

## The Dirt: January Gardening Resources & Tips

1 message

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### Gardening Resources & Tips from the MMGA

**January 2025**

***A New Year, New Dreams, New Plans***



Winter light is special, with warm, low rays that seem to encourage a closer view of nature. Walking through a field or garden in January lets one see beyond the bright colors of summer; we suddenly see form, shape, outlines (often in black and white)— including what artists call negative space. These altered views can awaken new ideas, and as winter settles on the land, we go inward and wonder how it all might be reborn. Our issue this month encourages you to see your gardens anew, as public or private retreats filled with nature and art, and as places we were can implement climate change action.



#### **In this month's issue of *The Dirt*:**

- Featured Garden: We revisit the rewilding of Veasy Park in Groveland.
- Featured How-To: Art and gardens intersect around climate change.
- Monthly Native Plant: For 2025, we will feature drought-resistant plants!
- Monthly Tip: January means dreaming about your garden's potential.

Rest, rejuvenate, and we'll see you in February, that much closer to spring!

**Dig *The Dirt*? Please tell your friends!**  
They can subscribe online by clicking [HERE](#).

***Last Chance! Registration closes Jan. 6th.***

## **2025 Home Gardener Boot Camp**

[Register Now](#)

Ten info-packed 1.5-hour **ONLINE** classes,  
one weeknight per week for 10 weeks

**Thursdays, 7:00-8:30 PM**

**Jan. 9, 16, 23, 30; Feb. 6, 13, 20, 27; Mar. 6, 13**



**ORGANIC GARDENING**



**PERENNIALS**



**BLUEBERRIES**

Horticultural science and gardening techniques are constantly evolving. MMGA's Boot Camp provides comprehensive, up-to-date information about the current best practices to create thriving gardens for yourself and the environment.

Boot camp is designed for gardeners of all skill levels. You will learn essential gardening skills to ensure beautiful, abundant and healthy gardens.

In this 10 week series, deepen your knowledge about gardening basics, herb gardening, vegetable gardening 101, urban gardening, perennials, hydroponics, bulbs and much more!

[Learn More and Register](#)

**WHAT YOU'LL LEARN IN BOOT CAMP:**

- Gardening Basics
- Home Herb Gardening
- The Holistic Approach to Gardening
- Vegetable Gardening 101
- Hydroponic Gardening
- Perennial Gardening
- Echo-Friendly Urban Gardening
- Container Gardening
- Bulb Gardening
- Blueberries in your Home Garden

Boot Camp speakers are some of our most experienced Certified Master Gardeners, with years of hands-on experience, grounded in the latest horticultural science. Classes include live Q&A time with the presenters; and most lectures also include detailed handouts...in case you need your memory jogged later. Need to miss a class? No problem. Classes will be recorded and available to watch until March 20th.

**Registration** closes January 6, 2025  
or as soon as all "virtual seats" are filled.

Click **HERE** for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

### **QUESTIONS?**

Email us at [BootCamp@MassMasterGardeners.org](mailto:BootCamp@MassMasterGardeners.org)

The Home Gardener Boot Camp Program does not lead to Master Gardener Certification.

**Registration is open!**



*Join us ONLINE for a*  
**Spring Gardening Know-How Series**  
**Wednesdays, 7:00-8:30 PM**  
**Feb. 5, 12, 19 & 26, 2025**

Traditionally, February serves as a pivotal month for gardeners, marking a time dedicated to thoughtful planning and preparation for the upcoming growing season. At the Massachusetts Master Gardener Association (MMGA), we emphasize the critical importance of mastering science-based gardening fundamentals in our Gardening Know-How series.

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND:** Whether you are a novice gardener or looking to refine your skills, our Spring Know-How series is designed to grow your expertise.

**LECTURES INCLUDE:**

February is the perfect time for gardeners of all levels to continue learning with these 4 new topics:

- **Preparing the Soil for Gardening**
- **Groundcovers: What They Are and How to Use Them**
- **Creating Pollinator Habitats Anywhere**
- **Gardening Water Wisdom: Save Water, the Environment and Money!**

Virtual sessions include live Q&A time with speakers and handouts to read in advance or revisit in the future.

