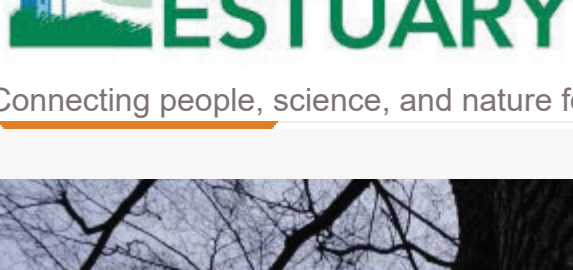
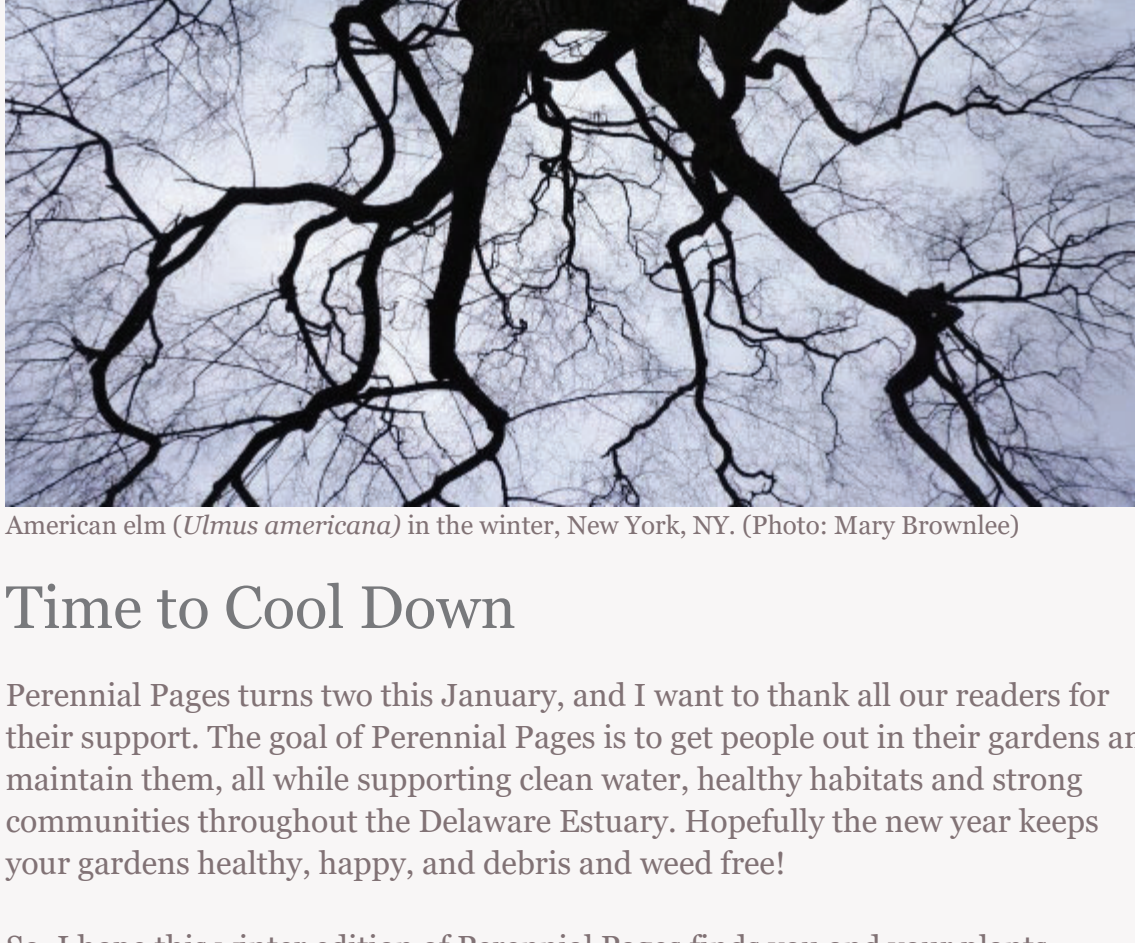


