

Newsday

# LIlife

## VIRTUALLY gardening

GREEN THUMBS ON  
LI PIVOT THEIR  
COMMUNITY ONLINE **E2**

act**2** | Women's podcast spreads message of empowerment **E15**



## In this issue

Believe it or not, it's time to think about spring gardening — and this week's cover story can help you get started.

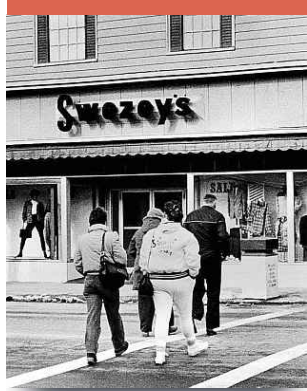
In Act 2, two spunky older Long Islanders take on women's empowerment in a new podcast.

Meanwhile, today's Faith calendar lists in-person and virtual events, and the Senior calendar continues to offer virtual events you can engage online.

This issue does not include the regular exploreLI Top 10 and Community Calendar; the Veterans calendar; or the Town Agenda and Police Beat. As we practice social distancing, many events and activities have been canceled.

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Nassau and Suffolk's **downtowns** give Long Island much of its identity.

**Take a look at how some of them have evolved**

[newsday.com/lidowntowns](http://newsday.com/lidowntowns)

## COVERSTORY

# GROWING NEW ROOTS



Roxanne Zimmer, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County's community horticulture specialist, created 2020's digital "Blooms in May," an experience that helped her launch this year's program.

## Pandemic leads gardeners to connect online with enthusiasts

BY JESSICA DAMIANO  
Special to Newsday

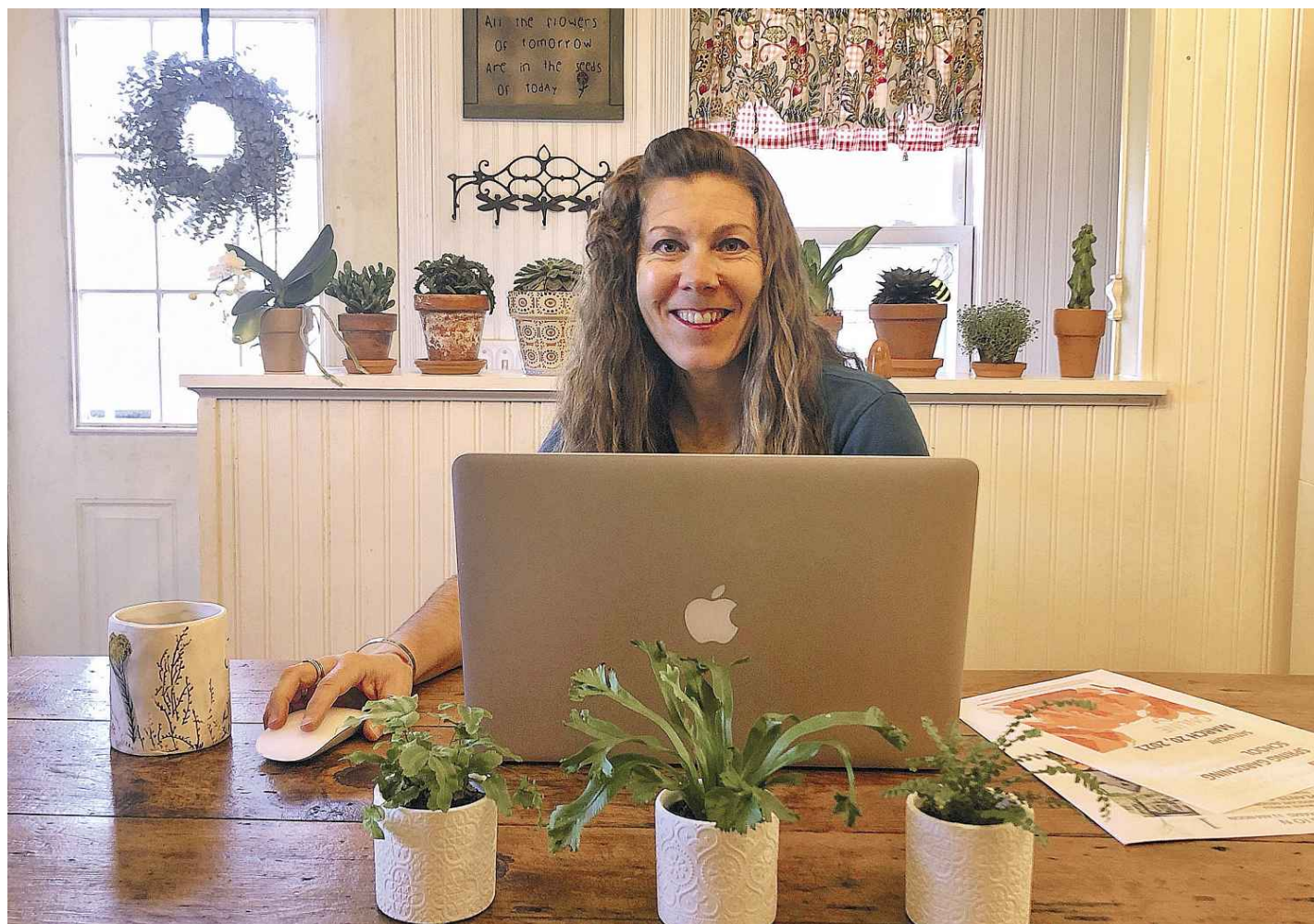
**A**s Jennifer Carlson logged into her computer on a sunny morning in January, she was itching to do some gardening — or at the least, learn about gardening and commune with like-minded folks. But, like so many events from pre-COVID times, such in-person lectures and meetings were out of reach.

