

T•H•E D•I•R•T

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



Overwintering Vegetable Crops

For many gardeners, autumn signals the end of the harvest. However, by changing our perspective on the calendar, fall can actually be the starting line for a bounty of early spring vegetables. Overwintering is the practice of planting cold-hardy crops in late summer or autumn, allowing them to establish as immature plants, and letting them sit dormant through the winter to provide an ultra-early harvest next March, April, and May.

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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.

Tomato Palooza: Taste, Learn and Pick Your Favs

Tomato season is one of the best parts of late summer in Central New York, especially when you get the chance to taste more than just the varieties growing in your own backyard. On Wednesday, September 9, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie and Otsego Counties will celebrate the season with Tomato Palooza, an evening of tasting, learning, and talking tomatoes.

The free event will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the CCESO Demonstration Gardens, 123 Lake Street in Cooperstown.

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Syrphus rectus (Yellow-legged Flower Fly)
© Angela Hartley. Used with permission.

Pollinator Watch

Look closely at the pollinating insects in a field of blooming buttercups or goldenrod and you might be puzzled by one of them. It looks somewhat like a wasp or bee, because of its yellow (or white) and black markings, but it hovers and darts around like a hummingbird. You may have just spotted a syrphid fly. It is sometimes called a flower fly or a hover fly.

The coloration of some syrphid flies is thought to mimic that of wasps and bees in order to discourage predators. However, syrphid flies cannot sting. Syrphid flies have large eyes, short antennae and skinny legs. Most telling, they have just one set of wings, compared to the two sets possessed by bees and wasps.

Syrphid flies are in the insect family Syrphidae. There are over 300 species in the northeastern United States, and more than 6200 species world-wide. In the Northeast, most species emerge in April or May and remain active until mid-October. Syrphids can cycle through four or more generations per year. The last generation in the fall will overwinter...

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Because our region sits squarely in USDA Hardiness Zones 5b to 6a, winter brings deep freezes, heavy snow, and biting winds. Succeeding with overwintered crops here requires the right plant selection, precise timing, and cold-protection strategies.

1. The Best Crops for Overwintering

Not all cold-tolerant vegetables can survive an Upstate New York winter. Look for varieties bred specifically for extreme cold, which often develop an incredibly sweet flavor in response to freezing temperatures as they convert starches into sugars to act as a natural antifreeze.

- **Leafy Greens:** Spinach (especially varieties like 'Bloomsdale Long Standing' or 'Space') is the undisputed king of overwintering. Kale ('Winterbor' or 'Red Russian'), maché (corn salad), claytonia, and sorrel also survive well.
- **Root Vegetables:** Carrots ('Napoli' or 'Mokum'), scallions, and parsnips. While root growth stops in winter, the roots remain perfectly preserved in the cold ground for spring digging.
- **Brassicas:** Sprouting broccoli and certain cold-hardy cabbages can be overwintered if they are small enough going into winter.

2. The Golden Rule of Timing: The "Persephone Period"

The biggest mistake in overwintering is planting too late. Unlike spring planting, the goal is not to grow a mature plant before winter. The goal is to get the plant to 75% maturity before daylight drops below 10 hours a day.

In Otsego and Schoharie counties, this critical threshold—known as the Persephone Period—begins around November 5th. Growth completely grinds to a halt after this date.

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- Late July to Mid-August: Sow slow-growing roots like carrots and parsnips.
- Late August to Mid-September: Sow spinach, kale, and hardy Asian greens.

Plants should be established, sturdy seedlings with a few sets of true leaves before the ground freezes. If they are too small, they will damp off; if they are too large and mature, they will bolt (go to seed) immediately when spring arrives.

3. Winter Protection Strategies

While some greens like spinach can survive bare ground under a heavy blanket of snow, our erratic modern winters often bring mid-winter thaws that leave plants exposed to freezing winds. Protection is mandatory for success.

