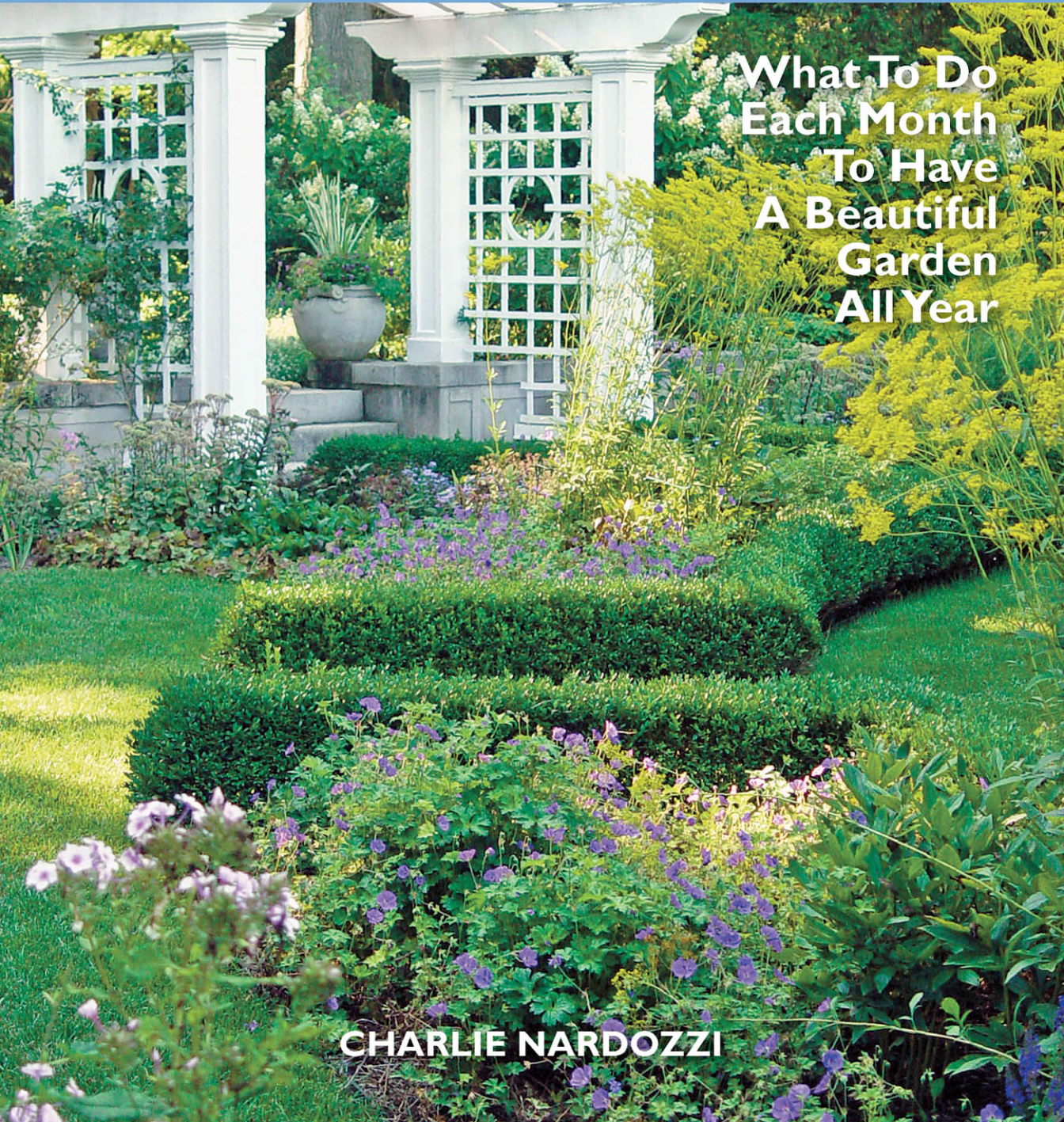


COOL SPRINGS PRESS

MONTH-BY-MONTH GARDENING NEW ENGLAND

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont



**What To Do
Each Month
To Have
A Beautiful
Garden
All Year**

CHARLIE NARDOZZI



MONTH-BY-MONTH GARDENING

NEW ENGLAND



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MONTH-BY-MONTH GARDENING

NEW ENGLAND

**What to Do Each Month to Have
a Beautiful Garden All Year**

CHARLIE NARDOZZI



COOL
SPRINGS
PRESS

Home and Garden Experts™

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Dedication

To all the Master Gardeners, Garden Club members, and home gardeners in New England who take the time to help other gardeners be more successful.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to acknowledge the Master Gardener organizations and Extension Services in each New England state (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). Their websites are filled with specific information on gardening in these areas, including pest controls, how-to information, and monthly calendars.

I'd also like to thank Billie Brownell, Tracy Stanley, Brad Springer, and the whole Cool Springs Press staff for once again making this book a straightforward and clear process. Thanks also to the horticulture editor, Katie Elzer-Peters, for her care and expertise. It helps to have a plan, and Cool Springs Press has a good one for this book.

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Introduction



