

# onserva**tion Times**

Newsletter of the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc.

January 2009

## Edible Home Landscaping: You Can't Get More Local than That!

Eating local is all the rage. The demand for farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares has increased dramatically—a positive trend that helps sustain local farms, boosts support for farmland preservation, and translates into a healthier diet of fresh, seasonal food. Interest in eating local has also brought back an old idea...that is, the art of *edible home landscaping*.

Nothing is more local than eating fruits, vegetables and other foods grown at home. Edible landscaping extends home food production beyond the traditional vegetable patch. You can turn your yard into a veritable “edible landscape” by planting fruit and nut bearing trees and shrubs, culinary herbs and edible flowers in place of ornamental landscape plants.

The benefits of edible landscapes are many, and reach beyond a ready supply of fresh, flavorful, truly local food! Edible landscapes offer an attractive, richly textured and colorful palette that will dazzle the eye from season to season. Edible landscape plants—and their flowers and fruits—provide food and shelter for a variety of local wildlife, including the ever important plant pollinators. And, if your yard is dominated by lawn, an edible landscape will transform it into a productive, natural space, no longer requiring resource intensive maintenance.

Edible landscaping is not a new idea, just one coming back into fashion in response to an interest in improving the natural environment and concerns about food security. According to Ros Creasy, author of *The Complete Book of Edible Landscaping* (Sierra Club Books, 1982), who has been edible landscaping for more than 25 years:

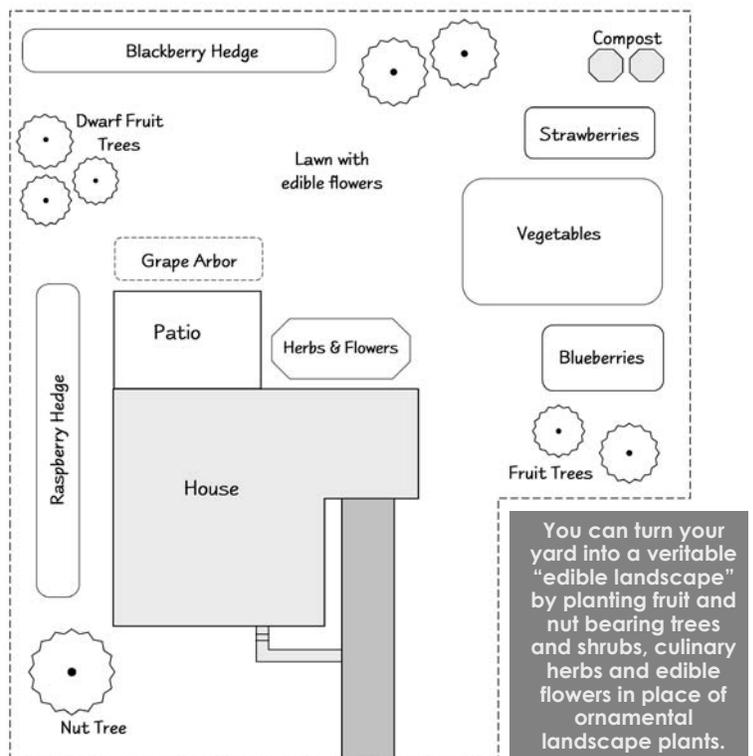
*“People have been growing edible plants near their homes for food and beauty for thousands of years. The ancient Persians, Egyptians, and many Asian cultures integrated edible plants into their pleasure gardens and installed them close to their living space. It was only during the Renaissance that the idea arose to separate utilitarian plants (food) from non-utilitarian flowers. Upper-class people saw growing only flowers near their home as a way to show off their wealth and power. They were so wealthy they could use their land to grow plants simply for pleasure and hide the edibles somewhere else.”*

There are many edible plants, some native to Connecticut, that are excellent for home landscaping: attractive berry producing shrubs like high and low bush blueberries,

American cranberrybush, and elderberry; raspberries and blackberries; groundcovers like strawberries, creeping cranberry and thyme; grape vines; fruit and nut trees, like plum, cherry, pawpaw and hazelnut; edible flowers like bee balm, lavender, lemon verbena and nasturtium; and even Ostrich fern, whose young fronds are eaten as fiddleheads. Of course, there is also a tempting variety of vegetables that can be grown in home gardens—just grab a seed catalog and explore!

