



Out & About

New Jersey Hills Media Group

GUIDE TO THE ARTS AND LEISURE



Ornamental grasses: deer resistant and low maintenance...what more could you ask for?

When I began my career in the horticultural industry in the early 1980s, there were very few selections of ornamental grasses on the market. The predominant species were Chinese silver grass (*Miscanthus*) and feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis*). Though these species are still used by homeowners and landscapers, the market now offers species of varying color, texture and form to suit your needs. Most grasses have the same cultural requirements and therefore fill a particular niche in the landscape. Grasses prefer full sun and a well-drained soil. It is not necessary to fertilize ornamental grasses heavily, because they are adapted to low fertility. In fact, if you overfertilize these grasses they may develop weak stem strength and flop over after heavy rainstorms. They have few pest problems and are resistant to deer browsing. For individuals seeking to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use, grasses are a perfect addition to the suburban landscape.

Ornamental grasses are also low maintenance plants requiring a seasonal cut back just once a year. Home gardeners frequently ask me if there is a specific time of year when grasses need to be cut back. It really doesn't matter. If you want the added textural element and the fall-like colors of the foliage, you can leave the grasses up all winter. That will give added structure to a winter landscape. However, if the grasses are planted near driveways, roadsides and walkways, where there may be snow load during the winter, cut the grasses back in the fall.

This will make maintenance easier since the mounding of snow will splinter the grasses and make for a messy landscape. When you cut the grasses back, leave approximately two inches of stubble near the ground. This will aid the newly emerging foliage in the springtime, allowing it to stand up until



Brian A. Oleksak
GARDENING

The writer is associate professor and chair of Landscape and Horticultural Technology at the County College of Morris. He can be reached at boleksak@ccm.edu or at [horticulture_ccm](#) on Instagram.

the stems harden off and mature.

Here are a few species of grasses you should be able to find in your local nursery or garden center:

Switchgrass (*Panicum*)

Switchgrass is a native North American species. It grows in clumps four to five feet tall. It has an upright habit with the inflorescences (flower heads) being open and airy in midsummer. Nursery producers have selected many new and improved strains of switchgrass that differ in form and fall color. Some cultivated varieties include "Northwind," "Shenandoah," "Heavy Metal" and "Dallas Blues." For gardeners who are looking to increase the use of native plants in their landscapes, this is a great choice when compared to the introduced species Chinese silver grass.

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon*) and Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium*)

The bluestems are both native prairie grasses that can be used in a residential landscape. Big bluestem may grow five to eight feet tall, while little bluestem grows to only three feet. Both have bluish-green foliage in the summer, which then changes to red, rusty bronze and straw colored as the fall and winter progress. Because of their natural prairie habitat, they are extremely drought resistant. A favorite variety of little bluestem is "Standing Ovation" for its compact habit and beautiful color changes.

Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus*)

Prairie dropseed is a native species that has become increasing-

>> MORE PHOTOS

For more photos, please visit us online at NewJerseyHills.com.

ly popular with landscape designers. It is a bunch grass with a compact tufted look. It looks best when massed in large groups with other sun-loving perennials.

Japanese Forest Grass (*Hakonechloa*)

Although most grasses require full sun, Japanese forest grass is a species that can be grown in light shade. It is low growing with a cascading habit. Several varieties are brightly colored with gold or cream-colored striping. It looks great when paired with ferns, hostas and other shade perennials.

Mexican Feather Grass (*Nassella*)

Although Mexican feather grass is not consistently winter hardy in northern New Jersey, I have used it in containers and annual borders for seasonal texture. It has a soft, billowy habit that moves about with the slightest breeze. If you want to use it in the landscape you can plant seeds in pots early or purchase pre-started nursery plugs.

Sedges (*Carex*)

Sedges are not grasses, but they offer a grass-like look. Sedges have narrow foliage with triangular stems, while grasses have round stems. Most sedges are in the genus *Carex*, which has over 2,000 species. They fill a unique niche in a landscape design since they tolerate shade and wet sites.

So you can have the look of a grassy plant in a part of the landscape that does not normally support the cultivation of true grasses. New varieties are being introduced every year. Some are brightly variegated to brighten up shady spots. Sedges make excellent substitutions for groundcovers like pachysandra and vinca for planting under trees.