Carlson, 47, a professional assistant in the biology department at Suffolk County Community College, remembered the palpable energy at the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County's annual Spring



**ON THE COVER.** Dennis Schrader, co-owner of Landcraft Environments, will be a featured speaker at the 2021 Spring Gardening School.





Avid gardener Jennifer Carlson, at home in Rocky Point, looks forward to attending the 2021 virtual Spring Gardening School.

LILY CARLSON

**The schedule for the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County's 2021 Spring Gardening School lists planned virtual speakers from Long Island, the United States and even the U.K.**

SESSION 3		SESSION 3	
SPEAKERS 2:15 PM-3:15 PM		PROGRAMS 2:15 PM-3:15 PM	
	<b>DENNIS SCHRADER</b> is a leader in plant production and design for greenhouse gardens to large-scale landscapes. Since 1992, he and Bill Smith have operated Landcraft Environments Ltd., a wholesale greenhouse operation.		<b>DENNIS SCHRADER</b> <b>HOT PLANTS for COOL CLIMATES</b> See why this garden with tender perennials and tropicals in the mix has been featured on Martha Stewart Living TV, HGTV, and the Today Show.
	<b>HEATHER COSTE</b> is a horticulturist managing the Four Seasons Garden and Brevoort Island at Bayard Cutting Arboretum. She has a decade of experience in the nursery trade, with a focus on native plantings and sustainable horticulture.		<b>HEATHER COSTE</b> <b>NATIVES for TOUGH PLACES</b> Which natives deliver in challenging sites? Discover the best choices for shade, sun, dry, wet conditions and deer resistance.
	<b>LARRY LEDERMAN</b> His Garden Portraits: Experiences of Natural Beauty follows award-winning Frederic Church's Olana. Other books include The Rockefeller Family Gardens and Magnificent Trees of the New York Botanical Garden.		<b>LARRY LEDERMAN</b> <b>GARDEN PORTRAITS</b> Experience beauty through the lens of an award-winning photographer. Gardens in the Hudson Valley, the Hamptons and Connecticut will delight.
	<b>LOUANN ROTHE</b> serves as vice chair of the Herb Society of America, LI Unit and a Suffolk Master Gardener. She led Master Gardeners in redesigning the Herb Garden at Suffolk County Farm.		<b>LOUANN ROTHE</b> <b>CULINARY HERBS</b> Culinary herbs are easy to grow. Whether for flavor or beauty, these herbs can be incorporated to bring sensory pleasure to a garden.
SPRING GARDENING SCHOOL		OPTIONS SESSION 3	
		FULL BLOOM PACKAGE ALL 4 PROGRAMS	
		SEEDLING PACKAGE SELECT 1 PROGRAM	

CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



RANDE DADDONA

Landcraft Environments specializes in tropical and exotic plants, including this Vanda orchid with Spanish moss.

Gardening School, long held at Riverhead Middle School. She attended twice, and as a master gardener, volunteered to chair the raffle committee. "There are so many people that are passionate about gardening on Long Island and have so many areas of expertise," she said. "It was exciting to spend time with them."