**Learn More & Register**

**QUESTIONS?**

Email us at [KnowHow@MassMasterGardeners.org](mailto:KnowHow@MassMasterGardeners.org)

***Featured Monthly Garden  
Revisiting the Rewilding of Veasey Park***

201 Washington Street  
Groveland, MA 01834

Tel: 978-521-9345

<https://www.veaseypark.org/>

*Author Dianne Plantamura obtained her MMGA Certificate in 1994. She has served Veasey Park as the originator and leader of Veasey's Native Plant Gardens since 2012 and oversees other gardens created there. Veasey Park became a Master Gardener project in 2016, and Dianne has led Master Gardeners in those gardens each spring, summer, and fall. In 2020, she was asked to join the Friends of Veasey Park as a board member. In 2022, she submitted an application to Groveland's Conservation Commission to use community preservation funds for the Rewilding Project at Veasey Park. The Town of Groveland funded the project in April 2023. From 2000 to 2022, Dianne was the Executive Director of the New England College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (NECOEM) and responsible for planning programs and executive functions for 300 physician members.*

For January, we reflect on the Miyawaki Forest rewilding efforts at Veasy Park in Groveland, MA. (See picture for a glimpse of its early days.)



A quick recap of Veasy's Miyawaki Forest project: The Miyawaki method mimics natural forest creation but at an accelerated rate. What would normally take 200 years to establish can take 20 years via the Miyawaki method. The method takes some commitment up front, including digging and loosening soil, removing invasives, amending soil, and then planting the trees.

Miyawaki forests grow 10x faster, are 30x denser, contain 100x more biodiversity and absorb 16x more carbon than conventionally planted forests. Since biodiversity is quick to establish, they're self-sufficient after the first two-to-three years as a thriving ecosystem takes shape. You can learn about the Miyawaki method [here](#).



#### *Early Days*

The Miyawaki project at Veasy Memorial Park began in August, 2023 with the removal of invasives, preparation of the soil, and purchasing of trees and shrubs. It was a collaboration between the town of Groveland, local residents, and the Massachusetts Master Gardeners; all totaled, there were 160 volunteers who planted almost 1800 trees in April 2024!

Team members included Dianne Plantamura, Chip DeVillafranca, Anne Morin, landscape architect Willow Cheeley, and many MGs who organized and planted.

#### *April 2024*

The potted plants and trees arrived (thanks to MMGA grant monies), and volunteers were able to get them in the prepared ground. In addition to all of the trees, the following items were planted along the back of a two-foot foundation wall:

*Carex brevior*, Plains Oval Sedge

*Coreopsis verticillata*, Tickseed

*Eragrostis spectabilis*, Purple Love Grass

*Penstemon digitalis*, Beardtongue

*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*, Narrow-leaved mountain mint

*Schizachyrium scoparium*, Little Bluestem



This area will eventually be used for educational activities. There was an Eagle Tribune article that covered the April planting, and there are many more pictures of those planting days [here](#)!



### *September 2024*

Denise and Paul Pouliot are the leaders of the Cowasuck band of the Abenaki Tribe.

Cowasuck means “people of the white pines”, and they were located in the upper region of the Connecticut River. Abenakis were part of the Wabanaki people, who were divided into two areas, east and west. The Western Abenaki were located west of the White Mountains, in New Hampshire, Vermont and Quebec, and

the Eastern Abenaki were in Maine, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and New Brunswick. Denise and Paul were onsite with their instruments and provided a dedication to this rewilding work. All of these efforts and blessings seem to be working, and the forest is taking hold.

### *December 2024*

The forest has been growing well. Dianne declared “thank goodness for the irrigation that was set up because the three month drought was rough”. That didn’t stop the weeds from growing vigorously, but with the help of hard working Master Gardeners and the amazing hard work



of the local pre-release prisoners, the saplings still thrived. The 500 native perennials that were planted behind the foundation wall are also getting rooted in and look great. Thanks to private donations and a grant from New England Biolabs, five Norway maples (listed as an invasive tree in MA), that bordered the Miyawaki forest were removed.

Project volunteers set a few screech owl nest boxes to help reduce the many moles, voles, and mice! Hopefully the owls will nest next spring. Most of all, it’s exciting to watch that process take shape.

