Invasives (Japanese barberry, Euonymous, Japanese stiltgrass)
- Invasive Vines (Wisteria, Bittersweet, Porcelain vine)
- Open Upland Habitat Invasives (Multiflora rose, Autumn olive, Canada thistle)
- Open Wetland Habitat Invasives (Purple loosestrife, Phragmites)
- Open Water Invasives (Nyads, a submerged weed; Water milfoil usually from aquariums)

THREATENING “CHOCOLATE” AT CLAYPIT CREEK

Forests represent a significant component of the Park System landscape (9,000 of 15,000 total acres, or about 60%). The more that park managers and visitors evaluate this resource, the more they develop an appreciation for its great diversity—and the more new invasive species are identified.



Chocolate vine vegetation



Chocolate vine flower

One such surprise was chocolate vine, *Akebia quinata*, found recently in the Claypit Creek section of Hartshorne Woods Park. With its soft leaf and attractive purple flowers, it is easy to see why this vine was first brought to this area from Central China. Since then it has silently established itself deep within our forests. This vine can completely cover the forest floor, extend to the understory of newly emerging trees and shrubs, and finally reach into the canopy. A determined and rapid response will be the best strategy to protect this patch of woods, an eradication plan is in place for 2011.

FIELDS “A-BUZZ” WITH KNAPWEED

The Park System maintains natural fields because they reduce maintenance costs and the environmental footprint, add a pleasant backdrop to our parks and greatly increase the diversity of our plants, animals, and insects. Fields provide valuable resources for hundreds of species and are ‘a-buzz’ with life as pollinators feed on the many flowers, and field-nesting birds find habitat to feed and raise their young.



Knapweed flower



Knapweed vegetation

In these delicate wildlife habitats, there is concern about invasive species like spotted and diffuse knapweed, *Centaurea stoebe* and *C. diffusa*, and others of this genus. These originally arrived in the ballast of sailing ships, and eventually traveled west where they became a big threat to grazing lands. Now Knapweed has also become well-established here, and is poised to be a diversity-spoiler when it comes to managing our fields. Knapweed is known for its high seed production for rapid spreading. It is also phytotoxic, which means it chemically inhibits other plants giving it a very unique advantage over our native flora.

First noticed in Fisherman’s Cove Conservation Area, Manasquan, knapweed can now be seen to some extent in almost every Park System field. While some control is possible with mowing and hand-pulling, the best results are achieved through herbicide treatment. This species should become a routine concern for all land managers, both inside and outside the parks.

NEW ID IN 2010: EXPLOSIVE-GROWING WATER CHESTNUT

One of the newest invasive species to this area, the water chestnut or *Trapa natans*, was recently identified in Monmouth County though not yet in the parks. This plant has the capacity for explosive growth, and can rapidly infest a lake or pond. One acre of water chestnut can produce enough seeds to cover 100 acres the next year! When considering the size of Park System lakes—the 21-acre Marlu Lake at Thompson Park, 17-acre lake at Turkey Swamp Park, and 16-acre Perrineville Lake—you can see the need to be extremely vigilant. Unfortunately, water chestnut also has seeds that remain viable for a dozen years. This means the plant, once established, will remain a threat for a long time even with the appropriate controls. Left untreated, area waters would become virtually unusable, no fishing and boating could ever be enjoyed in a dense floating mat of water chestnut.



It would be difficult to fish or paddle through this invasive stand of water chestnut, shown overtaking this lake.



Water chestnut, up close.

Working as a team, park users can help with early detection and land managers can provide rapid response in our efforts to preserve the places we love. For more information about the Park System’s Invasive Species Management Program, contact Park Planning Manager Ken Thoman by phone at 732-842-4000 ext. 4267, or e-mail ktthoman@monmouthcountyparks.com. You can also inquire about volunteer opportunities to remove invasive species in the parks.



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Diane Allen, Staff Horticulturalist

Well-made and maintained gardening tools will make your gardening tasks go faster and easier. Invest in the best quality you can afford, care for them properly and they will last a lifetime ... or longer.

