

T • H • E D • I • R • T

Newsletter of Master Gardener Volunteers of CCE Schoharie and Otsego Counties
Gardening • Environment • Community • Sustainability • Education



Watering Strategies for Summer Gardens

As summer temperatures rise in Otsego and Schoharie Counties, proper watering becomes one of the most important gardening tasks. Smart watering practices can help plants stay healthy, productive, and more resistant to stress and disease.

The best time to water is early in the morning. Cooler temperatures allow water to soak into the soil before...

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Grow with us! Subscribe for gardening tips, pollinator-friendly ideas, and local wisdom for Otsego & Schoharie counties in Central New York.

Mulch It In!

Mulch is one of the easiest ways to improve the health and appearance of your garden. A good layer of mulch helps retain soil moisture, suppress weeds, regulate soil temperature, and even improve soil quality over time. It can also give garden beds a neat, finished look.

Organic mulches such as shredded leaves, bark mulch, straw, pine needles, or compost are excellent choices for home gardens in Otsego and Schoharie Counties. As these materials break down, they add valuable organic matter to the soil.

Apply mulch after the soil has warmed...

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Bombus impatiens (common eastern bumble bee) © Angela Hartley. Used with permission.

Pollinator Watch

Bumble bees are beloved in popular culture. We have composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee", the Bumblebee superhero in DC Comics, countless bumble bee children's books, and bumble bee symbols on clothing, stickers, wallpaper, and more. When the average person draws a bee, it looks very much like a bumble bee.

We are all familiar with the sight of a bumble bee foraging in a flower and the gentle buzzing sound bumble bees make when they meander past. But their world is more complex than you may realize. For example, did you know there are nearly fifty different species of bumble bees in North America? A few of the more common species in New York are the brown-belted bumble bee (*Bombus griseocollis*), the common eastern bumble bee (*Bombus impatiens*), the perplexing bumble bee (*Bombus perplexus*), and the golden northern bumble bee (*Bombus fervidus*).

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it evaporates, and foliage has time to dry during the day. Evening watering is less ideal because damp leaves overnight can encourage fungal diseases.

Deep, less frequent watering is better than shallow daily sprinkling. A thorough soaking encourages plant roots to grow deeper into the soil, making plants more drought tolerant. Most vegetable gardens and flower beds need about one inch of water per week, either from rainfall or irrigation.

Mulching around plants with straw, shredded leaves, or bark helps conserve moisture and keeps soil temperatures cooler during hot weather. Mulch also reduces weed growth, which competes with plants for water.

Pay attention to signs of water stress, including wilting, curling leaves, or dry soil several inches below the surface. Containers and hanging baskets may need watering more often, especially during heat waves.

Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems are efficient ways to water because they deliver moisture directly to the soil while keeping leaves dry. Hand watering can also work well when done slowly and carefully at the base of plants.

With thoughtful watering strategies, gardeners can keep their summer gardens thriving while conserving water and reducing plant stress. ■



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In North America, only the European honey bee and several bumble bee species live in colonies. The rest of our native bee species are solitary. A bumble bee colony is created in the spring and lives for the summer and into fall. Only the new queens that emerge in fall will survive the winter. The colony of 50 to 150 individuals is small, compared to a honey bee colony of 50,000 bees. Most bumble bee species nest underground.

Bumble bees are not defensive and rarely sting, unless their nest is disturbed. They tend to ignore the presence of people, being fully absorbed by the work of gathering pollen.

Bumble bees are “generalist pollinators” that feed on a wide variety of flowers. They can forage for pollen in cold and wet weather, and are among the first bees to appear in early spring. They are important pollinators in food gardens. Bumble bees are the primary and one of the most effective pollinators of blueberries, bell peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, and kiwis, because bumble bees use their flight muscles to vibrate their bodies, shaking loose the pollen. Some plants like tomatoes hide their pollen in tube-shaped structures called anthers and require this buzz pollination.