### *Spring 2025*

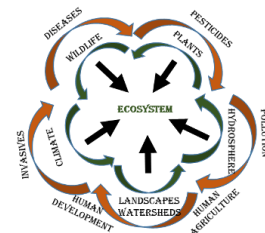
Other areas of the deer-fenced zone are due to be planted in the spring of 2025. In addition, Veasey Park and project leader Dianne Plantamura are planning a three-speaker series about the forest. Exciting news: One speaker who confirmed is Russ Cohen, wild edibles expert, who will join us on May 13!



## ***Featured Monthly How-To*** ***The Intersection of Art and Climate Change in the Garden***

*From Author Sandy Parker, Lifetime MG: While growing up in Louisiana, my only gardening experience was watering Grandma's hydrangeas. After moving to New England over 30 years ago, I was a biological researcher studying cold adaptation in Antarctic fish. In that cold environment, the only land plants were tiny slow growing mosses. Upon retirement, I expanded my appreciation of mosses to all the amazing plants here at home. MMGA allowed me to jump start that interest by learning and gardening alongside fellow plant enthusiasts. I am now in my fourth year as Class Assistant for the Master Gardener Certification Program, and I chair the Intersection of Climate Change and Horticulture Committee. These endeavors allow me to grow in what interests me most: learning how and doing more so our fellow creatures to have a place to flourish.*

The topic of climate change seems to touch everything we know and can become an overwhelming subject. But there is something that can mitigate the numbing effect created by this glut of information. According to an article in the ***World Economic Forum***, art can help people get to know and understand something with both body and mind, and can motivate people to turn thinking into doing.



As it turns out, art and gardening make a rousing combination for climate change action. For example, the Peabody Essex Museum, as part of their Climate + Environment initiative, hosted Konstantin Dimopoulos' 'Blue Trees', an installation which compels us to take notice of our trees as a call to environmental action. Emily Steer, writing for ***Artnet News***, asked, "Are gardens the art of the future?" and explored exhibitions focusing on the



relationships between plants and technology, climate crisis, and more. Gardens have always been works of art and have been used for centuries as a way to connect with nature's beauty. But most gardens we admire are well structured. Now, with the advent of climate change, we are asked to see things a little differently. What we might have once considered weedy, we now see is a habitat for wildlife and

sustenance for often dozens of insect species. Changing our perspective on what is a beautiful garden may not come naturally, but using art as a vehicle to alter perceptions is both surprising and fun!

So how can an ecological gardener integrate art? Let us count the ways!

*For the benefit of insects.* It is recommended to leave the leaves and the stems for the benefit of insects who require them for winter nesting. But every year we see garden grasses and perennials sheared to the ground because they are thought to be unsightly. What if we could make them more interesting? The artwork at the right is titled "Field work" by Jasmine Gutbrod, an artist, designer, and educator researching the intersections of climate science and social justice. She uses an invasive non-native reed for its sculptural message; however, we can visualize the same sort of treatment to many native grasses.



We all know the benefits of pollinator gardens, but some of those native plants are as wild as a two-year-old. The advice is to add signs so your neighbors know that you haven't gone crazy. Signs work well, but other things also engage and inform viewers. For example, borders made with natural materials create the message that the riotous freedom inside that garden is intentional.

*For the benefit of trees.* The esteemed primatologist, Jane Goodall, changed the way we think about chimpanzees by giving them names even when told that as a scientist, she should have given them numbers. But by giving her research subjects names, such as Greybeard or Frodo, Goodall found she got people to care. She now suggests we do the same with trees, saying "And if we have a tree in our name, we want that tree to live." We can have a tree planted in our name in a forest, or we can just go in our backyard and see who is there. No backyard?



Go to a park and pick out a tree. Name it. It is yours now. Visit it. Hang a portrait of your beautiful tree. There is a reason trees are often the subject of artists. They are in themselves art, not created by people but there to behold.

I now see my trees as individuals and the plants around them as their companions. I talk to them more. Crazy? Art? When you compare how we connect to a list of facts vs. other representations of a subject like deforestation, it becomes clear. Art is more likely to initiate a change in behavior than a list of facts. Art can make us think, feel, and spur action.