Selecting for Sturdiness

When selecting tools, notice the balance, construction and material used. Metal parts made of forged steel (check the label) will be the most durable. Implement heads and handles should be securely attached. A metal band that wraps all the way around the handle or has strips of forged metal bolted onto the handle will be more durable than one where the metal wraps only part way around the handle, or where the handle is poked onto a spike at the top of the implement head.

Wooden handles made of white ash or other dense-grained woods will last longest. Fiberglass handles are lightweight, nearly unbreakable and maintenance-free; these are becoming more popular with gardeners.

Handle grips are important and often a matter of personal choice. Be sure that they fit your hand comfortably, are attached securely, and are substantial enough to stand up to use and time.



Well-made second-hand tools, even if they need some cleaning and sharpening, deserve consideration. This small perennial blade (with a full-size garden shovel for comparison in back) has seen over 50 years of use and with cleaning and care, should be good for many years to come.

The Top 3 Tools

Gardeners spend a lot of time and effort moving earth and other materials around. There are three basic tools for this:

- **Round-point Garden Shovel** (or spade)—for digging, mixing and/or moving soil and other materials, planting shrubs and small trees. Look for a long handle for leverage and a flat edge at the top of the blade for pushing down with your foot.
- **Garden Fork** (also called a spading or digging fork)—with its heavy, flat tines is used to turn and loosen soil or compost, dig bulbs or divide perennials and small shrubs. Useful in heavy clay or rocky soil.
- **Garden Rake**—to move and smooth the earth in preparation for planting. Use its short metal tines to pulverize the earth, break up clods and remove stones. Then, turn it over and use the flat edge to make a fine, even soil surface.



(l to r): Garden Rake, Round-point Shovel, and Garden Fork.

Best Hand Tools

Once the heavier work is done, you will need basic hand tools, such as the trowel, cultivator and pruners.

- **Trowel**—for digging in the soil, setting in small plants, weeding and working in pots or containers.
- **Cultivator**—loosens the soil to open it up and aerate, incorporate amendments, and loosen weed roots before pulling them by hand.
- **Pruners**—the most personal of garden tools because they should fit your hand to avoid fatigue or stress. For clipping, shaping, and collecting cut flowers choose a bypass pruner (2 sharp blades like scissors), and keep them clean and disinfected.



Hand tools (l to r): trowel, cultivator and pruners.

Beyond the Basics: It's Nice to Have...

These are some tools that some gardeners would not want to be without.

- **Garden shears (scissors).** Made for the outdoors; one that fits your hand and will resist rust and corrosion.
- **Garden knife.** There are many variations; with its wide, slightly curved, double-edged blade, it is a useful for slicing and sawing, digging, cutting twine, opening bags, opening root balls, dividing perennials, and planting bulbs.
- **Hand-weeder (hoe).** The basic hand hoe's broad, thin blade is used to shave off weeds, dig and chop; the tip can be used to make furrows for seeds, dig out weeds and get into tight spaces. The narrow, sharp blade of a Cape Cod weeder can be drawn through the soil (or mulch), cutting weeds off below the soil line without disturbing the surface. A circle hoe works in much the same way, since only the bottom edge of the blade is sharpened you can draw it through the soil, slicing off weeds, without fear of damaging your plants.
- **Scoop.** Handy for transferring potting mix or soil amendments, though a trowel will suffice.
- **Pruning saw.** Specially designed for this purpose and cuts on the draw. There are many styles, including a convenient folding style and others that are mounted on long handles to reach higher branches.
- **Wheelbarrows and garden carts.** To move heavy and/or bulky materials about, and may sometimes be used as mixing containers.
- **Buckets and bins.** The tub trug, shown, is available in several sizes, durable, washable and useful for toting things into, around, and out of your garden. There is even a line made of recycled plastic.



Nice to have (front to back): garden gloves, hand weeder, garden shears, garden knife, scoop, pruning saw, and tub trug.