- Heavy Mulching: For root crops like carrots and parsnips, pile 6 to 8 inches of clean straw or shredded leaves directly over the rows in late November. This keeps the ground from freezing solid, allowing you to dig sweet carrots even in January.

- Low Tunnels and Row Covers: For leafy greens, construct simple low tunnels using PVC conduit hoops draped with heavy-duty floating row cover fabric. For double protection, place a second layer of fabric directly on top of the plants inside the tunnel.
- Cold Frames: A simple wooden box topped with an old glass window pane acts as an excellent microclimate for overwintering spinach and scallions on a sunny, south-facing hillside.

4. Spring Awakening

As days lengthen in late February and early March, your dormant plants will wake up. Long before spring-sown seeds could ever germinate in the cold mud, your overwintered spinach and kale will put on an explosion of tender, sweet new growth.

By experimenting with overwintering, you can effectively eliminate the "hungry gap" of early spring and enjoy fresh, homegrown food nearly year-round. ■



Pollinator continued from page 2

either as pupae or as adults. Most species overwinter in leaf litter.

Many species of syrphid fly feed heavily on flower nectar and pollen, and transfer pollen from flower to flower. They are valuable pollinators because they travel over a larger area than many other pollinators.

You might mistake the larvae of many syrphid fly species for slugs, as they are wrinkled and maggot-like. However, they are beneficial for your garden because they feed on aphids, thrips, mealybugs, leafhoppers, and other garden pests. About 40% of the world's syrphid species have larvae that eat soft-bodied insects. Up to 400 aphids may be eaten by each aphid-feeding larva before it pupates, but this number varies by species. When syrphid larvae are abundant, they may reduce aphid populations by 70 to 100%.

In the United States, few threats have been identified for syrphid fly populations, although this may be because there is a lack of information

on these understudied pollinators. Their needs should be considered in habitat conservation and pollinator planting projects.

You can attract adult syrphid flies by providing flowers for them near your garden or between other plants. They like small, accessible flowers such as alyssum, dill, fennel, yarrow, cilantro, parsley, native asters, goldenrod, and other wildflowers. Maintaining a mixture of flowering plants throughout the growing season will provide adult flies with dependable food. Such plantings are especially beneficial early in the season.

Also, provide appropriate egg-laying sites and places where the larvae can live and overwinter, such as fallen leaves. Applications of insecticides, especially broad-spectrum ones, should be avoided. This practice helps conserve syrphid flies and their larvae, and improves long-term control of insect pests. ■



Syrphus rectus (Yellow-legged Flower Fly) Source: Maryland Biodiversity Project

Choosing the Right Garlic for Central New York

If you're planting garlic this fall, start by choosing a variety suited to our Central New York winters. Hardneck garlic is generally the best choice because it's more winter-hardy than softneck varieties. It produces large, flavorful cloves and gives you the added bonus of garlic scapes in early summer.

Popular hardneck varieties for our region include Music, German White, and Siberian. When shopping, look for certified disease-free seed garlic from a local nursery, farmers' market, or reputable seed supplier rather than using grocery store garlic, which may be treated to prevent sprouting or carry soil-borne pathogens.

When it's time to plant, choose the largest, healthiest cloves from each bulb. Bigger cloves generally produce bigger bulbs, so save those tiny cloves for the kitchen and give your best ones a spot in the garden. ■

“Set it & forget it” Crop to Plant: Garlic

Most of the vegetable garden gets planted in spring, but garlic likes to get a head start. In Otsego and Schoharie counties, garlic is best planted in mid-October to early November, roughly six to eight weeks before the ground freezes. This gives the cloves time to begin developing roots before winter without encouraging too much green growth above ground.

Choose a spot that receives at least six to eight hours of sunlight each day and drains



well. Before planting, add compost or well-rotted manure to the bed. Garlic is a heavy feeder, so fertile soil will help support next year's growth. Avoid planting where garlic, onions, leeks, chives, or other alliums have grown within the past three years.