*For the benefit of wildlife.* Unlike my trees, I cannot so easily bring myself to love my rabbits, deer, and woodchucks. I could try naming them, but I think their names would be Hades, Ogre, and Cretan. But patience is called for amidst this imbalance of nature, along with a recognition that humans have taken over much of the landscapes that once belonged to wildlife. This one is hard for me, but I am trying to embrace the wildlife that eat my plants by using humorous art— and it helps! Making artistic “homes” for the critters can also be a project. Instead of completely removing a dead tree, leave the trunk.



These “snags” are often used by woodpeckers and other species of wildlife. Work with an arborist to trim it in a safe yet more artistic way. Anything that brings us emotionally closer to the individual elements of nature will ultimately be good for the environment.

*For the benefit of water conservation.* The ecologist Robert Paine coined the term ‘keystone species’ when he removed all of a single starfish species in one area and observed that the entire ecosystem rapidly changed. Keystone species fill an ecological role that no other species can, and without it, an entire ecosystem could collapse. There are many keystone plants and animals, and the species can vary according to location. In North America, beaver are such a species and are appreciated as ecosystem engineers in water conservation. Their dams and canals slow water flow, thereby increasing groundwater and reducing loss of soil that is needed by surrounding plants and animals. Studies have shown that in areas where beavers are, all living things in the beavers’ area survived devastating fires, whereas in areas without beavers, they did not. So we humans can learn and adapt. We can create rain gardens, which mimic nature and aid in climate controls. Rain gardens also add beauty to any garden— and



who says rain barrels have to be boring? Even if we can't be beavers, we can create beautiful ways to conserve and distribute water to our gardens.



*For the benefit of humans.* In the modern world, people often disconnect from nature. But to maintain a healthy ecosystem, the best and most sustainable solution is to connect people back to nature, and let local residents maintain and manage their ecosystem services. Nature's contributions to us go well beyond food, raw materials, clean water, and air. Much of our recreation, leisure, aesthetic experiences, and spiritual fulfillment depend on the outdoors, including the gardens we design and create. We do not need to give up beauty to have an ecological garden. Just add a little art and it could change what and how people see nature– and what they do to sustain it!



**SAVE THE DATE**  
**2025 Massachusetts Gardening Symposium**  
Saturday, September 27, 2025  
Bentley University, Waltham, MA

Save the date for this annual, day-long, educational event featuring talks by four experts on timely horticultural topics, a Garden Marketplace, Gardeners' Choice Raffle, lunch, and more! More details and registration information coming June 1, 2025. Meanwhile, check out the recap of our 2024 Symposium below.

[2024 Recap Here](#)

***Monthly Native Plant***  
***Hypericum prolificum***

Drought-tolerant landscapes are increasingly important as climate change intensifies water scarcity and leads to more frequent, prolonged droughts. These landscapes conserve vital water resources by using plants adapted to dry conditions, reducing reliance on irrigation. Additionally, they help mitigate the environmental impacts of climate change by fostering biodiversity and creating resilient ecosystems that can endure shifting weather patterns.



Incorporating native plants is essential for creating sustainable landscapes that thrive in their natural environment. Native plants are adapted to local climates and soil conditions, requiring minimal water and maintenance once established. Native plants also support local ecosystems, providing food and habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. Additionally, they are more resilient to pests and diseases, reducing the need for chemical treatments.

In 2025, we will be featuring native plants that have proven to be tolerant of drought conditions. By selecting drought-tolerant species, gardeners can create beautiful, resilient environments that support local ecosystems and withstand climate challenges.



*Hypericum prolificum*, commonly called shrubby St. John's wort, is native to stream banks, rocky outcrops, and dry wooded slopes throughout eastern North America. This compact mounded shrub typically grows one to four feet tall and features bright yellow flowers that bloom for a month in early summer. The species name *prolificum* refers to the numerous stamens on the flower that attract hordes of

pollinators, including flies and bees. The shrub is also a host of Gray Hairstreak butterflies and the Wavy-lined Emerald moth.