Keep 'Em Clean

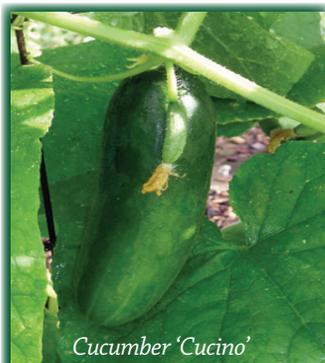
Clean tools with a proper edge last longer, reduce time and effort needed to complete your tasks, and will not transmit diseases or pests throughout your garden.

After use, remove the worst of the dirt, using soap and water and a brush if necessary. Disinfect if needed by wiping with rubbing alcohol or a 10% bleach solution. Store tools indoors out of the elements. Once a year, coat wooden handles with boiled linseed oil. Metal implement heads may occasionally need sanding and oiling to remove and inhibit rust.

INSIDER TIP: Here's an easy method to clean tools on a regular basis. Fill a box or bucket with sand, and add a bit of oil. After preliminary cleaning, plunge the tool into the sand a few times to remove any soil residue and give it a light coating of rust-inhibiting oil.

Stars of the 2010 Vegetable Garden

Vegetables, flowers and herbs mingle in raised beds in Deep Cut's Display Garden to delight and inspire visitors of all ages. Invariably, some generated more interest than others. Here are two of this year's stars.



Cucumber 'Cucino'

Baby Cucumber Cucino

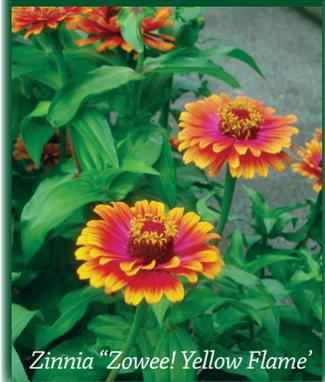
Cucumis sativus 'Cucino'

This little hybrid was evaluated by staff and volunteers and found to be an outstanding variety. Attractive deep green, 3" long baby cukes are borne prolifically on the vines. Crisp and tasty, with smaller seeds, less water, and a bitter-free skin, these can be eaten straight from the vine without peeling. Perfect for snacks, canapés or single-serving salads ... if they make it from garden to kitchen! Only 46 days to maturity; suitable for greenhouse growing. Companion planting: Nasturtiums and radishes are said to repel cucumber beetles.

Zinnia 'Zowie! Yellow Flame'

Zinnia elegans 'Zowie! Yellow Flame'

Visitors and butterflies alike were taken with this 2006 AAS Winner. Even a small planting of these 3-5" semi-double, bicolor flowers will give a magnificent display from June until frost. Heat and drought-tolerant, these are suitable for containers and garden beds. It grows 30-36" tall, place in the middle or toward the back of the border. Sturdy stems and long vase life (up to two weeks) make them excellent for cutting. Zinnias are easy to start from seed and require a well-drained soil in full sun. Butterflies and bees are attracted to the flowers; later in the season goldfinches love the seeds. Pests and diseases are few, but to minimize powdery mildew ensure good air circulation and avoid wetting foliage when watering (or water early in the day so the leaves can dry before nightfall). When cutting for vase, trim off all foliage as it does not last well.



Zinnia 'Zowie! Yellow Flame'

Beginner Gardeners, Take Note...

Susan Henschel, Deep Cut Gardens Librarian

Winter, with its cold gray weather, can be a perfect time for the beginning gardener to visit the library at Deep Cut Gardens for education and inspiration. Among the thousands of gardening books on the library shelves, several are worth noting for beginners:

In *The Garden Primer*, Barbara Damrosch spends the first four chapters explaining what you and your plants need to get started. Her advice is detailed yet clear as she encourages the reader to “try to learn as much as you can about your own garden’s needs” and then she guides you in doing just that. Reading this is like visiting a knowledgeable next-door neighbor.

Gardening Basics for Dummies by Stephen Frowine with the editors of the National Gardening Association follows the familiar “Dummies” format. The book is chock full of information, much of it in lists and short tips. Chapter I, “Getting Ready for Gardening” and Chapter II, “Planning Your Own Eden” are especially good for novices. Here are facts presented with a sense of fun in a concise format.