When you're ready to plant, separate the bulb into individual cloves, leaving the papery skin intact. Plant your largest cloves with the pointed end facing up and the flat root end facing down. Set cloves about 2 to 3 inches deep and 6 inches apart, with 12 to 18 inches between rows. Water thoroughly after planting.

Finally, cover the bed with about 4 to 6 inches of clean straw or shredded leaves. Mulch helps insulate the soil and reduces the freezing and thawing that can push cloves toward the surface during our Central New York winters.

Then you're done for a while. Come spring, green garlic shoots will begin poking through the mulch, and next summer's garlic crop will officially be underway. ■

Tomato Palooza continued from page 1

The stars of the evening will, of course, be the tomatoes. Otsego Master Gardener Volunteers will gather a wide assortment grown in the Demonstration Garden, from plants offered at the Master Gardener Plant Sale, and from their own home gardens. Guests will have the opportunity to sample the different varieties and cast their votes for the tastiest tomatoes of 2026.

The tasting is more than an excuse to eat a lot of tomatoes, although that's certainly part of the fun. The results will also help inform the Plant Sale Committee as they consider which tomato varieties to offer at next year's sale. It's a chance for local gardeners to have a say in which favorites might make a return appearance in 2027.

Tomato Palooza is also an opportunity to learn more about the Vegetable Varieties Garden Trials. Throughout the growing season, the Master Gardener Volunteers grow and observe different vegetable varieties in the Demonstration Gardens. Events like this give visitors a chance to see the gardens at the height of the harvest season, ask questions, and learn from what was grown this year.



You don't need to be an experienced gardener to join in. Whether you grow dozens of tomato plants every summer, have one plant on your patio, or simply appreciate a really good tomato, you're welcome to come taste, compare, and vote.

And if you've ever debated whether one tomato really tastes better than another, this is your opportunity to settle the question. At least until next summer.

Tomato Palooza takes place Wednesday, September 9, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the CCESO Demonstration Gardens in Cooperstown. The program is free and open to the public.

Pre-registration is not required, but is encouraged. ■



Garden Chore Checklist

September brings plenty of harvesting, but it's also time to start putting parts of the garden to bed and preparing for cooler weather ahead.

Vegetable Garden

- Continue harvesting tomatoes, peppers, squash, beans, and other crops regularly.
- Harvest winter squash and pumpkins once they're mature.
- Keep harvesting fall crops such as lettuce, spinach, kale, radishes, and turnips as they're ready.
- Remove plants that have finished producing rather than leaving them in the garden.
- Start preparing a sunny, well-drained bed for garlic planting in October.
- Later in the month, keep an eye on nighttime temperatures and be ready to protect tender crops from an early frost.

Soil & Garden Care

- Add compost to empty beds as crops finish for the season.
- Sow cover crops in beds you're finished using to protect and improve the soil.

- Continue watering fall crops and perennials during dry stretches.
- Leave healthy roots in the soil when possible and avoid unnecessary tilling.
- Begin gathering clean leaves to use as mulch or add to your compost pile.

Pest & Disease Watch

- Continue checking tomatoes and other late-season crops for signs of disease.
- Remove diseased plants and foliage rather than adding them to your compost pile.
- Pick up fallen or rotting fruits and vegetables to discourage pests and disease.
- Make notes about recurring problems while they're fresh in your mind. They'll be helpful when planning next year's garden.

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

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



Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer

QUESTION: Is it too late to plant anything in my vegetable garden?

ANSWER: Not yet! September can still be a good time to plant quick-growing, cool-season crops such as radishes, spinach, lettuce, and arugula. Check the days to maturity on the seed packet and keep an eye on your expected first frost date. Cool weather can slow growth, so the sooner you plant, the better.

