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March is For Pussy Willows, Christmas Ferns and Garden Cleanup





Image credit Amara Dunn Cornell

Pussy Willow- *Salix discolor*



Salix gracilistyla var.
melanostachys black
pussy willow

© Pamm Cooper



Colletes inaequalis

© Pamm Cooper

The native American pussy willow is a rapid spreading shrub or small tree with a shallow root system that may clog sewers or drains. It can be severely pruned after flowering and is deer tolerant. Pussy willows can help prevent erosion, tolerate wet soil and are not affected by black walnut toxicity to soils. Blooming in late winter to early spring, it is an important source of nectar and pollen for native bees active early in the year like *Colletes inaequalis*.

[Pussy Willow](#)

Christmas Ferns-*Polystichum acrostichoides*



These ferns remain green during the winter and spores form early in the spring. A native woodland fern, it does not spread to form colonies, but the clump can grow outward. The fronds emerge as silvery fiddleheads. This is a good choice for woodland gardens in the home landscape.

[Christmas fern](#)

Spring Garden Clean-up



March is a good time to cut dead stems and leaves of ornamental grasses and perennials. It is easier to clean up now - rake, remove debris etc. before new plant growth begins. If needed, mulching can also be done. Mulch should be removed from strawberries. Consider getting a soil test if it has been a few years since the last one was done. Clean and sharpen tools as needed.

Early Spring Clean-up

Cleaning and Sharpening Garden Tools

Animal Highlight- Wood Frogs



Wood frogs, along with spring peepers, are the first frogs to be active in the spring. They sound like quacking ducks. Ice can still be on ponds, and these frogs may come out and start their mating calls. Wood frogs are in decline in Connecticut, but can be encountered in lawns and gardens near woodland ponds. They can be recognized by their brown color (breeding females may be bright orange) and the broad, black stripe through the eye. Their egg masses often cover the surface of vernal pools by late March.

Wood Frogs

Bird Highlight- Eastern Phoebe



Image: Ryan Schain

This flycatcher is one of the first birds to return in the spring. It has a raspy voice that some people mistake for that of a chickadee. When it perches, it wags its tail. Nests are constructed on ledges under bridges, in or on the sides of buildings or other suitable spot with overhead cover. Like all flycatchers, its head is on the large side. This is a sweet little bird.

[Eastern Phoebe](#)

Plant Highlight- Forsythia



©Pamm Cooper

Forsythia (*Forsythia spp.*) are non-native shrubs grown mostly for their early spring profusion of yellow flowers. They can be used as a screen planting or as a stand-alone specimen plant. They can have an upright, mounding or rounded form depending upon the cultivar, and height ranges from 3 – 10 feet. Late winter freezes can affect flower buds. Plant in full sun.

Forsythia

Weather Highlight- Late February Rime Ice Coated Trees



©Pamm Cooper

Rime Ice



©Pamm Cooper



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On February 23, 2023, there was a rain that resulting in an ice coating of trees and shrubs as temperatures dropped below freezing by late afternoon. In portions of Connecticut, the ice remained for several days. Some trees like red maples, had swollen buds and it remains to be seen if any damage has been done. On white pines, needles were coated with rime in some areas and with a white ice in others. All of these images were taken in Bolton and Glastonbury.



KNOWLEDGE TO GROW ON - Read our latest Ladybug blogs

[2023 CT Flower & Garden Show](#)

[Growing A Healthier Life-Style](#)

[Winter is a Good Time for Tool Maintenance](#)

March Gardening Tips

1. Divide hosta when shoots appear. Clumps can be dug up, divided and replanted.
2. Cool season vegetables like carrots, spinach, peas, lettuce, cabbage, kale and turnips can be sown in the ground by mid-March as soil temperature rise above 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Peppers can be started now indoors.
3. Many kinds of annual flowers can also be started indoors including petunia, snapdragons, verbena and impatiens. Most are started 5-6 weeks before last frost is expected - which is around Memorial Day in Connecticut. Sunflowers should be sown directly in the ground when danger of frost has past as they do not transplant well.