The American Horticultural Society Encyclopedia of Gardening presents solid ideas and guidelines for start-up in its first chapter in Part I, “Garden Planning and Design.” Large photos, diagrams and information boxes colorfully enhance the text. A strong feature is the use of step-by-step illustration of technique. Read the Preface written by Elvin McDonald, namesake of our own Horticultural Library at Deep Cut.

Another offering from the AHS is *Northeast: a SmartGarden Regional Guide*. Part I outlines ten “tenets” for a good garden. Part II catalogs plants by physical characteristics or horticultural requirements. Each situation is presented in a two-page spread with lovely color photos of eight to ten suggested plants. Browsing is unavoidable.

Finally, rookie gardeners should remember that gardening is not all work. In the *Gardeners Bedside Reader* renowned gardeners and writers reveal that gardening can also bring fun, inspiration and satisfaction. Their entertaining and insightful essays are beautifully illustrated with vintage artwork and modern photography. This little gem will surely chase away the winter blahs.

The above titles are available in the Elvin McDonald Horticultural Library at Deep Cut Gardens in Middletown, open to the public Monday – Saturday, 9:30- 3:30. Borrowing can be arranged through the Friends of the Parks.



What to Plant Where? The Deep Cut Library can offer much-needed advice when faced with an empty bed to fill.

More Words of Wisdom for the Beginning Gardener...

The key to choosing the right plant for the location ... patience! (And with perennials, remember: 3 years - sleep, creep, leap). In our library, check out: *Right Plant, Right Place*, Ferguson (REF 635.9); *Perfect Plant, Perfect Place*, Lancaster (REF 635.9); and *What Plant Where*, Lancaster, (REF 635.9).



If you don't yet feel ready to prepare your own planting bed, container gardening is a great option for beginners. Classes are available with Deep Cut staff!

It's Time To...



March ✓

January ✓

- Throughout winter, check for winter mulches and plants displaced by the weather and replace as necessary. Gently remove snow from evergreens to prevent damage.
- Don't forget the birds! Fresh water is essential; seeds and suet will provide nourishment as natural food supplies dwindle.
- Start a garden journal; it will prove to be an invaluable asset. Increase humidity around houseplants by setting plants on pebble trays or grouping them together.
- Plan for the 2011 growing season – browse the catalogs, narrow your wish list, sketch out plans, make up your seed list.
- Take care of your garden tools; cleaning and oiling now will have them ready for spring and add years to the life of your equipment.

February ✓

- If winter seems to be dragging, remember that Deep Cut's display greenhouse is open year round, filled with orchids, succulents and houseplants. Peak orchid flowering season is January-March.
- Turning the soil in your vegetable and annual beds now will expose insect eggs to foraging birds and the ravages of winter. Next month you can add well-rotted manure or compost if not done in the fall.
- Keep foliage of houseplants dust free and stay on the lookout for insects. Feed any that are actively blooming or showing new growth.
- For a taste of spring, force branches of flowering trees or shrubs, or pot up some paperwhite narcissus – these will bloom within 3-4 weeks and don't require the chilling period most other bulbs require.
- Test leftover seeds for viability by placing several between moist paper towels or coffee filters and keep warm and moist.
- Insect & disease control is important for fruit trees – pesticide recommendations and spray schedules are available from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension (njaes.rutgers.edu/extension). Make sure you have the appropriate materials and supplies ready.