Welcome to gardening in New England. If you are new to gardening or new to gardening in New England, you'll see that our climate, soil, and seasons can be very conducive to amazing gardens. We seem to have just the right amount of sun, rain, and warm temperatures to grow beautiful annual and perennial flower gardens, vegetables, berries, bulbs, shrubs, and trees.

We all know a beautiful garden and landscape when we see one, but keeping it looking good may be a mystery. Whether you inherited an established landscape and garden when you purchased your home or condo or you've been building the gardens yourself, proper maintenance is essential. I often feel sad when I see a beautifully designed flower garden, shrub border, or edible garden looking overgrown, messy, and unkempt because the owners didn't have the time or knowledge to maintain it. As a garden consultant, that's the number-one issue I see in home landscapes. How do you maintain and improve what you have and keep it looking good? While I can't help you find more time in your day to weed, fertilize, prune, and water, I can help you know what to do when in your garden. I also can take you step by step through how to do some of the basic chores in the landscape, such as pruning shrubs, controlling pests, and planting a tree.

That's the purpose of this book. This month-by-month guide arms you with the information you'll need to improve upon your existing landscape, and more importantly, maintain it well. It's always surprising that once you have a plan for what to do when, your garden maintenance doesn't feel so overwhelming. Also, the better organized you are, the less time your yard and garden will take to maintain.

