



UConn Plant Science & Landscape Architecture  
Knowledge to Grow On!



## Looking Back on 2023

This year we saw some spectacular sights in our gardens, yards, and environment! We saw historic flooding and wildfire smoke in our air. Some of you also noticed bumper crops of acorns, strange timing of veggie crops, and hungry bunnies going after your plants.

In our newsletter this month, we highlight some of the most interesting sights we saw and answered questions about!



### *Exobasidium vaccinii* Azalea Galls

A familiar gall to those who see them on the native Pinxter azaleas, this year they were widespread in Connecticut on older Rhododendron and azalea shrubs. These are leaf galls and are very heavy and succulent to juicy when cut in half. Twigs containing galls should be pruned off just below the gall before white spore surface appears.

#### [Azalea Gall](#)



### Maple Anthracnose

Maple Anthracnose caused early leaf drop on many native maples. Continued wet weather caused many fungal outbreaks on our plants this year with sugar and red maples having severe anthracnose outbreaks causing brown shriveled leaves as early as August. A drier year in 2024 may avert any recurrence, especially if leaves were raked up and removed.

#### [Maple Anthracnose](#)

### The Year of the Rabbit

This was the Chinese Year of the Rabbit, and boy was it ever. Some rabbits eat fallen leaves if they are green and will perhaps stay away from garden plants when they are available. We had many reports from around the state as people noticed larger than normal numbers of rabbits on their property. Many of this year's crop of bunnies seemed nonplussed by humans, and you may have had to practically push them out of your garden...



### Rime Ice Event in Parts of Connecticut

Rime ice forms quickly when the moisture contained in a winter fog freezes onto an object having colder temperatures. As more moisture droplets from the fog contact these freezing surfaces, this ice can build up, sometimes appearing as feathery frosting rather than as a clear ice. If foggy conditions continue over a few days, rime ice can build up and get heavy, which it did in some areas of Connecticut. When the sun comes out, rime ice can melt quickly.

#### [Rime Ice and Hoar Frost](#)





## Flooding

This could have been the year of the fish, with many rainfall events that had inches of rain at a time. The Connecticut River flooded and acres of crops were taken out by standing water. Once edible crops have been flooded by rivers, crops are not suitable for human consumption, and farmers without insurance for this type of event suffer economically. To avoid compaction, gardens and lawns should not be worked in or walked on until surface water has infiltrated into the ground or evaporated from the soil surface. Vegetable gardens affected by floodwater generally have other issues, especially those concerning food safety.

## Managing Gardens and Landscapes After Flooding



Image by Cornell Cooperative Extension

## Jumping Worms/Snake Worms Everywhere!

This invasive worm seemed to be quite prevalent among Connecticut homeowners



## Canadian Wildfires and Ashy Skies

Many perennials that were starting growth spurts in the spring were affected by weeks of hazy skies in May and June caused by wildfire ash from Canadian wildfires mingled with extended cloudy days. Many perennials were noticeably taller than normal as they reached upward for some sun and had difficulty finding adequate amounts of light for lengthy periods. Next year height of plants should be normal. Image is from Vernon, Ct.

## Canada's Record Breaking Fires in 2023



Image by CT Agricultural Experiment Station

## Spotted Lanternfly Alert

We were on alert this year for the Spotted Lanternfly as it was *spotted* in places all around Connecticut! While this invasive has

this year. As awareness continues to spread, we hope that research on how to manage these pests will become more available.

### Asian Jumping Worms



Notice a Lot of Acorns, Fruits and Pinecones?

This year was a mast year for many species of woody plants like white pines, oaks and Eastern Red Cedar *Juniperus virginiana*. Mast means fruit, and a mast year is when more fruit than normal is produced. Reasons for mast years are not always clearly understood.

### Mast Year

been here since 2020, awareness about this invasive species has been spreading.

### Spotted Lanternfly



Did Your Lilacs Lose Their Leaves this Summer?