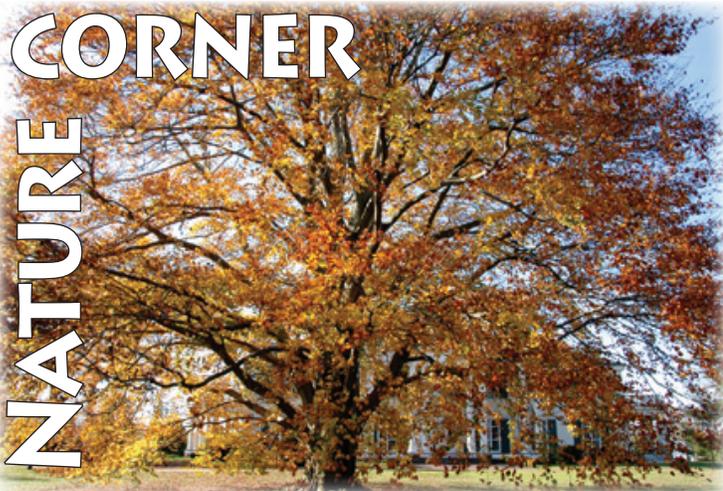
- Prune trees and shrubs for health and beauty. Fertilize, if not already done, after soil temperatures have reached 40° F, but before new growth begins. Apply dormant oil spray on a calm day above 40°.
- This is a good time to repot and fertilize your houseplants.
- Indoors, start seeds for broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, lettuce, parsley, peppers and tomatoes.
- Spray fruit trees with a dormant oil spray early in the month to control insect infestations before they start. If purchasing new trees, consider resistant varieties.
- Weather is uncertain, so be cautious about uncovering beds. Clean up the garden gradually, removing leaves and winter mulch in layers rather than all at once.
- Don't work the soil until it will form a ball that crumbles when pressed with your thumb.
- If not done in the fall, get a pH test and apply lime if needed.
- Divide and transplant perennials as needed, fertilize established ones when new growth appears, pot up extras to bring to the Deep Cut Spring Perennial Swap in mid April.
- This is a good time to take note of any areas of poor drainage.
- Outdoors, direct-sow seeds for cool crops like peas, beets, Swiss chard, lettuce, and seeds of cold-tolerant annuals.
- Visit a flower show. The MCPS runs bus trips to the New Jersey Flower Show. Check our website or the Activity Directory for dates and times.

February Fun. Can you identify this unusual spring flower? For answer: visit the Deep Cut Library!



CORNER

NATURE



This mid-November photo illustrates how the stately European Copper Beech got its name.

Thompson Park's Grand European Copper Beech

Park Naturalist, Janet Ryan

"I frequently tramped eight or ten miles through deepest snow to keep an appointment with a beech tree..." wrote Henry David Thoreau long ago about the magnificent beech. He was fond of visiting a small grove of these beautiful trees near the now-famous Walden Pond in Massachusetts and wrote of them poetically in his journals.

Today, visitors to Thompson Park in Lincroft may have the pleasure of seeing a different yet equally magnificent beech which has stood in front of the former Thompson family residence, now the Visitor Center, for over 100 years. On February 6, 2006, that stately beech was nearly lost to a fire that destroyed the original Thompson home. Senior County Park Manager Rick Royle says of that day...

"The wind was blowing the smoke and heat directly at the beech tree, and the heat was so intense it melted several light fixtures on the front walkway near the tree. I asked some of the firemen to turn a hose onto the tree and cool it off, which they did. After the fire, we were concerned about the amount of water that flooded the root system after washing through the charred building materials. The fire company literally sprayed hundreds of thousands of gallons of water on the building."

Notably Smooth: The Bark of the Beech

The tree that engendered so much concern is a 95-foot high European Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). Beech trees attract notice because of several unique characteristics. Their attractive bark is very smooth; it is light grey or even bluish in color. The skin-like bark is so smooth that for thousands of years, it has been irresistible to vandals, love-struck hikers, and note-writers on-the-move who cannot resist the temptation to carve into the thin outer layers. Even Daniel Boone left word to posterity that he had killed a bear in Louisville, Kentucky in 1760.



The smooth, skin-like bark of the beech (photo taken in September).

Any damage to the bark threatens the tree's health because it allows the entry of insects and fungus. One especially serious threat is a scale insect which entered Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1890 by way of beech trees imported from Europe. Once this scale insect pierces the bark, the fungus enters the tree. This blight has spread by way of wind and animals and now beech bark disease is a major killer of beech trees in the Northeast. Efforts are being made to breed resistant trees and to control the scale insects by chemical and mechanical means.