Photo by Nigel Dunnett

Little bluestem grass can be used as a foundation species like in this perennial planting, Olympic Park, London, England.



Photos courtesy of Brian A. Oleksak

Above: Ornamental grasses are used extensively on New York City's High Line. Below: Switchgrass is a native North American species growing in clumps four to five feet tall.



Photo courtesy of Brian A. Oleksak

Mexican feather grass has a soft, billowy habit that moves about with the slightest breeze.

Forbidden Tropics’ Afro-Peruvian rhythms at Jersey Jazz LIVE on Sunday, June 9, in Madison

The Forbidden Tropics band will bring its festive music to the the New Jersey Jazz Society (NJJS) Jersey Jazz LIVE! series at 3 p.m. on Sunday, June 9, at Madison Community Arts Center at 10 Kings Road in Madison.

Forbidden Tropics, led by Perth Amboy-based guitarist Alejandro Ataucusi, blends Afro-Peruvian rhythms with harmonic elements of jazz. The Afro-Peruvian styles evolved from the music of the African slaves brought by the Spanish to Peru during the 17th century.

Among the styles played by Forbidden Tropics are Festejo, which in Spanish means “celebration”, and is the most buoyant of the Afro-Peruvian styles; Landó, said to have been handed down from the bantu slaves who came from Angola. In contrast to the lively Festejo style, Landó is often performed in a minor key at a slower tempo; and Panalivio, originally sung by the slaves while working in the fields.

It was brought over by the Spanish colonizers to Argentina, Cuba, and Uruguay and was a forerunner to tango dance music.

“Peruvian Rhapsody,” Forbidden Tropics’ latest album, was released in 2022 on all streaming

platforms. Last summer, Forbidden Tropics performed on alternate Friday nights from June through September on the Madison Community Arts Project’s Rose Pavilion outdoor stage.

Ataucusi is a William Paterson graduate and a member of the WPU Latin Jazz Ensemble. He has played with such Latin jazz luminaries as trumpeters Claudio Roditi and Ray Vega and percussionist Jose Madera. Members of the band, in addition to Ataucusi, are bassist James Nascimento, keyboardist Robbie Sko, drummer Mike Dick, and drummer/percussionist David Greiff.

Forbidden Tropics will be preceded by a Rising Star quartet led by Tinton Falls guitarist Alexander Rausch, a member of the Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) Jazz Ensemble and Ellipses Jazz Combo. A

age 11, Rausch began studying at Red Bank’s Jazz Arts Project where he was mentored by such artists as pianist Brandon McCune, drummer Winard Harper, and bassist Gary Mazzaroppi. He founded the first jazz band at Freehold’s Biotechnology High School and was a member of the New Jersey Association of Jazz Educators’ All-State and All-Region Jazz Ensembles. He was also



Forbidden Tropics will bring its festive music to the the New Jersey Jazz Society Jersey Jazz LIVE! series on Sunday, June 9, at Madison Community Arts Center at 10 Kings Road in Madison. From left are bassist James Nascimento, keyboardist Robbie Sko, guitarist Alejandro Ataucusi, drummer Mike Dick, and drummer/percussionist David Greiff.

a participant in the New Jersey Performing Arts Center’s Jazz for Teens program and was selected as a member of the Art Blakey Ensemble and the James Moody and George Wein Scholars Ensembles. A biochemistry major at CWRU, he plans to pursue a career in the medical field while continuing to be an active member of the jazz community.

The other members of Rausch’s quartet are drummer Alex Kavlianian, a senior at Rah-

way High School; pianist Ben Peters, a freshman at Rutgers; and bassist Damien Dudek from Pompton Lakes, who is part of the NJPAC Jazz for Teens program.

Admission will be \$10 for NJJS members and \$15 for non-members. Student admission is \$5 with valid ID. There will be light refreshments for purchase.

To order tickets in advance, visit <https://madisonarts.ticketleap.com/njjs-forbidden-tropics-06-05-24>.

Morris Area Freewheelers ‘Revolutionary Ramble’ this Saturday

The Morris Area Freewheelers Foundation will hold its 15th Annual Revolutionary Ramble fundraiser on Saturday, June 8, at Raritan Valley Community College, 118 Lamington Road, in Branchburg.

All net proceeds will be donated to local volunteer emergency medical squads, safe cycling education programs, and bike-related charities. The non-profit foundation has donated more than \$200,000 to local emergency squads and bike-related charities to date.