Older lilacs that had not been pruned regularly to allow foliage to dry out better may have been affected by a fungal pathogen of a *Pseudocercospora* spp. Leaves may have turned brown and fallen by the end of summer. If this happened to your lilacs, make sure to remove the leaves from the ground and discard them. Prune if needed to allow better air circulation. With all the rain and humidity this year, lilacs may still have been infected, but next year may be drier with less incidences of this leaf disease.

### *Pseudocercospora* spp. Leaf Spot on Lilacs



# USDA Updates Hardiness Zone Map

In November, the USDA updated the Hardness Zone map for the first time since 2012. Here in Connecticut, this caused a shift in zones across the state.

### [Explore the Interactive Map](#)

Many homes across the country will be celebrating Christmas this year with a live tree. Environmentally conscious gardeners may be wondering if there are other uses for it besides putting it on the street for the town to pick up. "Old" Christmas trees and holiday greens can be used as a shelter and food source for wildlife, compostable organic material, or wood chips. Always remember to remove any wire or decorations from trees and greens before recycling them.

## Repurposing your “Old” Christmas Tree

Dr Indu Upadhyaya from UConn Extension published an article recently about things to keep in mind as you're preparing your holiday meals this season. While this is something the Home & Garden Education Center doesn't have expertise in, UConn has detailed [food safety](#) resources for home cooks as they prepare traditional holiday meals this season.

## 8 Essential “Always” of Holiday Food Safety



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## Knowledge to Grow On

Read our Ladybug blogs written weekly



*Photo by dmp2023*

[Bulbs – The Good, The Bad and the Ugly](#)

[Give Thanks for all the Little Things!](#)

[When Should I Clean Up My Garden?](#)

[Plant Galls Caused by Insects and Mites](#)

[All About Pumpkins: Celebrating Fall's Most Festive Fruit](#)

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## Upcoming Events and Things to Do



- The [UConn Horticulture Club](#) will be selling poinsettias and a collection of rosemary plants shaped and decorated like miniature Christmas trees. The sale will be on Monday (12/4), Wednesday (12/6), and Friday (12/8) from 2-5 pm each day, in the Floriculture building.
- It's a great time of year for craft fairs and festive shopping! Check your with your local recreation department for events like [Holidays on Main](#) in Wethersfield, CT or the [Winter Festival](#) at the Woodstock Fairgrounds.
- [Winterfest Hartford](#) is an opportunity to go ice skating in Bushnell Park! They host free events, including free skating lessons and visits with Santa through the month of

December.

- [Twilight Tours at Osbourne Homestead Museum](#) - Museum volunteers transform this historic museum into a festive, holiday showcase! *Fridays in December*
- [Holiday Light Festival & Market](#) - Enjoy interactive light gardens, illuminated structures, seasonal food and drinks, family-friendly activities, a festive holiday market and daily live entertainment. *November 18<sup>th</sup> – December 23<sup>rd</sup>*
- [Winterfest and Tunnel of Lights](#) at the Connecticut Trolley Museum takes guests on an evening trolley ride along with carols and other festivities. *Weekends in December*
- Visit the [Lobster Trap Tree](#) in Stonington, CT - This is the third annual event honoring the rich fishing history in the town of Stonington. Artists paint buoys to hang from the lit tree of lobster traps - quite a sight to see!
- Go Snow tubing, skiing or visit the artisan market at [Powder Ridge's Lifted Spirits](#) event in Middlefield, CT *Weekends November. 24 – December 23*
- Celebrate Hanukkah by taking part in a community [Menorah Lighting](#)
- [Wood Library 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Gingerbread House Festival](#) is one of the largest gingerbread festivals in our region- features replications of historical buildings and other structures. *November 24<sup>th</sup> - December 17<sup>th</sup>*
- [Christmas Bird Count](#)- participate in the annual bird count in your area this year. The Christmas Bird Count occurs *December 14 to January 5 every season*. Join in the count or sign up to see the results of this annual Christmas season bird species count.