INTRODUCTION

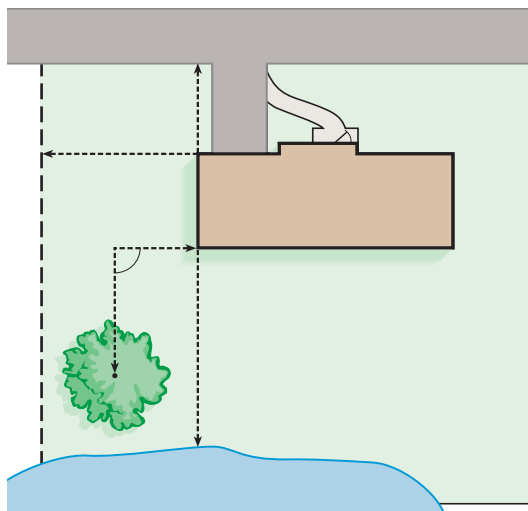
DIVERSE GEOGRAPHY

Geographically, New England isn't that large when compared to other parts of the country, but it is diverse. The coastal areas are moderated by the Atlantic Ocean. This makes for less severe cold in winter and a longer growing season. However, the down side of coastal gardening is that sometimes poor soil, salt spray, harsh winds, and storms wreak havoc on plants. The rivers of New England are historic and were used by Native Americans and early settlers as transportation highways and food sources. It's along the Connecticut, Merrimack, and Kennebec and many other, smaller waterways that the best soils for growing are often found. But these rivers can quickly swell in spring, causing flooding and damage. The mountain areas, such as the Green Mountains of Vermont, White Mountains of New Hampshire, and inland areas of Maine, have a short growing season with long, cold winters. New Englanders are traditionally hardy people, so even here we scratch out some amazing gardens. In fact, clients of mine in Stowe, Vermont (a mountain ski community), have amazing perennial and annual flowers gardens even with their three-month-long growing season.

PLAN

Every garden needs a well-thought-out plan. Start with a map of what you have in your yard, including permanent structures such as the house, garage, fences, rocks, walls, and large trees. Then dream a little. Think about the potential uses for various parts of your yard and the plants that would be best suited there. Consider the light, water, soil, and space requirements of your plants. Winter is a good time to put all this information down on paper and get ready to act come spring.

It's also a time to plan on changes to existing gardens based on your notes from the summer and fall. But before you start moving and digging, remember the soil. The soil is the foundation of your garden, and having healthy, fertile soil will reduce overall maintenance. With healthy soil you'll grow stronger plants that will better withstand insect, disease, and animal attacks and produce fruits and blooms in more abundance. While this book is filled with information on how



■ *Make a sketch of your yard showing the location of major permanent features such as the house, driveway, walkway, road, large trees, walls, and fences. You can add in your garden beds later.*

to plant, weed, fertilize, water, prune, and problem solve, always start with making better soil.

It's good to know your type of soil to get started. Soils in New England range from sand to clay. Sand has few nutrients and is well drained, while clay is usually nutrient rich but doesn't drain water well. The solution to make both of these soils healthier is organic matter. Organic matter sources come in many forms, such as hay, straw, untreated grass clippings, manure, shredded bark, leaves, peat moss, and compost. These break down into nutrient-rich humus. Organic matter not only makes sandy soils hold more water and nutrients and clay soil easier to work, it feeds the soil microbial life. Soil microbes are important for creating an ecological balance in the soil and in your garden. A soil with a broad range of soil microbes can make water and nutrients more readily available to your plants and help ward off insect and disease attacks.

PLANT

Once you have your soil-building plan in place, it's time to turn your attention to the plants. A wide range of plants can grow in New England. With hardiness zones ranging from 7 along the southern

HERE'S HOW

TO DETERMINE YOUR SOIL TYPE



1

■ Take a handful of soil and dampen it with water until it is moldable, almost like moist putty.



2

■ Roll the soil into a ball, as if working with cookie dough.



3

■ Using your thumb and forefinger, gently press the soil until the ball begins to roll out of your closed hand. The ribbon will begin to form, and will eventually break under its own weight. If the soil crumbles and doesn't form a ribbon at all, you have sandy soil.



4

■ If a ribbon more than 1 inch long forms before it breaks, you have silty soil. If a ribbon 2–3 inches long forms before it breaks, you have clay soil.

New England shore to 3 in the mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire, the spectrum of shrubs, trees, and perennial flowers is broad.

When selecting perennial plants, shrubs, and trees for your yard always remember the “right plant for the right place” rule. Understand the ultimate size and shape of the plant and if it will fit in your location. Think about the sun and soil requirements. Planting the right plant in the right place will save you many headaches down the road.

For annual flowers, herbs, and vegetables, timing is *everything*. Planting these too soon into cold, wet soil can lead to rotting seeds and transplants. Waiting too late during our sometimes short summers can mean crops won't mature or flower much before frost. You can extend the season with frost protection and plastics to heat the soil, but getting plants out at the right time is essential.