This year, the foundation will partner with the Miles for Matheny fundraiser by providing the bicycle ride portion of their event.

The Revolutionary Ramble is the premier bike tour in New Jersey for cyclists of almost any ability, attracting riders as far away as Colorado. The ride is open to anyone age 13 and older although youths between the ages of 13 and 17 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

There will be 25, 35, 50, 70, and 100 mile tours featuring scenic roads through the “Crossroads

of the Revolution.” Support personnel and mechanics will ensure that riders are taken care of in the event of bicycle failures. All tours will have fully-stocked rest stops and a post-ride lunch included in the registration fee.

In previous years, 800 to 1,100 cyclists have participated and more than 98 percent of participants said they would recommend this event to a friend.

It is recommended to register now at www.rambleride.org as the registration fee will increase as June 8 approaches. Volunteers are also needed and will be provided lunch. Email inquiries to info@maffnj.org.

The Morris Area Freewheelers Foundation is a non-profit organization that benefits local volunteer emergency medical squads, educates drivers and cyclists about bicycle safety, and advances awareness about the role of cycling in community fitness and recreation.

For more information, visit <https://www.rambleride.org/maf-foundation>.

Whippany Railway Museum’s will host Father’s Day train excursions

The Whippany Rail Museum will run a special “Father’s Day Express” train at 1, 2, 3 and 4 p.m. on Father’s Day, Sunday, June 16, rain or shine, at 1 Railroad Plaza at the intersection of Route 10 West and Whippany Road in Whippany.

Riders can step back through the decades at the non-profit Whippany Railway Museum on this 10-mile, 45-minute, round trip ride. Onboard this limited-time event, guests will travel the route of “The Whippanong Trail.” The train rolls through Whippany, East Hanover, Livingston and Roseland in Morris and Essex Counties, passing through the remnants of prehistoric Glacial Lake Passaic, a natural swamp which supports abundant wildlife, such as deer, turtles, wild turkeys, hawks and rabbits.

This excursion offers three different seating classes to choose from. Passengers can board a caboose

of their choice and experience how freight railroaders lived and worked onboard their cozy, little “home-away-from-home.”

For a slightly higher fare guests can upgrade their excursion by choosing to ride in a 1927-era Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ) club car ‘Jersey Coast’ which is a beautifully restored, wood-paneled conveyance that features all the amenities offered by the CNJ’s legendary Blue Comet passenger train of the 1930s that traveled between Jersey City and Atlantic City. Painted in a two-tone blue, with a cream window band, this striking car reminds one of a comet streaking through space.

For the ultimate experience, people can climb aboard the award-winning, Lackawanna Railroad Subscription Club Car No. 2454, which radiated elegance on a train once known as ‘The Millionaire’s Express’ that ran between

>> MORE PHOTOS

For more photos, please visit NewJerseyHills.com.

Hoboken Terminal and Gladstone from 1912 to 1984.

Ticket prices vary from \$13 to \$26. Train fare includes admission to museum building and grounds.

Excursion train rides are operated as a fundraising effort to benefit the Whippany Railway Museum, a non-profit operating heritage railroad staffed by volunteers. Donations help to keep the museum operational, but funds are still required to support this unique New Jersey treasure. Proceeds from the train rides will further enhance the museum’s mission and its historic preservation efforts.

For tickets and more information, visit www.WhippanyRailwayMuseum.net or call (973) 887-8177.



Photo by Steve Hepler

Passengers can board a caboose of their choice and experience how freight railroaders lived and worked onboard their cozy, little “home-away-from-home” waycars.

The Center for Contemporary Art Youth Scholarship Program applications due Monday, July 1

The Center for Contemporary Art’s scholarship program deadline is Monday, July 1.

The center, in Bedminster Township, offers three scholarship opportunities to make its classes and workshops available to those who could

not otherwise afford them.

The Youth Scholarship Fund provides scholarships to youth ages 5-15 who attend public school and who reside in Somerset County.

The Naomi Nierenberg Scholarship Fund is offered to women students who wish

to study ceramics.

The General Scholarship Fund is open to any and all applicants age 16 and over who do not otherwise have the resources to attend a class or workshop.

The center’s Scholarship Committee reviews each ap-

plication and makes final award selections. The Scholarship Committee is composed of select administrative staff and Trustees.