Where do you begin if you want to turn your yard into an edible landscape? A good resource is the e-newsletter *Edible Landscaping with Charlie Nardozzi* found at [www.garden.org/ediblelandscaping](http://www.garden.org/ediblelandscaping). The website includes an *Edible Landscaping Primer*, an article on *Planning Your Landscape* and lots of other useful information about growing edible shrubs, trees and flowers. Also, look out for a revised edition of Ros Creasy’s book on edible landscaping, due out in spring 2009.

Have some fun this winter and start planning your own edible landscape. For a selection of notable local edibles be sure to check out the District’s 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Shrub and Seedling Sale offerings (*see information on back page*).





## CRWP Strategic Planning Initiative Launched with Eye on Program Vitality, Viability

This past fall, the District assembled a group of water resource professionals and community river advocates for a half-day brainstorming session for the Connecticut River Watch Program (CRWP), the District’s citizen monitoring, protection and improvement program for the Connecticut River and tributaries. The session’s purpose was to initiate a strategic planning effort for CRWP, our first since 1998 when the program was expanded in Connecticut to include the entire watershed.

Planned and held with professional facilitator Walter Smith, the brainstorming session focused on four main areas: expansion outside of existing program areas; monitoring activities to best meet water quality data needs; methods to disseminate data, promote use and motivate action; and program funding.

Twenty people representing a variety of agency and community interests participated in the session, many with firsthand experience as program partners. They provided a great deal of constructive and creative input. Next steps will include convening a CRWP advisory committee, and using the ideas generated during the session to develop a CRWP strategic plan.

*This project was funded in part by the CT DEP through a U.S. EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant in conjunction with Rivers Alliance of Connecticut Small Grant Program.*

## District Track Down Surveys Focus on Improving Water Quality

With the assistance of Pamela Bajorek, a student intern from the University of Connecticut, Middletown’s Miner Brook was the subject of the District’s ongoing track down survey effort in the Mattabeset watershed. Track down surveys are intensive stream walks that first identify potential sources of pollution, then recommend remedial actions to address them. For Miner Brook, pollution reducing practices that top the list include more frequent street sweeping and catch basin cleanout; storm drainage and road culvert maintenance, repair or replacement; and a watershed-wide landowner education campaign.

*Funding for this project was provided by a US EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 Grant administered by the CT DEP.*



Track Down Intern Pam Bajorek

## IN and AROUND the Mattabeset

### *A Restoration Framework for the Mattabeset Watershed*

The District has completed the first step in a new initiative to refocus water quality improvement efforts in the Mattabeset. Recognizing that a piecemeal approach will not result in measurable improvements in a watershed as large as the Mattabeset, we conducted a Comparative Subwatershed Analysis (CSA) to prioritize and target efforts at a more workable, subwatershed scale.

Using a Center for Watershed Protection ([www.cwp.org](http://www.cwp.org)) method, we divided the Mattabeset watershed into twelve subwatersheds, evaluated each on a number of different characteristics, and prioritized them based on their restoration potential. The results suggest that the Swamp–Miner subwatershed (in Middletown) is highly restorable, one reason we chose Miner Brook for a recent track down survey. Lowest on the list are the more urban subwatersheds where high levels of impervious cover limit restoration opportunities.

The CSA will help guide our Mattabeset programs, and will support state and local efforts as well. To read the CSA summary report go to [www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal/watershedmanagement.shtml](http://www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal/watershedmanagement.shtml).