A good way to minimize problems with growing plants in the wrong location, dealing with pests

INTRODUCTION



■ When planting a tree, dig a hole that is two or three times the diameter of the rootball or container and just as deep.

on plants, and having plants not survive is to grow native plants. I like to think of native plants as those plants indigenous or naturalized to a given area over a long period of time. This includes plants that have grown in an area for thousands of years and ones that have naturalized in New England over the last few centuries. The key is that native plants have developed a balance with other plants, insects, and animals in the ecosystem. They fill a niche for wildlife and insect life without crowding out other plants.

The native plant movement is going strong in New England, and many garden centers and nurseries promote growing natives because they're good for the ecological habitat and easy to maintain. These are plants that you know won't get out of hand in your yard, and many are very attractive additions.

Whatever perennial flower, shrub, or tree you plant, dig a large enough hole to accommodate the roots. The hole should be two to three times wider than the rootball and as deep. Use the native soil to fill the hole. This will encourage the roots to get established faster and get the tree off to a good start.

CARE

It would be nice if all the flowers, vegetables, bulbs, trees, and shrubs that you just planted would fend for themselves. While some plants *are* lower maintenance than others, all will benefit from some care. Beside the watering, fertilizing, and pest-control techniques I mention in these sections and in each monthly chapter, mulching is a good way to reduce work and keep your plants healthy. Organic mulches such as straw, bark, and wood chips reduce the amount of weeding and watering, while slowly decomposing to provide nutrients for your plants. Even crushed stone works to prevent weed growth and watering, even though it doesn't add organic matter to the soil.

Pruning is *essential* for some plants to produce the best flowers and fruits. Annual flowers benefit from deadheading the spent blossoms. Not only do they look better, but the snipping also encourages more flowering. Fruit bushes and trees need annual pruning to keep their shape and prevent overcrowding. This will result in better production. Ornamental trees and shrubs can always benefit from the removal of dead, diseased, and broken branches each spring to help keep the plant healthy.

Dividing overcrowded perennial plants and harvesting vegetables promptly help keep the flowers and veggies coming. By dividing perennials, such as iris and daylilies, you can create more plants for yourself and friends. With many vegetables, the more you pick, the more they will produce, so staying on top of harvesting is key to optimum production.

WATER

There's nothing worse than working hard to plant your garden only to have it dry up with the first summer drought. Although New England tends to

HERE'S HOW

TO DIVIDE PLANTS



■ Dig up the plant that you want to divide. Dig all the way around the plant clump, about 4 inches away from the edge of the plant. If you water the plants you're planning to dig up and divide the night before you're dividing them, they'll be easier to dig up.



■ To divide with two forks, put the forks back to back in the center of the plant clump, push both down, and pry apart.



■ Divide the plant with either a spade or two gardening forks. Gardening forks work well for plants like daylilies because they have relatively small roots. Hostas have large roots, and ornamental grasses are often so dense that it is impossible to pry pieces of the plant apart with the forks, so you might have to use a spade to chop the plant apart.



■ Water new plants thoroughly after planting so the rootball is well-soaked.

get plenty of rain to water our landscapes, it may not come when we want it or in the quantities we need. Young transplants and newly planted shrubs and trees especially need a constant supply of water to survive.

Check young transplants and germinating seeds almost daily to make sure the soil stays moist. Deeply water perennials, shrubs, and trees so the moisture seeps 6 to 8 inches into the ground.

INTRODUCTION

This will encourage deeper rooting and lessen the chance of the plant succumbing to drought. Use mulches to conserve moisture on all landscape plants and as a way to prevent weeds from competing with your plants for water.

FERTILIZE

Starting with healthy soil is essential to a productive garden, but sometimes you'll find the need to add fertilizer. Before you automatically add any fertilizer, you should do a soil test in spring or fall. This test will give you a snapshot of what's lacking in your soil and what to do to correct the deficiency. Perform a separate soil test for each type of garden or planting. Soil labs mentioned in the appendix offer testing services for our region.

