



# Dutchess Dirt

A gardening newsletter from:



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Cooperative Extension  
Dutchess County

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## ARE WE THERE YET?

by Joyce Tomaselli, CCEDC Community Horticulture Educator

That timeless whine from an anxious child in the back seat of the car “Are we there yet?” We respond “Not yet. Almost. Be a little more patient. You’ll be so happy when we get there. It will be worth the wait.”

This year, it’s the adults who are whining “Is it Spring yet?” Not yet. Almost. Be just a little more patient.

The sun is getting stronger and each day is longer. Despite freezing days and sub-zero nights, icicles are dripping, snow drifts are diminishing and the edges of patio furniture are reappearing.

If you know where to look and listen, you’ll find other hints.



My best friend Barb and I have lived in the same neighborhood for many years. We have a fierce competition each spring to discover favorite signs before the other does. Barb is an avid and experienced birder so she usually excels there. Already this year, she reports that birds have started singing their spring songs. The Juncos have moved from a rattle-twitter to a trilling song. Cardinal, White-throated Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse and White-breasted Nuthatch songs can be heard early in the morning. The one I usually recognize is the Chickadee’s *fee-bee*.



Some trees and shrubs are early indicators. Willows branches slowly morph from yellow to chartreuse and finally green leaves emerge. Groves of maple trees redden at their crowns as flower buds get ready to bloom. Tiny yellow flowers of witchhazel, *Hamamelis vernalis*, emerge even when snow is still on the ground. I did some serious scouting this weekend but failed to find any of these indicators. At this point, Barb is leading.

In a few weeks, even before the snow is totally melted, the first Snowdrops, *Galanthus*, and Skunk Cabbage, *Symplocarpus foetidus*, will emerge followed by Coltsfoot, *Tussilago farfara*. When I walk our dogs I'll watch my favorite spots carefully and hope to beat Barb. These photos were taken last year on March 23, March 26 and April 14.



Although the sight of robins and bluebirds is exciting, it can be misleading – both over-winter locally in sheltered locations. For Barb and me, the key bird event is the return of the Red-winged Blackbird. The male's one second song starts with an abrupt note that turns into a musical trill. The unmistakable *conk-la-ree!* from the tops of tall trees prompts the final phone call. "It's Spring!"

Then we can all stop whining. Spring is here, and it was worth the wait.

## WINTER TREE IDENTIFICATION

Winter is a good time to hone your tree identification skills, especially when the snow is too deep to do much else.

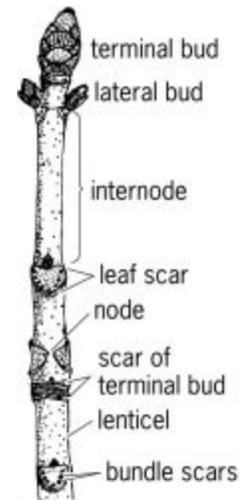
Evergreen trees stand out visually since the leaves are off most deciduous trees. (The few deciduous trees which still do have leaves are usually oaks and beech.) A tree's form is an important aspect of its general identification. For example;

- Pyramidal evergreens with strongly drooping lateral branches and sharp square needles are Norway Spruce.
- Conical evergreens with ascending branches and flat needles are Balsam Fir.
- Large open deciduous trees with irregular branches and bark with patches revealing whitish under bark are Sycamore.
- Large oblong deciduous trees with very shaggy bark are Shagbark Hickory.

Bark is another diagnostic feature. Bark can be scaly, smooth, peeling, fissured, furrowed or cracked. It can be white, green, red, shades of grey and brown and black, plain or with patterns, glossy and dull.

But other characteristics are also important to identify trees with less obvious characteristics or to identify a specific species. For example;

- Whether the twigs has a true terminal bud or not.
- Whether leaf-scars are alternate, opposite or whorled.
- The shape of the leaf-scars including round, crescent shaped, heart-shaped, inversely triangular and semi-round.
- The shape of buds, whether they have scales, and how many.
- The shape of their fruits and seeds.
- The smell of the twig or bark.



The best way to truly identify a tree in winter is to use a dichotomous key.

"Dichotomous" means "divided into two parts". Dichotomous keys always give two choices in each step, and are used to identify all types of items in the natural world including plants, animals and rocks. A series of choices lead you to the correct name of a given item.

Some trees can be identified in a few steps. Some take many steps. Patience, determination, and a sharp pencil are useful (to keep track of the path you've taken in case you need to backtrack and start over). Many good tree identification books include keys, and some are also available online.