Strong applications will reflect demonstrated curiosity, potential, or passion for artistic, self-expression; in-

terest in building community through the arts and financial need.

The center’s scholarship program operates with bi-annual scholarship deadlines of July 1 and Dec. 1. Applicants are eligible for one scholarship per year.

For answers, contact Director of Education Programs and Operations Ged Ong, at gong@ccabedminster.org or call (908) 234-2345, ext. 102.

To learn more and apply online visit <https://www.ccabedminster.org>.

• ENTERTAINMENT •

Hummingbirds are Amazing will be presented by Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) as the June Second Sunday Program from 1:30 to 3 p.m. on Sunday, June 9, in person only, at the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center, 32 Pleasant Plains Road, Harding Township. Guests will learn how to attract the Ruby-throated hummingbird to the yard. Participants will join Friends volunteer and hummingbird enthusiast Dave Katz to learn more about these beautiful and fascinating birds. Katz will share photos from his recent trip to Columbia and explain the new hummingbird research that he is doing at Great Swamp NWR. Registration is required and can be done online at <https://tsu.me/hummers>. Information is available

on the Friends website at www.friendsofgreatswamp.org under Events.

Repair Café – Toss it? No Way! - will take place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, June 8, as a Drop-In Event at Bernards Township Library, 32 S. Maple Avenue, Basking Ridge. The Repair Café is an opportunity for community members to have a beloved item repaired. Anyone can bring one or two broken items to be repaired for free by skilled volunteers. They can bring a piece of clothing or jewelry that needs mending, a broken household item or knife that needs sharpening. There will also be tech teens available to help with software and device questions. Signup is suggested, particularly to be certain one of the volunteers will be able to eval-

uate the items for repair. Donations are welcome and will make future Repair Cafés possible. For information, visit **BernardsLibrary.org** or call (908) 204-3031, ext. 4.

This Willowwood & Bamboo Parks Van Trip for adults includes a walk among the flowers and unique plants at two Morris County parks: Willowwood Arboretum and Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center leaving from 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, June 6 and returning to 3:30 p.m. via Hunterdon County Arboretum at 1020 Route 31 North in Clinton Township. Cost is \$26. Willowwood encompasses 130 acres of rolling farmland and has about 2,100 kinds of native and exotic plants, many of them rare. Bamboo Brook is located on 670 acres and

was once known as Merchiston Farm and was the home of William and Martha Brookes Hutcheson from 1911 to 1959. The gardens are on the National and State Register of Historic Places. Guests should bring lunch and drink, wear sturdy walking shoes, and dress for the weather. The group will cover about three miles of walking. This trip is rain or shine; a light rain will not cancel the trip.

The High Bridge Pooch Parade organized by Women For High Bridge will begin at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 8 at the Commons Park on Main Street in High Bridge. This year’s theme is All American Pups. All humans should get ready for a tail-wagging good time as adorable pooches strut their stuff in patriotic costumes at the High Bridge Pooch

Parade 2024. All pups and their people are welcome. Prizes will be awarded. Registration starts at 9 a.m. on the day of the event. There is a \$10 registration fee. Advance registration is available online at WomenForHighBridge.org. Rain date is 2 p.m. on Sunday, June 9, with registration at 1 p.m.

Tewksbury Township’s biennial Tewksbury Barn Tour will be held this year from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, June 8, rain or shine. Co-sponsored by the Tewksbury Historical Society and Tewksbury Trail Association, there will be five barns on the tour offering a diverse display of country life in Tewksbury. Tickets can be purchased online through the Tewksbury Historical Society’s website at www.tewksburyhistory.org.

net, then click on the Barn Tour page. Advance tickets are \$40 per person with ages 11 through 18 at \$5 per person; children 10 and under are free. Tickets may only be picked-up the day of the event, along with a wrist band, journal and tour road map, at the Tewksbury Historical Society Headquarters, 60 Water Street, in the Mountainville section of the township. Tickets may also be purchased the day of the tour, if available, at the Tewksbury Historical Society Headquarters, at a cost of \$50 per person. Tickets must be purchased no later than 12:30 p.m. to allow enough time to complete the tour by 3 p.m. No tickets will be mailed and tickets are not available prior to the tour day. There will be no refunds. For information, visit www.tewksburyhistory.net.