For healthy plants growing in healthy soils, adding a layer of compost in spring may be enough to keep them growing strong. For fast-growing, more demanding annual flowers, vegetables, and roses, adding an organic balanced fertilizer, such as 5-5-5, early in the growing season helps give them a boost. These plants may need additional doses of fertilizer, or a sidedressing, during the spring and summer to keep them flowering and producing fruits.



■ Choose a fertilizer that is appropriate for your plant. Organic types are slow-release and healthier for the plant and soil.

Organic fertilizers are preferred in most cases because they release nutrients slowly. This allows the plants to take up the food as needed and reduces the risk of some nutrients leaching out to pollute waterways.

Sometimes young plants will need a boost of a specific nutrient to get them growing strong. Nitrogen is a key chemical to help keep leaves green and vibrant. A young struggling seedling or transplant that has pale-colored leaves may need a dose of a soluble nitrogen fertilizer, such as fish emulsion, to just give it a boost.

PROBLEM-SOLVE

While there can be many problems in the garden, most of us think of weeds and pests as our biggest concerns.

Many plants in New England are not natives. These have arrived on purpose or by accident. While most exotics have adapted to our climate and soils without harming the native vegetation, some have become a problem and are considered weeds. Some plants, such as goutweed or bishop weed (*Aegopodium*), were originally brought here as ornamental plants. Unfortunately, these plants were too happy in New England, and without any natural insect and disease predators to keep them in check, they have spread to take over gardens and forests. When this happens, the exotic plant is now considered an invasive weed. Some invasives continue to be spread inadvertently by people. The water weed, Eurasian water milfoil, is spread when boaters go from pond to pond with their boats, unknowingly bringing pieces of the plant along.

Some invasives are obvious in our New England gardens and woods. For years I've driven one of the major north-south interstates in New England (I-91), and once I reach Massachusetts and Connecticut from Vermont I start seeing signs of Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*). This vine will grow aggressively to cover, choke, and kill healthy trees. I've seen 70-foot-tall trees along the highway swallowed up by bittersweet vines. For an extensive list of invasive plants that might be in



■ *Avoid planting invasive plants, such as Oriental bittersweet, in your yard. It can quickly become a weed that will last for years.*

your yard and need to be removed, check the state-by-state resources in the appendix.

Some of these invasive weeds are obvious, while others are less conspicuous. Laws in some states, such as Connecticut, prohibit the sale of plants on the invasive list, but you still should be careful not to unknowingly introduce an invasive into your yard from a neighborhood plant swap or a division from a friend or family member. Not only will it be harmful to your garden environment, you may be battling it for years to come.

The tricky part about controlling invasives is they can spread easily by roots or seeds. Herbicides sprayed in spring and summer can provide some relief and are one of the few places I can see using them to combat a real problem area. Otherwise, you'll have to be diligent about hand weeding, mowing, and uprooting the invasives wherever they're found.

While invasive weeds are pests in New England, most gardeners are more concerned with controlling insects, diseases, and animals that can make a hard-worked garden look like a battlefield. In this book, I cover what pests to watch for when and on which plants. This is where some education really helps in your work to have a healthy garden. Identifying the pest and knowing its habits will help you prevent damage or minimize it.

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

I'm an organic gardener, and most of the recommendations in this book reflect that fact. I like to follow the integrated pest management (IPM) approach to controlling pests. In this approach, you first make sure you're growing the right plants in the right places on healthy soil. Once pests arise, IPM strategies lead you through the least-invasive practices. Spraying pesticides of any kind, organic or not, is always a last resort. Here are some of the steps of IPM to follow.