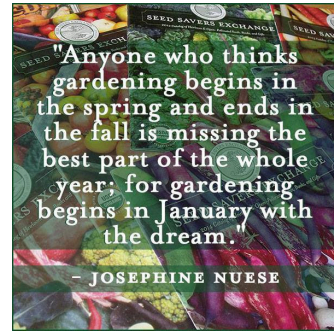
The lovely flowers give way to cone shaped seed capsules that offer food for birds and adding visual interest in the winter. Adding to the multi season interest is the shrub's peeling bark that reveals a pale orange inner bark. St. John's wort is tolerant of a range of soil and sun conditions but performs best in sun. The shrub is resistant to both deer and rabbits due to a toxic substances within its tissues that irritate the gastrointestinal tracts of mammals. It's a low maintenance, ecologically-wise addition to your garden.



## ***Monthly "Tip"***

## *January Is Time to Prepare for the Garden Year*

On the darkest days of the year, it's time to dream of the perfect garden. The holidays have passed, the plant and seed catalogues are filling up the mailbox, and there is little to distract you from planning your garden. Now is the time to plan, organize, and get ahead of the gardening season. Think about how you would like your garden to be. Do you want more vegetables? Is this the year to add more natives to increase the butterfly population? Would you like to start a cutting garden? Do you want to plant a few native trees? In January, we get to explore and envision what could be!



**Write down all of your ideas.** On a computer or in a notebook, get something in writing and maybe even a simple sketch, something that will jog your memory later on in the year. The more information you gather now, the more it will help you come spring.

**Go for a walk through the garden in winter.** Sometimes a fresh perspective, a view from a different angle will give you a chance to look at the house, the garden, that tree, in a different way. Look at the garden at different times of day. Where does the winter sun set as opposed to the summer sunset?

**Look out of every window in the house.** What do you see? Frame a view through each window. When viewing from an upper story window, the area looks different and what works well and what doesn't can be readily seen. The starkness of winter allows the bones of the garden to shine.

**Once areas of concern have been identified, look for solutions.** A tree needs to be cut down, pruned or the canopy lifted, allowing space for more plants to grow in the understory. Bird feeders might need shrubs planted nearby for birds to take cover, or more berry-producing native shrubs need to be planted to augment the bird feeders. You might want to focus on the garden in winter, adding more evergreens, hollies and twig dogwoods.



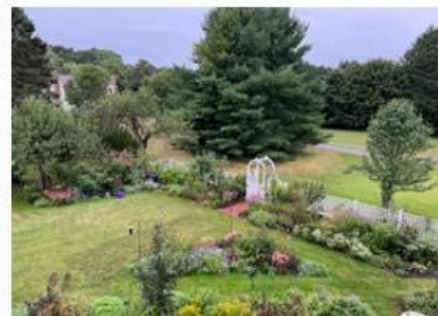
**Gather all of the seed and plant catalogues.** With markers, pens, pencils and a large pad of paper, go through the catalogues. Circle or write down all that interests you, then go back through the list and write down where it should go in the yard. Remember to consider the growing conditions— the soil, drainage, light requirements and the zone in which they successfully grow— that will help to whittle down the list. Even if you don't purchase items from the catalogues



now, you have added to your garden knowledge by reading about different plants and their requirements.

Remember that with the list there comes a few constraints. Time— will you have enough time to get all of the plants in the ground come spring? Space— If you are growing seeds, will you have enough space to pot on all of those little seedlings into larger pots? Will you have space in the garden? Plants grow each year and what starts off small can take up quite a bit of space in subsequent years. Remember the saying, “Sleeps, creeps, leaps,” referring to the first three years of most perennials and shrubs. Budget— we all

have constraints and if you think you have found a garden solution, but if it is stretching the budget, make your plan a multi-year project to accommodate your situation.



**Keep a record.** Once you have ordered the plants and seeds, think of a way to keep a record of what was ordered and what year. Write them down in a dedicated notebook or keep all of your order forms in a folder. If you have a problem with any of the plants, the order forms should have all of the pertinent information— date ordered, Latin and common names of plants, item numbers, price, address, phone number, and email of the company.