# Perennial Pages

Gardens for Clean Water: A Seasonal Newsletter for Habitat Owners & Caretakers



Connecting people, science, and nature for a healthy Delaware River and Bay



American elm (*Ulmus americana*) in the winter, New York, NY. (Photo: Mary Brownlee)

## Time to Cool Down

Perennial Pages turns two this January, and I want to thank all our readers for their support. The goal of Perennial Pages is to get people out in their gardens and maintain them, all while supporting clean water, healthy habitats and strong communities throughout the Delaware Estuary. Hopefully the new year keeps your gardens healthy, happy, and debris and weed free!

So, I hope this winter edition of Perennial Pages finds you and your plants hunkered down for the winter, but also gets you thinking about next year and what your future garden might look like!

Winter is the easiest season when it comes to garden maintenance. However, late winter/early spring can also see you "itching" to get out into the garden again. Instead of heading OUT to the garden, I suggest you stay IN with your pen & paper, or your computer, and make a plan for what's to come.

Please enjoy our usual features, as well as a special article on fertilizing and native plants!

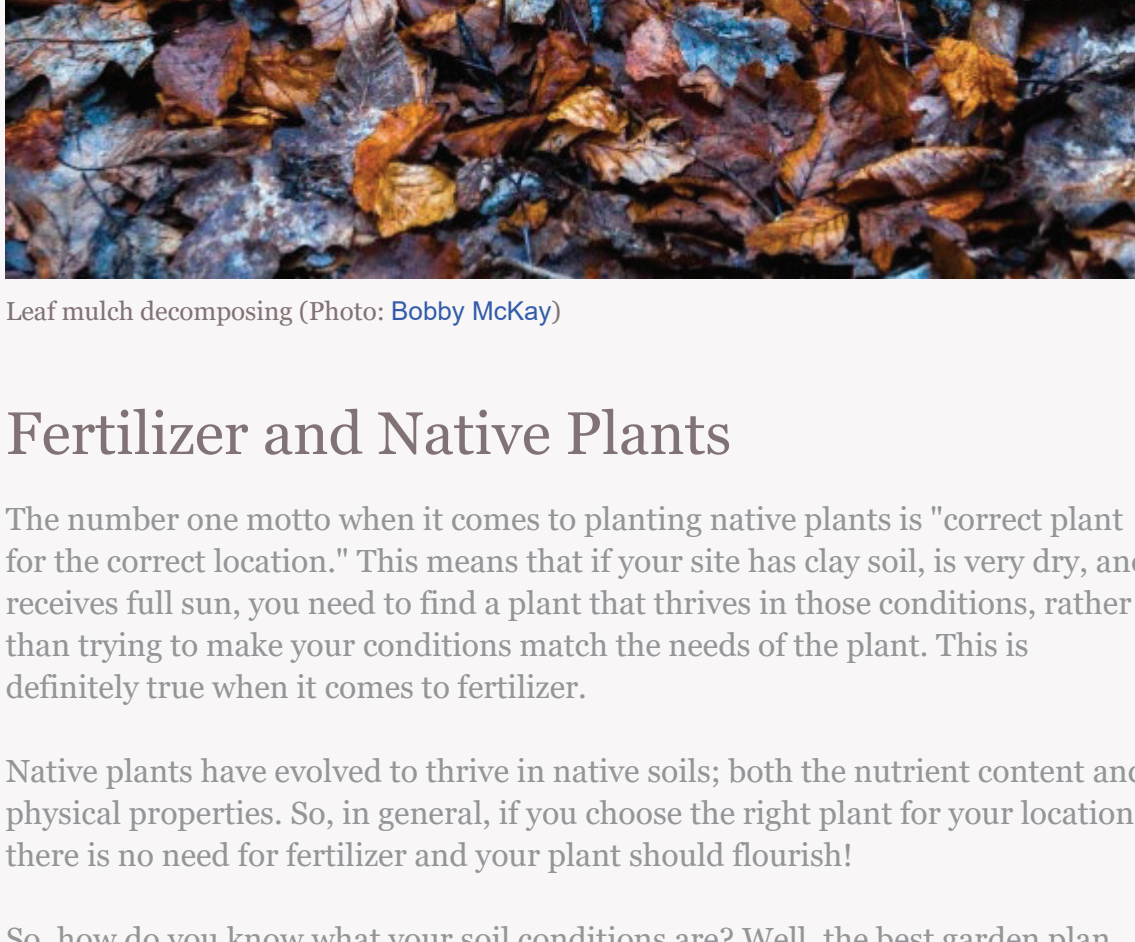


White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), after recent snowfall, Newark, DE. (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

## Time for Action: Winter 2021

Check out past winter issues of [Perennial Pages](#) for more garden tips and tricks. Here are some top tips for winter gardening.

- Leave the leaves, sticks, and twigs alone for overwintering critters. If you need to move leaves, move them onto your perennial beds as mulch.
- Check your gardens for debris, as well as clogs in your rain gardens.
- Fall and winter are both good times for pruning shrubs and trees. So if you are feeling like you need to get out in the garden, pruning can be an option for some plants (but not all!) See our [Fall 2019](#) issues for some more pruning tips.
- If there is intense wind, check on the mulch levels of any newly established plants that could be susceptible to freeze.
- Start planning for next year! Create those drawings, make those plant shopping lists and take stock of your current plantings. Consider any maintenance adjustments that are needed, and plan accordingly. For example, did those asters get too big? Might write yourself a reminder to prune mid season, so they stay more manageable.



Leaf mulch decomposing (Photo: [Bobby McKay](#))