To ask a Master Gardener a question, visit:

<https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/master-gardener-program/ask-a-master-gardener-volunteer>

Goldenrod: A September Standout

By September, many of our summer flowers are starting to fade, but goldenrod is just getting started. Its bright yellow flowers are easy to spot along roadsides, in fields, and at the edges of woods throughout Central New York. And despite its reputation, this native perennial deserves a little more appreciation.

First, let's clear something up: goldenrod is probably not what's making you sneeze. Goldenrod often gets blamed for fall allergies because it blooms at the same time as ragweed. Ragweed produces lightweight pollen that travels through the air, while goldenrod's heavier, stickier pollen is primarily carried from flower to flower by insects. Unfortunately for goldenrod, ragweed's small green flowers aren't nearly as noticeable, so the big yellow flowers tend to take the blame.



Those flowers are also an important food source. Goldenrod blooms late in the season when fewer plants are flowering, providing nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects. You'll often find its flowers buzzing with activity on a warm September afternoon. Some species also provide seeds and shelter for wildlife later in the year.

There isn't just one goldenrod, either. North America is home to many species, including several native to New York. Depending on the species, plants can vary quite a bit in height, growth habit, and preferred growing conditions. Some spread enthusiastically, which is great for a meadow or naturalized area but may be more than you bargained for in a small flower bed. Others are better behaved and work well in perennial gardens.

If you already have goldenrod growing around your property, consider leaving some of it rather than automatically pulling or mowing it down. Paired with asters and other fall bloomers, it can add a welcome burst of color at a time when the garden is beginning to slow down.

And the next time someone blames those yellow flowers for their September sniffles, you can stick up for goldenrod. Ragweed has been getting away with it for long enough. ■

Upcoming Events

Join us, learn together, and grow stronger communities.

⇒ REGISTER TODAY! ⇒

**SEPT
9**

SAFE CANNING USING BOILING WATER

🕒 1:00 PM -2:30 PM
📍 CCESO EducationCenter
173 S. Grand Street, Cobleskill, NY

**SEPT
9**

TOMATO-PALOOZA

🕒 5:30 PM -7:30 PM
📍 CCESO GrowGarden
123 Lake Street, Cooperstown, NY 13326

**SEPT
15**

MAKING AND PRESERVING JAM

🕒 6:00PM-8:30PM
📍 CCESO EducationCenter
173 S. Grand Street, Cobleskill, NY

**SEPT
16**

SEED SAVING WORKSHOP

🕒 5:30 PM -7:00 PM
📍 CCESO GrowGarden
123 Lake Street, Cooperstown, NY 13326



Cornell Cooperative Extension
Schoharie and Otsego Counties

For more information or to register visit
www.cceschoharie-otsego.org

or contact Marcie Foster, mkf48@cornell.edu, 607-547-2536 ext. 235.

Community Events

September 9, 2026

Safe Canning Methods

173 S. Grand St., Ste 1, Cobleskill, NY

September 9, 2026

Tomato-Palooza!

123 Lake St, Cooperstown, NY

September 15, 2026

Making & Preserving Jam

173 S. Grand St., Ste 1, Cobleskill, NY

September 16, 2026

Seed Saving- The Art and Science

123 Lake St, Cooperstown, NY

See the full list of upcoming community events: <https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/events>



Weather Watch

September's cooler temperatures and scattered showers signal the shift toward fall. Keep harvesting, watch for cooler nights, and start preparing the garden for the end of the growing season. Visit the NRCC : <https://www.nrcc.cornell.edu/index.html>

Dates	Weather Conditions
Sept 1-12	Scattered t-storms; warm, then turning cool
Sept 13-23	Scattered showers north, sunny south; cool
Sept 24-30	Isolated showers, cool
September	Temp 68° (-1 avg) Precip 3" (-1 avg)



Grow With Us on Social Media!



Master Gardeners Volunteer- Otsego

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



Master Gardeners Volunteer- Schoharie

<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 here: <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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