Despite their ecological importance, however, more than a quarter of North America’s bumble bee species face some risk of extinction (per the Xerces Society and the IUCN North American Bumble Bee Specialist Group). Major threats include habitat loss and degradation, introduced diseases, and haphazard pesticide use.

You can help bumble bees by providing habitat and avoiding the use of pesticides that adversely impact this species and other important pollinators. Increase the abundance of flowers in your garden and the number of flowering species, with overlapping bloom times throughout the season. Good nectar and pollen sources include native willows, serviceberry, bee balm, anise hyssop, baptisia, purple coneflower, red clover, salvia, penstemon, mountain mint, yarrow, goldenrod, and asters. Some non-native plants like borage and zinnias are also attractive to bumble bees. You can also help by providing nearby sites for nesting and overwintering, such as loose earth and rotting logs.

If you mow fields, summer is the best time and mower blades should be raised to avoid ground nests. Staggering cutting times in different field areas will ensure nectar sources are always available. Increasing available nesting habitat may be accomplished by reducing tillage in fields and leaving unplowed strips vegetated. ■



Bombus fervidus (golden northern bumble bee) © Angela Hartley. Used with permission.

The Green Thumb Corner

June is the perfect time to support plants before they need it. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and pole beans grow quickly once summer heat arrives, and waiting until they're flopping over can make staking and trellising much more difficult.

Install cages, stakes, or trellises while plants are still relatively small. This minimizes root disturbance and gives plants a structure to grow into as they put on size throughout the summer. It also helps keep fruit off the ground, reducing rot and making harvest easier.

Proper support improves airflow around plants, which can help reduce disease pressure during humid summer weather. A little support now can make harvesting easier, improve plant health, and save headaches later in the season.

Early Harvest Recipes: Fresh Flavors from the Spring Garden

One of the best rewards of spring gardening is enjoying the season's first harvests. Cool-weather crops such as radishes, peas, spinach, lettuce, and other greens thrive in Otsego and Schoharie County gardens and can quickly become fresh, healthy meals.

Radishes add crisp texture and peppery flavor to salads, sandwiches, and tacos. Try slicing



them thinly and serving with butter and a sprinkle of sea salt on fresh bread for a simple spring appetizer. Radish greens are also edible and can be sautéed with garlic and olive oil.

Fresh peas rarely make it all the way into the kitchen before being eaten straight from the pod. Snow peas and snap peas are delicious in stir-fries or lightly steamed with butter and herbs. Garden peas can be tossed into pasta dishes, soups, or spring risotto.

Tender greens such as spinach, arugula, kale, and lettuce are perfect for early salads. Mix greens with peas, radishes, and a light vinaigrette for a quick garden-fresh meal. Spinach and kale can also be added to omelets, soups, or smoothies for extra nutrition.

Harvesting vegetables young and often encourages continued production and helps maintain the best flavor and texture. Early harvest recipes don't need to be complicated, sometimes the freshest ingredients are best enjoyed simply prepared and shared with family and friends. ■

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in late spring. Spread it about 2–3 inches deep around flowers, shrubs, and vegetables. Avoid piling mulch directly against plant stems or tree trunks, which can trap moisture and encourage rot or pests. “Mulch volcanoes” around trees may look tidy, but they can damage bark and roots over time.

Different gardens benefit from different mulches. Straw works well in vegetable gardens, while shredded bark or wood chips are ideal for ornamental beds and around trees. Grass clippings can also be used if they are free from herbicides and applied in thin layers.

Before mulching, remove existing weeds and water the soil thoroughly. A properly mulched garden will require less watering and weeding throughout the growing season.

With a little effort, mulch can help your garden stay healthier, more productive, and easier to maintain all summer long. ■



Garden Chore Checklist

With frost season behind us, June is all about growth. Keep planting, stay on top of maintenance, and enjoy the first harvests of the season.