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## Educational Opportunities and Workshops

- [Learn to make a Christmas Themed Charcuterie Board](#) with Preston Ridge Vineyard in Preston, CT. *December 14<sup>th</sup>*
- Learn to make a holiday boxwood tree! [Our Kids Farm](#) in Canterbury, CT and [Lewis Educational Agricultural Farm \(LEAF\)](#) in Southington, CT are just a couple of many local businesses in the state hosting these build your own boxwood tree events. Check with local small farms, florists and other associations for workshops like this.
- [Webinar: Humanity for Habitat](#) hosted by the Ecological Landscape Alliance *December 12<sup>th</sup>*



The CT Vegetable & Small Fruit Growers Conference is coming back this January. Early Bird Registration ends December 20th, 2023.

[Registration and More Information](#)

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## December Gardening Tips

1. Rotate windowsill plants a quarter turn each week to give all branches equal exposure to the winter sun.
2. Holiday plants, including amaryllis, mistletoe, and yew are [toxic](#) and should be kept away from children and pets. Contact Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 immediately if you suspect a problem.
3. Reduced light during the winter can cause houseplants to become dormant. Be careful not to overwater them during this time although they may need to be watered more often when the heating system is on.
4. Harvest any leeks and root vegetables such as carrots and parsnips that are still in the garden
5. Mark perennials and bulbs before they become covered in snow to help you identify plants in early spring.
6. Avoid using salt to melt ice on driveways and sidewalks which may end up on the lawn, when possible, use sand or kitty litter. This will help prevent salt damage to plant roots.
7. Tap the evergreen branches gently to remove snow and ice to prevent the branches from breaking.
8. Be sure to keep bird feeders stocked with seed and suet for the winter months.
9. If you have friends or family that like to garden, think of gardening gifts for the holidays. Books, gloves, hand tools, weather instruments, and fancy pots are some fun ideas to consider.
10. Turn compost piles one more time before they freeze for the winter.

[More December Gardening Tips](#)



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Notice something going on in your garden? The UConn Plant Diagnostic Laboratory diagnoses plant problems including diseases, insect pests and abiotic causes. Submitting a sample is easy! For details, visit the [UConn Plant Diagnostic Laboratory](#)

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Have Your Soil Tested for Macro- & Micronutrients: Send your soil sample in for testing now to avoid the spring rush. For details on sending a sample, go to the [UConn Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory](#)

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## Photo Op: Fascinating Sights



*Rainbow over the Connecticut River, by Elizabeth Merkt*

See something cool in your garden? Send your pictures to us at [ladybug@uconn.edu](mailto:ladybug@uconn.edu) with subject line “Newsletter Photo” and a brief caption to be considered for next month’s highlight!

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## Before We Go...

Did you know...

Your shadow will be its longest length of the year on December 21st?

This date marks the Winter Solstice. After this day, we will see daylight begin to increase again. Gardening will return before we know it!



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*This Month’s Newsletter Contributors:  
Pamm Cooper, Dr. Nick Goltz, Dawn Pettinelli, Marie Woodward, Heather Zidack*

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For Gardening Questions Visit our website:

**UConn Home and Garden Education Center**

*UConn Extension Home & Garden Education Center:* We are on a collaborative journey working together with farmers, families, communities and businesses to educate and solve problems concerning food, health and sustainability.

*Join us.*

**The UConn Home & Garden Education Center**



1-877-486-6271



[ladybug@uconn.edu](mailto:ladybug@uconn.edu)



<https://homegarden.cahnrc.uconn.edu/>



U-4115, 1380 Storrs Road  
Storrs, CT 06269-4115



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**WHAT WE DO AT THE UCONN HOME AND GARDEN EDUCATION CENTER**

Plant, insect, and plant disease identification and control options

Advise clients on plant selection and cultural requirements

Receive samples for diagnosis either by drop-off or mail

Give presentations on gardening topics including IPM, pollinators, lawns, invasive plants and insects, landscaping and gardening with native plants, gardening to support bees, birds and wildlife

Staff a booth every year at the CT Flower and Garden Show- bring soil samples for pH testing & your gardening questions

Publish weekly blogs and a monthly newsletter available for free by subscription

Publish fact sheets, newspaper, and magazine articles

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UConn Extension 1376 Storrs Road Unit 4134 Storrs, Connecticut 06269 United States (860) 486-9228