KEEP PLANTS HEALTHY

Just like humans, when plants are healthy they're less likely to succumb to insect and disease attacks. Proper watering, fertilizing, weeding, and mulching, as well as healthy soil conditions and placement in the right light levels, will ensure that your plants grow strong. Also, growing plants



■ *Encourage beneficial insects, such as ladybugs, into your yard by growing a diverse selection of plants.*



■ *Praying mantis is a natural predator of many insects in the garden.*

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■ *Be on the lookout for exotic invasive insects such as the Asian longhorned beetle. This beetle has been found in the New England region and is devastating to maples and many hardwood trees if it's not controlled.*

that are hardy and adapted to your part of New England and ones that fit in the space without overcrowding will also lessen the chances of pests causing serious damage. Look for varieties with specific insect and disease resistance to reduce the need for further pest controls. Remove dead, diseased, and insect-ridden plants when you find them to prevent their spread.

Growing a variety of different types of plants also helps create an ecological system that will take care of itself. Mix and match vegetables, herbs, flowers, shrubs, and trees together in the landscape. The greater the variety of plant types, the less likely your garden will be overrun with pests. This should include having water sources and shelter nearby for beneficial insects and creatures such as frogs and birds.

IDENTIFY THE PESTS

Not all insects and diseases are considered pests. In fact, the vast majority of insects and diseases are either neutral or beneficial toward your plants. The first step is to properly identify the problem. Some plant problems aren't even caused by pests. Damage may be from hail, frost, wind, water, or even herbicide drift if you live near a farm. The insect you see on leaves may not be the culprit causing the damage. For example, slugs will often eat holes in hosta leaves when the plant is young. As the leaf grows, so does the hole. If you find

a beetle on the adult leaf with a large hole, you might think the beetle is eating the leaves, but chances are the damage was caused days ago by the slug. Using resources such as the Internet and the Master Gardener organizations in your area, you can properly identify the damage and know if it's insect, disease, or animal related.

While many pests, such as Japanese beetles, are annual problems in the garden, new exotic pests have invaded our region in recent years and are really cause for concern. The Asian longhorned beetle has killed thousands of maple, elm, willow, birch, and other hardwood trees from the Great Lakes to New England. In our region it is presently confined to areas in Massachusetts and is being actively monitored to reduce its spread. The emerald ash borer is another exotic, invasive tree insect that kills a variety of ash trees in our forests and landscapes. It found its way into New England and has spread to Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. Like the Asian longhorned beetle, it has no natural predators and so can quickly spread from tree to tree, killing this important forest and landscape tree. The hemlock woolly adelgid is a pest of hemlock trees and is presently in all New England states, reducing wild and planted stands of this beautiful evergreen tree. By carefully monitoring your trees and being able to properly identify these insects you can help alert state authorities about these pests to help slow their spread.

MECHANICAL CONTROLS

Once you know the pest, you can start controlling it. The best control is prevention. By blocking insects from laying eggs, diseases from spreading from leaf to leaf, or animals from chewing on branches, you will be able to stop damage before it becomes a problem. In this book, I talk about floating row covers, mulches, spacing plants properly, netting, fencing, and repellent sprays as ways to prevent damage.

The other aspect of mechanical controls is handpicking. By continually monitoring your plants you will be able to identify eggs and young stages of insects and early signs of diseases. Then you can crush eggs, handpick young insects, and pick off diseased leaves before they start spreading.

You can also use traps, such as apple maggot traps or the yellow sticky cards that lure and trap whiteflies and aphids, to reduce the population of specific, harmful insects.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROLS

Mother Nature has many ways to keep your garden pests in check. Beneficial insects and animals thrive in a healthy organic garden so no one pest can get out of control. You can help this process by creating habitats for beneficials to live. For example, placing an upside-down, broken clay pot in a garden provides a nice hiding place for frogs and toads. They *love* to eat insects and slugs.

You can go a step further for pests that are getting out of hand. Biological sprays have become that latest trend in pest controls. These sprays use naturally occurring bacteria to control insects and fungus. They are less disruptive to the environment and are safe for pests and children. *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is probably the most common type. There are forms of Bt that kill cabbageworms, Colorado potato beetles, fungus gnats, and mosquito larvae. There is even research on a form of Bt that will kill Japanese beetle grubs.