Vegetable Garden

- Succession plant lettuce, spinach, radishes, and beets for continuous harvests
- Plant warm-season crops such as beans, cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, melons, and sweet corn
- Begin harvesting lettuce, spinach, radishes, peas, and other early crops
- Stake, cage, or trellis tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and pole beans
- Pinch suckers and prune tomatoes as needed
- Mulch around vegetables to conserve moisture and reduce weeds

Soil & Garden Care

- Side-dress heavy feeders like tomatoes, corn, squash, and peppers with fertilizer or compost
- Water deeply during dry periods, aiming for about 1 inch of water per week
- Continue weeding regularly

- Add mulch to help retain soil moisture
- Monitor containers and raised beds closely, as they dry out faster in summer heat

Pest & Disease Watch

- Check squash, cucumbers, and melons for squash bugs and cucumber beetles
- Monitor tomatoes and potatoes for signs of blight and other leaf diseases
- Watch for aphids, flea beetles, cabbage worms, and Japanese beetles
- Remove diseased leaves promptly to improve airflow and reduce disease spread
- Inspect plants regularly for damage and address problems early before they become widespread

Find more gardening guidance at [Cornell Garden Based Learning](https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/garden-based-learning)

<https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/garden-guidance/>. ■



Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer

QUESTION: My tomato plants are growing, but they're still small. Should I fertilize them more?

ANSWER: Not necessarily. In June, tomatoes are establishing roots and steady growth. Too much fertilizer can lead to lots of leaves but fewer tomatoes. Consistent watering, mulch, and patience are the recipe for a healthy harvest.

Click here to ask a Master Gardener a question.
<https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/master-gardener-program/ask-a-master-gardener-volunteer>

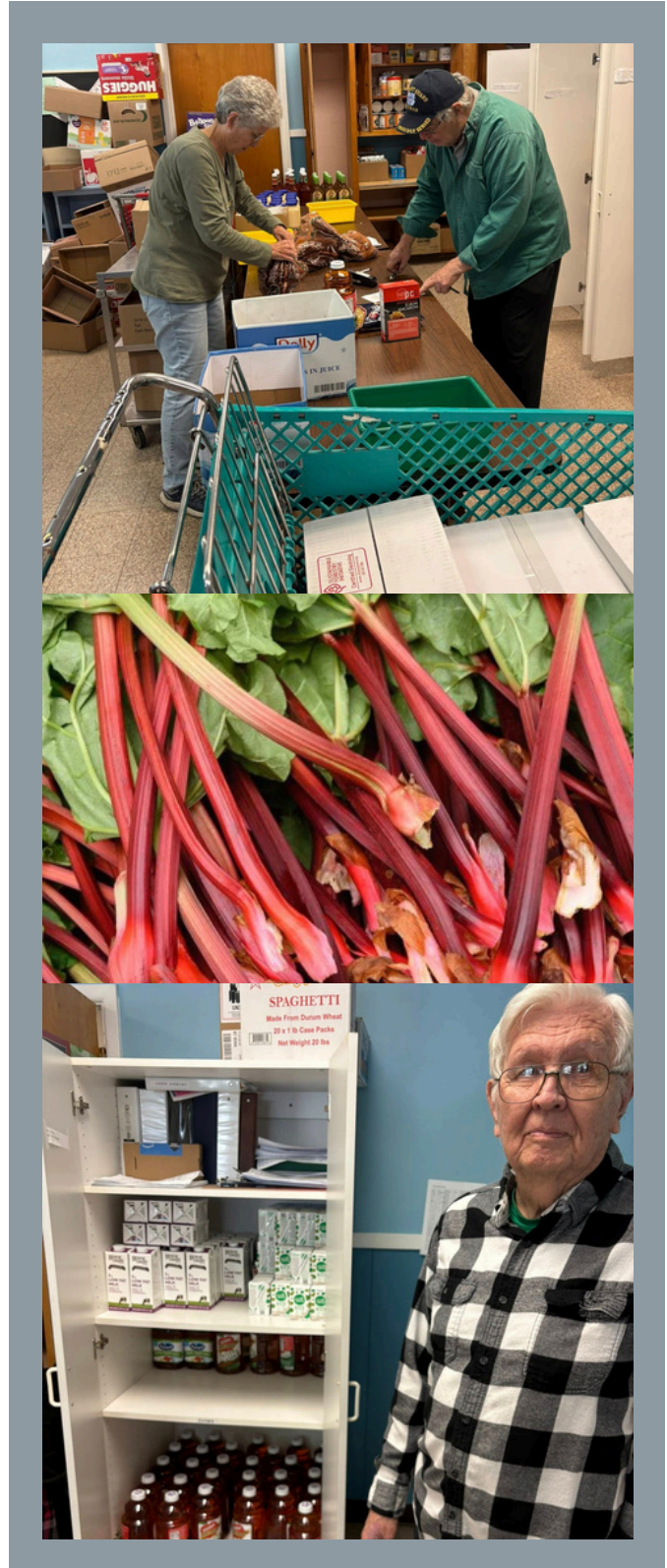
Grow a Row Donations Already Making an Impact

