



Protecting Birds And The Fair is Back!

Even though they may meander a bit, my blogs usually address just one topic. This month, though, I want to address two very different subjects. One is serious, while the other is fun and upbeat. I'll discuss the first up front; otherwise, I might lose some readers before you reach the end of the blog.

Something is killing our songbirds. Across large segments of the country, young fledglings are dying of a mysterious, as-yet-identified ailment. It may be bacterial, or possibly viral. It could be caused by a fungus; surely I'm not the only gardener who's found patches of mushrooms all over the yard in this exceptionally humid, raining summer. It could be that the level of pesticides in our environment has reached a tipping point, and I implore you: if you haven't already stopped using glyphosphate-based pesticides like Roundup, please, please stop now. (Glyphosphates have been banned in many countries for years, but the U.S. lags woefully.) Whatever the problem is, it's causing apparently neurological damage, including blindness, which is a horrible way for young songbirds to die. No "perfect" lawn or garden is worth such a devastating loss.

What can you do about it? Besides avoiding pesticides, you can help by temporarily emptying out your bird feeders and bird baths. It's not known whether the problem is contagious, but, out of caution, birds need to practice social distancing right now. And if it *is* contagious, they need to be foraging well apart from each other, not sharing communal food and water sources.

Don't worry that you're abandoning the birds to starvation. At this time of year, food sources are abundant, and they will manage just fine. Continue to keep the buffets closed at least through the end of summer. The Connecticut Audubon Society is closely monitoring the situation and will let us know when it's safe to resume feeding. There are some encouraging signs that the problem may be starting to lessen. Let's hope that, by the time the weather gets cold and natural sources become scarcer, we'll be able to fill up the feeders again. I'll keep you posted.

The Haddam Neck Fair is Back! We still have a month of high summer to enjoy, but it's time to start planning your horticultural entries for Labor Day Weekend. The Haddam Garden Club took on the responsibility for the Horticulture and Flowers section two years ago, and we're doing our best to make it fun and user-friendly for as many people as possible.

Horticultural entries: This is your chance to show off your gardening skills. You can enter specimens in as many classes as you like (but only one entry per class, please). Keep in mind that you want to exhibit the freshest, most perfect flowers. Choose flowers that have just barely come into full bloom, with no missing or drooping petals, no chewed-up leaves, and no evidence of disease. Don't forget to bring a vase or container, and remember: the container is part of your exhibit and can make or break your score. It should be clean, an appropriate size and color, and able to hold the blossom attractively upright. No floppy stems!

Floral design entries: Here, in particular, you should be having fun. We've tried to reshape this section to be less intimidating for beginners, and hope you'll give it a try. Our intended theme last year was based on the 400th anniversary of the landing of the Mayflower. That fair was canceled, but, since there's no law against commemorating the 401st anniversary, we decided to keep the theme. You can create a design using just Old World plants, or just New World species, or mix it up. We've added an entirely new award, the Susan Ritty Bouquet award, which is ideal when you have a mix of colors, shapes and textures to play off against each other. One entry recognizes the contributions of Native Americans, who gardened this land long before Europeans arrived. And we're hoping to receive many entries for a candles-optional Thanksgiving centerpiece, which can be as classic, whimsical, or kid-friendly as you choose.

Entries must be dropped off on Thursday, September 2. To learn more about the Horticulture and Flowers section, check exhibitors' rules, and get inspired, please go to the Fair website, [www.http://haddamneckfair.com](http://haddamneckfair.com). (As I write, the 2021 guide for exhibitors has not been posted yet, so keep checking back.) See you at the fair!