At the in-person events, Carlson perused educational

exhibits and plant clinics, browsed the plant sale and ate a boxed lunch in the school's cafeteria while enjoying camaraderie with friends, new and old. "A big highlight was the Koppert Cress demonstration," she said, recalling the tasting table set up by the Dutch-inspired grower of naturally aromatic microgreens with greenhouses in Riverhead and Cutchogue. "They had one that

made you salivate, and another that popped in your mouth. It was incredible."

Carlson also ate up other displays. "I'd go through everything at the tables because you just want to see all the different projects, get all the literature, [pick up] new seed catalogs from companies you might not have heard of," she said. "And I definitely have gone to a lot of the garden

centers that have donated to the event and found new places to shop."

The coronavirus pandemic brought most gatherings to an end about a month before last year's April 25 Spring Gardening School. The event was sold out, with classrooms at or near their 50-seat capacity, so the inclination was to reschedule the event for September. But it soon became clear to Roxanne

Zimmer, CCE's head of community horticulture, that the pandemic would necessitate an outright cancellation. So Zimmer got creative, brainstorming how to cancel without disappointing the nearly 300 registrants who'd already signed up. She asked 10 of the event's 38 scheduled speakers to record their presentations

See COVER STORY on E4

## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

**B**eyond Spring Gardening School, virtual programs for new and experienced gardeners are sprouting up on Long Island.

Nassau and Suffolk libraries are offering a plethora of online courses, most free and held via Zoom or GoToMeeting — and many are open to the public without residency requirements. Sign up online to receive a link or connection instructions and access it on your device at the appointed time.

Want to learn how to sow seeds outdoors, without a greenhouse, over winter? North Shore Library has a virtual class (on Feb. 16); Interested in "visiting" the grounds of Highclere Castle, the setting of the BBC series "Downton Abbey"? Register for a Zoom link from Northport-East Northport Library and hop online to attend (Jan. 20). Or let Volunteers for Wildlife show you how to attract birds to your backyard via Middle Country Public Library's Zoom meeting (Feb. 27). And if wanderlust is getting the best of you, Deer Park Library is offering "Travel Tuesday: Garden Getaways," which will help you discover more than 35 beautiful public gardens to visit in the metropolitan area.

Other programs include "The Magic of Compost," "How Plants Help with Social Distancing and Help Clean the Air," "Stories from the Garden," "Bay-Friendly Yards," "Going Native," "Lawn and Landscape for the Future" and more — a virtual (literally!) treasure trove of classes presented by local experts.

For more information, visit [newsday.li/OnlineGardening](https://newsday.li/OnlineGardening).

— JESSICA DAMIANO





RANDEE DADDONA

Dennis Schrader, seen tending plants at Landcraft Environments, says of the Spring Gardening School, "If you can't physically be there doing things, it's the next best thing."

# Reaching a wider audience

## COVER STORY from E2

and repackaged them as "Blooms in May," a digital program she created to replace Spring Gardening School.

"I'd never done a Zoom before," Zimmer said, "but I'd been a teacher for most of my career, so I realized the ability of this new platform and that joining visually compelling content with dynamic speakers would make [it] a success."

### THE SILVER LINING

Carlson, for one, appreciated Zimmer's ingenuity. The 2020 virtual event "was really neat because it allowed me to do all of the courses I was interested in during a time when I was suffering from cabin fever. The pandemic was new, and I was experiencing a total disruption in my life, and anxiety. We

didn't even know if the stores would be open or if we'd be able to buy plants. We just stayed home, all trying to flatten the curve," she said. The virtual program "was a reprieve from all that daily stress that broke the monotony and allowed me to feel some happiness."

This year, Zimmer, armed with that experience, decided early to conduct a virtual Spring Gardening School. Foreseeing in late October that an in-person event would not be possible in 2021, she began planning. "I wanted it to be special," she said. "It was important to have a keynote of renown delivering a message that would resonate with homeowners [and be] something they could put into practice."

Like many in the gardening community, Zimmer knew of



ANN-MARIE POWELL

**U.K. garden designer Ann-Marie Powell aims to inspire confidence in fellow gardeners.**

Doug Tallamy's work and "the importance of his contribution," she said, adding that she simply sent a cold email asking the University of Delaware insect ecology professor, a driving force of the burgeoning native plants movement, to

deliver the keynote. "His calendar was free and he said, 'sure, I'll come.'"

One silver lining of a virtual event is access to faraway experts, like Tallamy. Zimmer conceded that "we only have the lineup that we do because it is virtual."

Although not initially enamored with virtual platforms, Tallamy, too, has come to appreciate their advantages. "You don't have to travel and you can reach a lot more people," he said, noting that since the pandemic he's been getting three or four speaking requests a day. "I presented to 1,700 people through the Florida Audubon a few months ago. I'll never get that in person."