## CCEDC MG Volunteers Offer Vegetable Gardening for Beginners

**Tuesdays – April 7-28, 6:30-8:30pm, Adriance Library, 93 Market St. Poughkeepsie.**

Taught by CCEDC Master Gardener volunteers. Course fee for each class is \$5 for supplies.

**April 7 Getting started:** Choosing a location...Drawing a garden plan... Finding, selecting and growing seeds vs. plants... Preparing the soil... Protecting plants from critters... Weeding, mulching, fertilizing and watering

**April 14 First planting, cool season veggies:** Peas, lettuces, arugula, spinach, carrots, radishes, onions and leeks, beets, chard, broccoli, kale, kohlrabi

**April 21 Veggies that need the heat:** Tomatoes, peppers, beans, squash, cucumbers... and time for review and Q&A

**April 28 Herbs:** Where and how to grow them, and ideas for using 12 easy herbs: sage, thyme, chives, mint, oregano, parsley, tarragon, cilantro, basil, dill, lavender and rosemary.

We even provide some seed or plants each week, so you can get started right away!

Please contact Nancy Halas at 845-677-8223 ext. 115 to register. For more information visit [CCEDutchess.org/gardening](http://CCEDutchess.org/gardening)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Saturday, March 14, 10am, Housatonic Valley Regional High School, Falls Village, Annual Mad Gardener's Spring Lecture & Workshop, *Naturalizing the Formal Garden*** with Larry Weaner. Lecture only \$45, w/ lunch \$55, w/ optional workshop \$65. Workshop enrollment is limited to 30 participants, call to reserve a spot before sending a check. For more info, call (860) 355-1547 or visit [www.madgardeners.org](http://www.madgardeners.org)

**Tuesday, March 17, 10am – noon, The Garden at Bellefield**, 4097 Albany Post Rd, Hyde Park, HANDS-in-the DIRT Workshop, Sharpen Up Your Tools. Come learn how to sharpen your pruners and put an edge on shovels and spades. If the weather is good, we will head into the garden for a vine-pruning primer. FREE to members/ \$10 non-members. Please email [info@beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org](mailto:info@beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org) to reserve a place for this workshop.T

**Sunday, April 12, 2pm, Marlboro Free Library on Route 9w in Marlboro, NY, The Hudson Valley Iris & Daylily Society** will host a lecture on *Dahlias* presented by Amanda Chase, who operates Something to Crow About Dahlias which grows over 1700 dahlias. Amanda will be bringing tubers for door prizes. We begin gathering at 1:30 to socialize with snacks and beverages. The meeting starts at 2. Join us and learn how to have beautiful dahlia flowers in your garden.

**Saturday, May 2, 10am-3pm, Hudson Valley Garden Fair 2015** Montgomery Place, 25 Gardeners Way, Red hook, NY. Presented by the Hudson Valley Garden Association. Vendor applications are due by March 1, 2014. For more information, visit [www.hvgardenfair.com](http://www.hvgardenfair.com)

## MASTER GARDENER PLANT SALE MAY 15-16

Mark your calendars for the annual CCEDC Master Gardener Plant Sale Friday and Saturday, May 15 and 16. We will be offering a wide range of annual flowers, foliage plants, herbs, vegetables, and an ever changing array of perennials. Come early for the best selection! In a few weeks we'll start heating the greenhouse, potting up plugs and sowing seeds. The mother plants for cuttings are growing beautifully.



More information on the sale and highlights of some of the plants will be included in next month's Dutchess Dirt.



## PLANT ID QUIZ



This deep-rooted perennial blooms in June but is interesting year-round.

*Baptisia australis*, False Indigo, has showy flowers and attractive seed pods, grows in poor soil, is drought and rabbit resistant and attracts butterflies.

Can you identify these trees by their bark?

Hint, the one on the left is the same genus but different species from the one in the middle.

***Need Soil pH Testing? Need Lawn or Plant Diagnosis?  
Have any gardening questions?***

The **Horticulture Hotline**, (845) 677-5067 has closed for the year. Samples for identification or diagnosis can be submitted all year long. Visit our [Horticulture Diagnostic Lab website](#) for reliable resources and information on our services.

**HELP SPREAD THE DIRT!** Please forward a copy to anyone you think might be interested. To be added or removed from our e-mail list, or submit upcoming gardening events, contact Nancy Halas at [nh26@cornell.edu](mailto:nh26@cornell.edu), [www.ccedutchess.org](http://www.ccedutchess.org).



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