A big thank you to the Cobleskill United Methodist Church Food Pantry for serving so many families in our community. As a participating food pantry in Cornell Cooperative Extension Schoharie and Otsego Counties' Grow a Row program, they have already received their first fresh local produce donation of the season: rhubarb from a local gardener.

Grow a Row is a community-driven initiative that encourages gardeners to plant an extra row, or simply grow a little extra, to donate to local food pantries and hunger relief organizations. The program helps increase access to fresh, nutritious, locally grown fruits and vegetables while making good use of the abundance many gardens produce each year. There are no minimum donation requirements, and gardeners can contribute whatever they are able throughout the growing season.

Participants who sign up as Grow a Row gardeners receive gardening education, seasonal resources, and support from Master Gardener Volunteers, along with assistance connecting to participating food pantries and produce drop-off locations. By working together, local gardeners can help address food insecurity and provide healthier food options for families across Schoharie and Otsego Counties.

Interested in becoming a Grow a Row gardener or learning more about donating fresh produce this season? Visit the Grow a Row program page for information, resources, and registration details <https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/gardening/grow-a-row-helping-feed-our-community-one-garden-at-a-time> ■



Community Events

June 29, 2026

Square Foot Gardening Workshop
 CCESO Grow Garden
 123 Lake St, Cooperstown, NY

July 15, 2026

Family Gardening Program (Part 2)
 CCESO Grow Garden
 123 Lake St, Cooperstown, NY

See the full list of upcoming community events [here](https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/events) <https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/events>.



Weather Watch

June is when the garden starts to hit its stride. Warm nights are finally here, and most warm-season crops can safely settle in. Visit the Northeast Regional Climate Center: https://www.nrcc.cornell.edu/services/blog/2011/05/10_last_frost/index.html

Dates	Weather Conditions
June 1-8	Scattered t-storms, cooler
June 9-12	Mix of showers + sunny; hot
June 13-19	Scattered t-storms, mild
June 20-24	Sunny, warm
June 25-30	Rain, some heavy; warm
June	Temp 68° (2° above avg) Precip 3.5" (0.5" below avg)



Grow With Us on Social Media!



[Master Gardeners - Otsego](https://www.facebook.com/CCEOtsegoMG)

<https://www.facebook.com/CCEOtsegoMG>



[Master Gardeners - Schoharie](https://www.facebook.com/CCESchoharieMG)

<https://www.facebook.com/CCESchoharieMG>

Our Mission

We prepare volunteers to be peer educators who build relationships with community audiences to integrate local experience and research-based knowledge in planning for and initiating steps to manage gardens, lawns, and landscapes with an emphasis on food security and environmental stewardship.

Learn more about the CCE Master Gardener Volunteer programs of Otsego & Schoharie counties by [clicking here \(https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/master-gardener-program\)](https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/master-gardener-program)

Master Gardeners Volunteers are trained through Cornell Cooperative Extension who share research-based gardening knowledge with the community. We answer questions through the Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer service, teach classes, and maintain demonstration gardens in Cooperstown and Cobleskill. You'll find us at farmers markets, fairs, and local events offering practical tips, and we also grow plants for fundraisers, lead beginner gardener programs, and offer soil testing to help neighbors grow with confidence.

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