*This project was funded with a grant from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.*

### *A Watershed-based Plan for the Coginchaug River*

The Coginchaug River Watershed-based Plan has been finalized, thanks to the hard work of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff and a dedicated group of watershed stakeholders serving on a local advisory committee. A template for water quality improvement, the plan is full of both general recommendations for management practices to be implemented throughout the watershed, and site-specific “place-based” restoration projects. The District is working with the advisory committee on the next steps, including, most importantly, determining how best to ensure that action is taken on the plan. To view the Coginchaug Watershed-based plan, go to the CT DEP website ([www.ct.gov/dep/site/default.asp](http://www.ct.gov/dep/site/default.asp)) and search on “Coginchaug watershed plan.”

### *CRWP Volunteers Help Uncover Coginchaug “Hot Spots”*

This past summer the District conducted a water quality study of Coginchaug tributary streams in response to a need for more data identified in the watershed-based plan. The study, conducted with the help of a team of CRWP volunteers, uncovered several “hot spots” that are likely contributing to high levels of bacteria documented in the river main stem. Water quality information will be used to plan future assessment and improvement activities in collaboration with municipalities and stakeholders, and will assist greatly efforts to reduce bacteria levels.

*The District’s involvement in the Coginchaug projects was funded in part by the CT DEP through a U.S. EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant.*

## District Helps Secure Long Island Sound License Plate Grant for Westbrook's Salt Island Overlook

The District completed a natural resources assessment and management plan for Westbrook's Salt Island Overlook Conservation Area in 2007. This year, the plan played a central role in helping the town secure a \$10,000 Long Island Sound License Plate grant. The grant will fund the first part of a multi-phase plan to restore coastal upland forest at the Overlook. The work funded by this grant will also help set the stage for future public access to this ecologically notable conservation area.

Before the native coastal upland forest can be restored, abundant and widespread non-native invasive plants found at the Overlook have to be eradicated. The town has contracted All Habitats, Inc. to conduct the removal, and has retained the District to oversee and monitor the work. Prior to removal of any invasive plants the District established four permanent vegetation sampling plots. The plots will help assess the long-term success of the eradication effort; provide feedback on whether more work is necessary; and provide data on the post-removal plant community, a key piece of information necessary to guide successful restoration.

## Cornstalk Sampling—A Dirty, Itchy Adventure!

This past fall District staff found themselves out in the field...the cornfield, that is! If you've walked through a cornfield in the fall, you'll know what a dirty, itchy proposition it is. But it was all for a good cause: an effort to better manage nutrients applied on cornfields in the Coginchaug River watershed.



The District embarked on a three-part nitrogen testing project at the Greenbacker farm in collaboration with Lorraine Los (UConn Department of Plant Science) and Joe Greenbacker. Staff collected stalks at seventeen silage corn fields in Durham, Middlefield and Middletown, and submitted them to the UConn Soil Testing Lab for nitrogen analysis. In the spring, the project will continue with soil sampling and testing, then in the fall, with another round of cornstalk sampling. Results of the study will guide the Greenbackers in applying optimal amounts of manure and fertilizer, avoiding the common pitfall of using excess nitrogen on cornfields.

*The project is funded by a grant from the CT DEP to the UConn Department of Plant Science.*

## Exploring Long Island Sound at CRCCD's 61st Annual Meeting

For our 61st Annual Meeting on October 18, 2008, friends of conservation, District Board members and staff were treated to a program on the shoreline ecosystems of Long Island Sound by Ranger Russ Miller, Director of the Meigs Point Nature Center. All enjoyed a beautiful, sunny fall day at Hammonasset Beach State Park, and learned about the vital functions of the salt marsh, rocky shore and sandy beach ecosystems. Of great interest were the variety of beach flora and fauna found in the park, and how the geology of Long Island Sound is so stunningly revealed.