In addition to 105 research papers, Tallamy authored the groundbreaking 2007 book, "Bringing Nature Home" (Tim-

ber Press), credited with mobilizing a cavalry of gardeners to embrace the mission to support pollinators and other wildlife. Its driving message? Simply that "plant choice matters," Tallamy said. "The plants that we choose to landscape our properties, [should] be determined by how much life can live there."

"When I wrote that [book], we didn't have the insect decline we're seeing now. All these headlines now are supporting what I was saying in 2007," Tallamy said. "The important thing is you can do something about it. ... You get to control whether you have chickadees or titmice in your yard by what you plant," he said, adding that "this crisis needs to have a grassroots solution."

His keynote address, which





## SPRING GARDENING SCHOOL

SATURDAY  
MARCH 20, 2021  
ONLINE



CCE SUFFOLK COUNTY

## SPRING GARDENING SCHOOL

The Cornell Cooperative Extension's Spring Gardening School will be held live via Zoom on March 20, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. (it will be available for viewing through April 20). Two packages are available: "Full Bloom" and "Seedling." To register, visit [weblink.donorperfect.com/SGS](http://weblink.donorperfect.com/SGS).

Those who register by Feb. 15 will receive coupons for savings at the master gardener bulb sale, and all registrants will automatically be entered to win door prizes, including gardening tools and gift certificates.

Programs include: "Plants, People, Place" (Ann-Marie Powell); "Gardening for the Birds" (Nancy Gilbert); "Reduce the Lawn" (Tamson Yeh); "Going Native" (Ann Raver); "Ornamental Woodies" (Mina Vescera); "Benefits of Bees" (Noah Wilson-Rich); "Edible Landscapes" (Michael Veracka); "Hot Plants for Cool Climates" (Dennis Schrader); "Natives for Tough Places" (Heather Coste); "Garden Portraits" (Larry Lederman); and "Culinary Herbs" (Louann Rothe).

— JESSICA DAMIANO

he plans to give from home, "upstairs in my little Zoom room, sitting at a little table next to my bed," aims not only to motivate and inspire but to instruct that grassroots movement. Based on his latest book, "Nature's Best Hope," published last year by Timber Press, Tallamy's presentation will make a case for replacing



RANDEE DADDONA

In the Spring Gardening School program "Hot Plants for Cool Gardens," Dennis Schrader will reveal how he and his partner, Bill Smith, transformed a 14-acre abandoned farm into a tropical paradise in Mattituck.



RANDEE DADDONA

**Vriesea splendens, "Zebra bromeliad," native to South America, is among the exotic plants at Landcraft Environments in Mattituck.**

typical suburban, lawn-centric landscapes with wildlife habitats. "Where we are in this whole native plant movement is still brand new to a lot of people, and they don't understand the role they can play. Everybody has to be a good steward of the planet; you don't get a pass on this." The address aims to show people "how you do it."

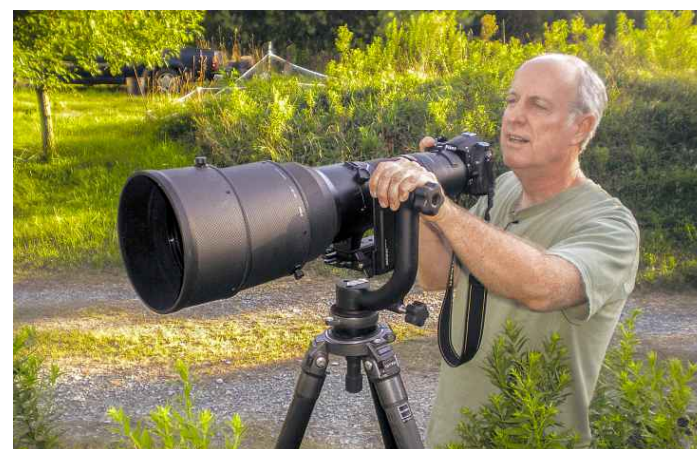
Tallamy's third book, "The Nature of Oaks" (Timber Press), is set to hit bookstores March 30.

Zimmer expects the event will draw "more folks who live nearby, master gardeners from all over the country, and people in other environmental and civic groups who might not

have otherwise attended but who are interested in the message that Doug Tallamy will share with us."