**Document the garden year.** Some like a notebook, some a specific garden journal, some keep a calendar; whatever you prefer make sure to document your gardening year. Take pictures on your phone of your gardening successes and the ones that weren't that successful. Was there a drought that affected the growth of the garden? Was there excess rain? When did the rain stop? Specific dates are good to add to see if there are trends. Was there a period of high heat? Were the spring night temperatures too cool to get the tomatoes in by Memorial Day? What was the name of that tomato, dahlia, native plant that did so well? Write it down or take a picture of the plant and the label. If you use your

phone's camera to document the garden, place all of the pictures into a folder for ease of accessing the records. Next January that record will help with your planning for 2026.

**Read, take classes, and learn.** Visit your local library to get information on all aspects of gardening. Take a class online or attend a lecture. Continue to learn. Gardening doesn't stop in the winter; growth just goes in new directions.

Enjoy this slow time of the gardening year. Along with your writing, reading, ordering and organizing, save time to dream of gardens to be (see below)!



## ***Seasonal MMGA Learning Resources***

**Ask us your questions in person!** Trained volunteers staff **Ask-a-Master-Gardener (AAMG)** tables at dozens of events throughout the growing season.

- The AAMGA is coming to a community near you, so check our [AAMG Calendar](#) calendar for dates and times.
- Belong to a local organization that would like to host an AAMG? Contact [Outreach@MassMasterGardeners.org](mailto:Outreach@MassMasterGardeners.org).



**Why guess? Test!** Get your soil pH tested - for free!

- Check back in the spring for our soil testing clinics: [Soil Testing Calendar](#).

- To request an MMGA Soil Testing event for your organization's event, contact [SoilTesting@MassMasterGardeners.org](mailto:SoilTesting@MassMasterGardeners.org).

## ***Year-round MMGA Learning Resources***

**Have a plant problem?** Email our volunteers your questions...and they'll get back to you. Please include your name, phone number, and as much detail as possible, including photos.

- **Massachusetts Horticultural Society:**  
[MHSHelpline@MassMasterGardeners.org](mailto:MHSHelpline@MassMasterGardeners.org)
- **New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill :**  
[Hortline@NEBG.org](mailto:Hortline@NEBG.org)

**Speaker's Bureau:** If you're a member of a garden club or other organization, check out our lecture topics [here](#). If you need information on how to schedule a talk for your group, contact our Speakers Bureau Manager at [Speakers@MassMasterGardeners.org](mailto:Speakers@MassMasterGardeners.org).

## ***Credits***

### **Featured Articles & Columns**

- Featured MMGA Garden, by Dianne Plantamura, LMG
- Featured Monthly How-To, by Sandy Parker, LMG
- Monthly Native Shrub, by Hadley Berkowitz, PMG
- Monthly Gardening Tip, by Kathy Gariepy, LMG

### **Photos (in order of appearance)**

- Winter light, by Lynne Larson, PMG
- Veasy Park, all photos, by Dianne Plantamura, LMG
- Ecosystem diagram by Sandy Parker, LMG
- Blue Trees, by Peabody Essex Museum
- “Field Work” (Grasses), by Jasmine Gutbrod (artist)
- Pollinator habitat sign from Xerces Society
- Three Images: Lung Tree by Phu Nguyen; Chart by Roundup.org; Tree stump, by 8Billiontrees.org
- Hosta with rabbit sign, by Sandy Parker, LMG
- Top rain barrel, by Renee Brennan
- Bottom rain barrel, source unknown
- Hypericum prolificum (three pictures), by Native Plant Trust/Go Botany
- Nuese quote, by Danielle Nierenberg, Food Tank
- How-To photos, including frost on sage, catalogs, and gardens, by Kathy Gariepy, LMG
- Colorful garden, by Royal Horticultural Society, Garden Harlow Carr
- Whimsical tree garden/winter walks, by Royal Horticultural Society

### **Editorial Staff**

- Executive Editor: Susan Cormier, SPMG
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- Copywriters: Madeline Chamberlain, PMG, and Carolyn Alessi, CMG
- Circulation: Nancy Kedersha, PMG



## *Who We Are*

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is an independent non-profit organization whose mission is to share research-based horticultural knowledge and experience with the public. We meet that goal through Master Gardener Certification, outreach, education, volunteering, and public gardening programs for the advancement of best practices in sustainable, regenerative horticulture.



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