Bacillus subtilis is a type of bacteria that attacks common fungal diseases such as blackspot on roses,

blight on tomatoes, and scab on apples. When looking for sprays, start with these.

ORGANIC SPRAYS

The final line of defense should be an organic spray. Insecticidal, soap, Neem oil, diatomaceous earth, kaolin clay, horticultural oil, acetic acid (weed control), and pyrethrum are some of the organic sprays available. Be aware that even though these are organic, they still kill, sometimes indiscriminately, so use them cautiously. Spray on calm days, following the label directions.

Some sprays, such as pyrethrum and spinosad, are toxic to bees and should not be sprayed on plants in bloom. It's best to spray these later in the day, when bees are less active. Others, such as, acetic acid, can be harmful to frogs and toads and should mostly be used to spot-treat weeds on patio and decks. With careful use, sprays can be just one of the tools in your garden basket to curb an out-of-control infestation.

Just knowing all these tasks isn't enough. The key is to know when to do them. When to water, when to prune, when to look for pests . . . that's what this book is all about. By knowing how and when to do these gardening tasks you'll be able to be most effective with the least amount of work.



■ *New England is known for its magnificent fall foliage color.*

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

New England Month-by-Month Gardening is a handbook to help you know what to do when in your garden, every month of the year. It's a great companion to another book of mine, *New England Getting Started Garden Guide* (Cool Springs Press, 2014). This book provides more than just reminders, though. It has recommendations for types and varieties of plants and many step-by-step how-tos to guide you through some of the more common maintenance topics.

I've tried to make this pretty simple and straightforward. Each month is broken into six task categories. These are Plan, Plant, Care, Water, Fertilize, and Problem-Solve. Within each of these tasks are plant categories, which include Annuals, Bulbs, Edibles, Lawns & Groundcovers, Perennials & Vines, Roses, Shrubs, and Trees. The tasks that are important to perform for each of these types of plants are then explained for that month. Some months won't have any tasks to do, so that category will be blank.

Scattered throughout the book are Here's How sections that will help you dig a little deeper into how to do the tasks recommended for that month. Some of the Here's How topics include pruning a shrub, planting a container tree or shrub, building a raised bed, seeding a lawn, and planting bulbs. And there's so much more.

