



As we approach the end of summer and the days begin to shorten and the nights become cooler, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture would like to remind gardeners and homeowners that this is the perfect time to do some landscaping around your home and/or in your community.

Attractive, healthy landscaping increases the value of your property (referred to by real estate professionals as “curb appeal”), creates a sense of well-being and quality of life, and holds several other benefits. It can create a habitat for birds and pollinators, improve air quality and soil erosion issues, and help improve the energy efficiency of your home – all through the wonderful world of plant life.

Depending on the scope of your planting project, you may wish to meet with a landscape designer and/or a landscape contractor... or you can do it yourself. One important step in the process is visiting your local nurseries and garden centers to see what plant materials are available. The staff at these operations are great at answering questions regarding growing conditions, how large the trees, shrubs or plants will be at maturity, and how to care for them. It is no accident that former New



## *NJ Dept. of Agriculture*

By Joe Atchison III  
Assistant Secretary of Agriculture

## Fall is for Planting in New Jersey

Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher made it a priority to ensure that the Garden State’s nurseries and garden centers were named as “essential businesses” at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Many businesses shut down, and even some of those that weren’t had employees working from home. People needed to have access to outdoor activities, including planting fruits and vegetables for consumption, but they also were able to realize the therapeutic and mental health benefits of gardening. For those spending significantly more time at home than they were used to, the ability to get outside and beautify their own surroundings was crucial.

Now that the pandemic restrictions have been eased, folks should not forget that gardening has several mental health benefits

that were and remain critical to all of us. These include stress relief, staying grounded, providing a sense of purpose, and, according to studies, the potential to reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s and get in a good physical workout for practitioners.

In addition, being exposed to Vitamin D and natural light can build resistance to chronic disease and strengthen immune systems. For older adults, research has shown that gardening can help people maintain a healthy blood-pressure level, enhance sensory awareness and motor skills, and, where gardening can lend itself to group activities, foster and bolster social skills. If the latter of those is a goal of yours, consider joining a local gardening club. There are many throughout the state.

While you are visiting the garden centers and nurseries to

select the items you want to include in your landscape, please consider asking them about Jersey Native plants that are acclimated to our soils and growing conditions. There are hundreds of options to choose from, including flowering and non-flowering plants, trees and shrubs, and ornamental grasses that can provide excellent curbside aesthetics to your home.

And while we live in a temperate climate that brings us some cold winters, gardening can be brought indoors to continue that enjoyment through the care of plants that can survive inside until the weather warms enough to move them back to the outdoor garden again.

This is primarily why the nursery/greenhouse industry is New Jersey’s largest agricultural sector. It accounts for just shy of half a billion dollars in farmgate sales annually from nursery/

greenhouse/sod products.

The state hosts 1,660 nursery plant dealer locations, including garden centers and landscape firms (as certified in 2022). Plant dealer certification involves verification that plant dealer stock originates from certified sources and that a visual inspection of nursery stock, when present, has been conducted and passed.

With so many financial, physical, mental health, and environmental benefits to gardening and landscaping, there are more reasons to get out in the soil today than there have ever been. Visit your local garden centers and nurseries and start planning.

*Editor’s Note: New Jersey Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Joe Atchison III is directing the Department, assuming the responsibilities of Secretary, until the State Board of Agriculture’s recommendation for the new Secretary of Agriculture is approved by Governor Phil Murphy. Atchison is also the Director of the Division of Marketing and Development for the department. He can be reached at 609-292-3976.*