Photos J. Costello

## Congratulations to the District's 2008 Conservation Award Recipients!

### Environmental Professionals

Emily Wilson, Geospatial Extension Specialist  
UConn Center for Land Use Education and Research

Wendy Goodfriend, Natural Resource Specialist  
Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District

### Communications/Media

P2 View, Judith Prill, Editor  
Connecticut DEP Office of Pollution Prevention

### Cooperator

Acer Gardens, Sharon and Bill Harris

### Municipality of the Year

Old Saybrook Conservation Commission

### Special Merit

Eleanore Milardo  
Christian Life Church  
Summer Hill Nursery, Michael Johnson

### Certificates of Appreciation

Gary Crump & Gloria Priam, Priam Vineyards  
Larry McCulloch, Chamard Vineyards  
Mark & Mindy Yuknat,  
CT River Expeditions  
Old Saybrook Shopping  
Center, Matthew Rubin  
Sunny Border Nurseries,  
Pierre Bennerup  
Thomas D. Comer, CPA,  
Comer and Company, LLC



## District News & Events

### MEET THE DISTRICT'S NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS

This year we are pleased to welcome two new members to our Board of Directors. Appointed at the 2008 Annual Meeting, they bring a wealth of experience and new skills to our Board. **Jennifer Charneski**, who lives in Middletown, contacted us about the board in response to a posting on the United Way Volunteer Center website. She has a Master's degree in Public Affairs with a concentration in Environmental Policy and Natural Resource Management, and has been working as the Budget Coordinator for the Town of Hamden since 2006. She is also trained as a Professional Facilitator.

**Jennifer Weymouth**, who also lives in Middletown, volunteered last summer as a CT River Watch Program water sampler. She is completing her M.S. in Resource Management and Conservation at Antioch University, and has a graduate certificate in nonprofit management and a B.A. in communication sciences. She is currently working as an intern for the DEP on municipal solid waste management issues, including recycling and source reduction, and was formerly a Philanthropic Officer at The Community Foundation of Greater New Haven.

### BETTER THAN EVER! THE 4<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RIVER CRUISE BENEFITS CRWP

What is better than a cruise on the Connecticut River with a glass of wine and wonderful local food? A graceful swallow ballet at sunset! Once again, the River Cruise and Wine Tasting to benefit CRWP was a great success due to the enthusiasm of the many participants. Special thanks to *RiverQuest* owners Mark and Mindy Yuknat, Priam Vineyards' Gary Crump and Gloria Priam, and Chamard Vineyards' Larry McCulloch for their generous contributions.

If you missed the river cruise in the past, plan ahead for 2009! This now annual CRWP benefit will be held again on Thursday, September 10, 2009.



### 18<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SHRUB AND SEEDLING SALE: April 17, 18 & 19, 2009 2nd Year at a NEW Location!

*Old Saybrook Shopping Center*  
*Boston Post Road & Elm Street, Old Saybrook*

Interested in making your landscape edible? Looking for easy to grow, but hard to find native plants? In addition to our wide selection of Connecticut native shrubs, grasses, ferns, flowering perennials and tree seedlings, this



year we are offering a new expanded selection of edible landscape plants! For a brochure and order form call us at (860) 346-3282 or visit us at [www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal](http://www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal).

Quantities of some selections are limited, so don't miss out—*send in your pre-sale order form on or before March 31, 2009.*

### January 2009

The Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the sound use and management of our natural resources through technical assistance and education.

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Christopher Holden, Portland  
Timothy Myjak, East Haddam  
Brian O'Connor, Clinton  
Mark Yuknat, Essex  
Jennifer Weymouth, Middletown

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Wendy Goodfriend  
*Natural Resource Specialist*  
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*Office Administrator*  
Eric S. Mosher  
*Watershed Projects Coordinator*

The District serves the towns of Berlin, Chester, Clinton, Colchester, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Hebron, Killingworth, Lyme, Madison, Marlborough, Middlefield, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Rocky Hill, Salem and Westbrook.

The Board of Directors holds public meetings every fourth Wednesday, 7:00 PM, at the deKoven House Community Center in Middletown. All programs and services are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.

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Digital cameras of any type. Needed for field surveys and volunteer monitoring. Call us to donate your old or unused camera to a good cause!