Massive, Foot-like Roots

Another distinguishing characteristic of the tree is its muscular-looking buttress roots which are partially visible above the ground. The tree is *mesophytic* which means it uses a lot of water, leaving little water for other plants. Not much grows beneath the thirsty beech tree.



The foot-like roots (photo taken in September).

The Leaves: A Rainbow of Seasonal Colors

The leaves of the European Copper Beech at Thompson Park change color dramatically throughout the seasons. Starting with the fresh bright green of spring, they turn a dark purple in early summer, then back to a copper-tinged green in late summer. During autumn, this tree finally displays the bright copper colors for which it is named.

They also sometimes cling to the tree in winter, a characteristic called *marcescence*. The lovely pale gold or brown leaves later in the year add color to the winter woods. When the leaves do eventually fall, they take a long time to decompose and leave deep piles of leaves on the ground.



The dark purple of the Visitor Center beech, in early summer (June).



Beech leaves are pointed, sharply toothed and provide a dense shade.

The Infamous Beechnut

The nuts of the tree are triangular; usually two of these nuts develop inside a spiny husk or *cupule*. Along with acorns and hickory nuts, beech nuts provide abundant food for wildlife in our local forests. The nuts are called "mast." A wide variety of animals eat the nutritious beechnuts. These include mammals such as squirrels, chipmunks, opossum, raccoons, white-tail deer, black bears, porcupines, foxes, rabbits, and mice.



Two triangular beechnuts shown inside and outside the spiny husk.

Among the birds that eat beechnuts are evening grosbeaks, hairy woodpeckers, chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches, ruffed grouse, pheasants, wild turkeys, ducks, and blue jays. Blue jays are *scatter hoarders* which bury nuts in many different places to retrieve later. Scientists think that blue jays were responsible for much of the regeneration of beech and oak forests after glaciers retreated after the last Ice Age.

The nuts are more abundant in cycles of 2 or 3 years. The "pulsing" of seed production causes nut-eaters to move away or die out during years of low nut production. This leads to a surplus of nuts the following year which are able to survive and grow into trees. It is said that beechnuts are abundant in years following droughts. It will be interesting to see if that holds true for next year, following the severe drought of 2010.



The weeping beech at Thompson Park.

Note the Weeping Beech, Too

There are many other beautiful beech cultivars. One dramatic example is the European Weeping Beech, which a visitor to Thompson Park may also see nearby. It looks like a gigantic "leafstack" formed by branches which droop downward to touch the ground.



Last year, marcescence was evident on a second, much larger beech at the Thompson Park Visitor Center grounds with its pale gold leaves that cling through even the worse winter storms.

There is a new walking guide and map for the specimen trees on the Visitor Center grounds. Please make sure to pick up a copy on your next visit to Thompson Park.



GREEN HERITAGE

805 Newman Springs Road, Lincroft, NJ 07738-1695

Volume 44, No.4 Winter 2010/2011

A10564-11/10

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Saving Thompson Park's Beloved Beech

In the spring of 2006, after the Visitor Center fire, Thompson Park Senior Manager Rick Royle noticed that the side of the beech tree facing the building was “very slow to leaf out.” Firefighters had doused the tree when they fought the fire, but it was exposed to heat and smoke and the roots and soil were flooded, then compacted by all the heavy trucks and equipment. Royle consulted with the county Master Gardeners who suggested a light application of lime and 10-10-10 fertilizer, and slowly the leaves unrolled and eventually caught up with the rest of the tree.

In the years since, park rangers have given the tree extra special care during grounds-keeping, and control for any competing weeds with very light dosages of herbicides. Each spring, according to Royle the tree is “slower to leaf out on the side facing the building, but by June the foliage is in full splendor.”

Based on historic photos of the mansion, this tree is thought to be 120-130 years old (Beeches may live for over 300 years). “I’d love to see it live for a long, long time,” says Royle, and thanks to the dedicated firefighters and careful maintenance by Park Rangers, he may get his wish.

Learn more about how this beautiful beech is surviving, inside, on p. 10.



The Visitor Center and beech (just left of the columns) in 1906.



The Visitor Center, and beech 100 years later.



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