4. Lawns should not be fertilized at this time if a fall application was applied. It is generally too early to apply a crabgrass preventative product.
 5. Certain insects that entered homes to overwinter are becoming more active now - Asian multicolored lady beetles, brown marmorated stink bugs, box elder bugs and western conifer seed bugs can be vacuumed or collected and released outside or disposed of. The invasive BM stink bugs should be killed when found.
 6. Prune crabapples, oaks and other trees and shrubs that are susceptible to disease problems if pruned during warmer weather. Make sure to remove branches that rub against each other. Choose the better branch to keep. Prune just above the base of a branch the swollen collar. Do not apply wound dressing; cuts will heal on their own.
 7. Caladium bulbs are slow to start new growth and can be potted up now and placed in a warm spot indoors.
 8. Cut back ornamental grasses before new growth begins. Bunch - type grasses may need to be divided if the clumps have thinned out in the middle.
 9. Do not prune maples or birch trees now as they will bleed due to heavy sap flow.
 10. Clean out old nest boxes or put out new ones now. Bluebirds will look for nesting sites in March, while house wrens and tree swallows should return sometime in April.
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Ornamental grasses should be cut back before new growth appears in spring.

Food For Thought

Drone use in agriculture helps farmers detect problems from the air:

<https://www.tntech.edu/news/releases/22-23/class-demonstrates-variety-of-uses-for-drones-in->

[agriculture.php](#)

Got an area that tends to hold water after rain? Consider a rain garden, better yet, use native plants to build one:

<https://extension.unh.edu/resource/native-plants-new-england-rain-gardens-fact-sheet>

Supply of native seeds insufficient to meet the needs of current and future ecological restoration projects, says new report

<https://www.morningagclips.com/supply-of-native-seeds-insufficient-to-meet-restoration-needs/>

[New research turns what we know about bird window strikes inside-out](#)

New research from William & Mary published in PeerJ reveals that decals intended to reduce incidents of bird window strikes—one of the largest human-made causes of bird mortality—are only effective if decals are placed on the outside of the window. Researchers found that the patterns on the films and decals placed on the internal surface of windows do not reduce collision because they may not be sufficiently visible to birds.

Horticultural Happenings

CT Master Gardener Symposium, March 11, 2023. Virtual. www.ctmga.org

CT NOFA Winter Conference, March 6 -11, 2023. Virtual & In-person. Wesleyan University. www.ctnofa.org

Hardy Plant Society, CT Chapter March Into Spring – Annual Soup Symposium, March 18, 2023. Solomon Wells House, Wethersfield. facebook.com/hardyplantsocietyconnecticut

Connecticut Conservation Districts Spring Plant Sales:

Connecticut River Coastal District – pre-order by April 2, pick-up April 28 & 29, for specifics visit <https://www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal>

North Central Conservation District: pre-order by April 5, pick-up April 21 & 22, for specifics visit <https://conservect.org/northcentral/plant-seed-sale/>

Northwest Conservation District: pre-order by April 12, pick-up April 21-23, for specifics visit <https://nwcd.org>

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Publish fact sheets, newspaper, and magazine articles

Provide media support and publish a monthly e-letter for the Department of Plant Science

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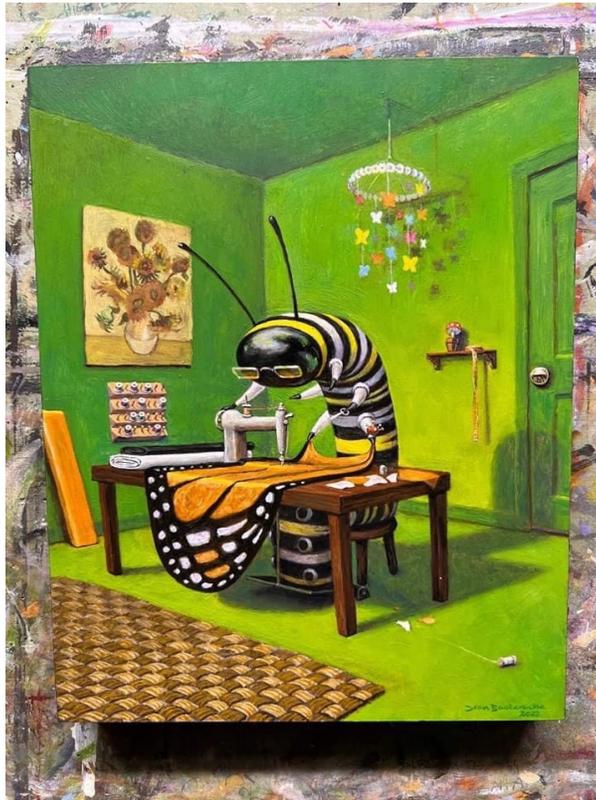


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