### VARIED PROGRAMS

And if crossing state lines weren't impressive enough, Royal Horticulture Society Gold Medal garden designer Ann-Marie Powell will present "Plants, People, Place: Design an Extraordinary Space," from across the pond. An author, journalist and television personality who's appeared on and judged several UK gardening-makeover shows, Powell will share her philosophy for plant selection in various landscapes, discussing key design elements from her



CINDY TALLAMY

**Doug Tallamy, author of the 2007 book "Bringing Nature Home," will be the keynote speaker at the Spring Gardening School.**

Hampshire home in the English countryside.

Powell said she aims to inspire confidence in gardeners, particularly confidence with experimentation. "You could want a very tranquil garden with evergreens or one that makes you feel alive with lots of color, and plant selection is key, from the big trees to the teeny, tiny crevice-fillers," she said.

Though Powell has given presentations around her native UK and in Poland, she said Spring Gardening School will be her first in America. "The world is getting smaller because of lockdown," she said. "We're craving connection, and this is a wonderful opportunity

to reach out and find someone with commonality."

Powell spent 100 days at the beginning of the pandemic fostering such a community around the world. Though at first panicked about her business and children, Powell said she realized she had been neglecting her own garden, so she began channeling her stress and boredom into its improvement.

Powell started the @myreal-garden Instagram page to document her progress over those 100 days, posting daily live videos as she shopped at a garden center, planted and tended her plot. Visitors

See COVER STORY on E6





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LANDEE DADDONA

Exotic plants fill a greenhouse at Landcraft Environments in Mattituck.

## Finding a wider world

COVER STORY from E4

shared their gardens "from as far away as Sweden and France," she said, "and when a couple came on and said, 'we're from Detroit,' I almost fell out of my chair." Before long, people from around the world, "diverse in every way possible," were sharing "stories that just made you melt about how gardening was getting them through."

Wanting to "showcase this community sharing spirit" and help others, Powell brainstormed with a friend and decided to compile the photos and stories in a book, raising money for production costs on the crowdfunding website Indiegogo. A portion of the proceeds will go to Greenfingers, a charity that creates "magical gardens" for children in UK hospices.

"My Real Garden" (Orphans Publishing) will be released in the UK on March 23 — the anniversary of Powell going live on Instagram, with a U.S. release to follow.

In addition to these nationally and internationally known horticultural superstars, attendees will get the expertise of 11 local gardening luminaries. CCE master gardeners and educators, horticulturists, designers, garden writers (including my program "Tomatomania!"), and even a bee expert will inform, educate and share tips for success for home gardeners to implement on their own.

### CLOSER TO HOME

Among them, Dennis Schrader, co-owner of Landcraft Environments, a wholesale greenhouse nursery in Mattituck that specializes in exotic and unusual tropical and tender plants, will reveal how he and his partner, Bill Smith, transformed a 14-acre abandoned farm into a tropical paradise in "Hot Plants for Cool Gardens." Schrader, who has been featured on Martha Stewart Living TV, HGTV and the "Today" show, said attendees can expect a virtual "walk through the garden, [as well as insight into] the

history of how we developed it over stages and how it looks at different times of year."

As a side note, that garden will soon be open to the public. Last year, Schrader and Smith established a nonprofit foundation to oversee its establishment as a 14-acre public garden slated to open in spring. The Landcraft Garden Foundation will feature 4 acres of lush gardens, 10 acres of nature trails, a plant sale area, gift shop and sculptures; a series of workshops is also planned. Consider Schrader's presentation a sneak peek, with plenty of take-home inspiration.

There will be no lunchtime camaraderie at the 2021 Spring Gardening School, but another reality of in-person attendance — the dreaded course closeout — won't be making an appearance, either. With no classroom-capacity limits, registrants are assured a spot in their first-choice courses. And although classes will be held live, one needn't dedicate an entire day to the event. Registrants can watch the presentations in real time or watch (and revisit) the recordings on a dedicated webpage during the following month.

After browsing this year's offerings, Carlson decided to register for "Going Native," "Natives for Tough Places," "Gardening for Birds" and "Reducing the Lawn."

"I'm really excited about the keynote speaker. He's one of the hottest people in the gardening world at this point," she said.

"The one thing about Spring Gardening School that people [might not] realize until they attend is how inspiring and exciting it is," Carlson said. "It makes gardening approachable because they're giving you hints, you're learning things, and it's fun."

Virtual programs are good for education, socializing and "feeling a part of something," added Landcraft Environments' Schrader, who admits to having enjoyed his share of Zoom cocktail parties. "If you can't physically be there doing things, it's the next best thing."