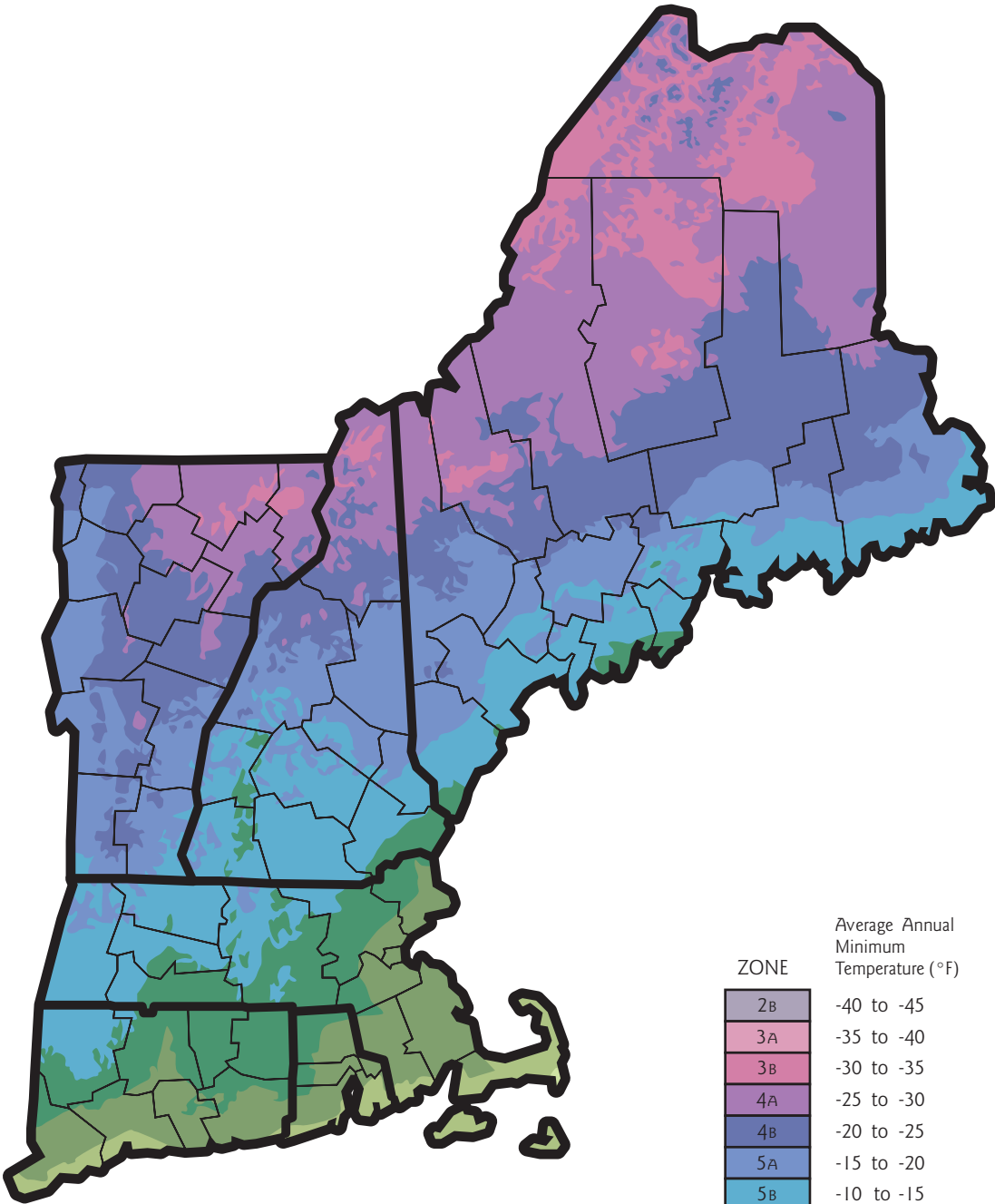
So, let's get started taking care of and improving your yard and garden.

USDA HARDINESS ZONE MAP

The USDA Hardiness Zone Map gives gardeners a key tool for selecting hardy plants in their region. It's based on the *average* annual minimum temperatures during a thirty-year period in the past, not the lowest temperature that has ever occurred in the past or might occur in the future. Therefore, it should be used as a guide, not the absolute final word about which perennial, shrub, or tree is hardy in your area. Other factors that will contribute to plant hardiness are wind exposure, soil, sun, and the age of the plant.

The USDA hardiness zones were recently changed to reflect the warming climate. Many zone designations shifted northward because of warmer conditions of the last thirty years. This has tempted gardeners to grow more tender plants in their area, but it's important to remember that the hardiness zones are only the *average* winter minimum temperatures. There are sure to be winters that will be colder than the average and may harm your plants.

Microclimates can be created that will protect plants so more tender species can grow in your area. A microclimate is any area that provides a plant with protection from the cold or enhances the accumulation of heat. Some examples are a building or wall that blocks cold north and west winds in winter, or a courtyard that has a southern exposure so it stays warmer in winter from retained heat.



ZONE	Average Annual Minimum Temperature (°F)
2B	-40 to -45
3A	-35 to -40
3B	-30 to -35
4A	-25 to -30
4B	-20 to -25
5A	-15 to -20
5B	-10 to -15
6A	-5 to -10
6B	0 to -5
7A	5 to 0
7B	10 to 5
8A	15 to 10
8B	20 to 15
9A	25 to 20

January