## Fertilizer and Native Plants

The number one motto when it comes to planting native plants is "correct plant for the correct location." This means that if your site has clay soil, is very dry, and receives full sun, you need to find a plant that thrives in those conditions, rather than trying to make your conditions match the needs of the plant. This is definitely true when it comes to fertilizer.

Native plants have evolved to thrive in native soils; both the nutrient content and physical properties. So, in general, if you choose the right plant for your location, there is no need for fertilizer and your plant should flourish!

So, how do you know what your soil conditions are? Well, the best garden plan always starts with a soil test. You can easily get one of these relatively inexpensively (\$15-\$20) through your local extension office.

- Delaware: [UD Soil Testing Program](#)
- Pennsylvania: [Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences](#)
- New Jersey: [Rutgers Soil Testing Laboratory](#)

Take the results with a grain of salt. For the native plant gardener, these tests should be more informative than prescriptive. Take note of things like acidity and existing nutrient content. Then try to find plants that will do well under those conditions. [This video](#) from the University of Delaware walks through the results of a soil test.

Generally, the only fertilizer native plants need is a good layer of leaf or pine needle mulch.

There can be exceptions. If you are particularly interested in a native plant, but know your garden does not meet its growing requirements, fertilizer might help you keep it around. One common example is blueberries. Blueberries are great in the garden for both their human and wildlife benefits, but they like acidic soil. A fall/winter application of blueberry specific fertilizer might be in order if you want your blueberries to flourish. Always apply plant specific fertilizer in the quantities recommended for your specific soil and your specific plant. And ALWAYS follow the directions on the label for both timing (seasonality) and quantity of fertilizer to apply. Natural fertilizers are best, and for blueberries pine needles can work well.

Remember, even when using fertilizers in other areas of your yard, to read and follow the labels and keep them away from your native plants (they can cause burns). The excessive use of lawn and garden fertilizers can contribute directly to water pollution via storm runoff. By planting natives and reducing fertilizer use we can help keep our land and waterways clean!

## What's "up"?

Seasonal Plant Identification



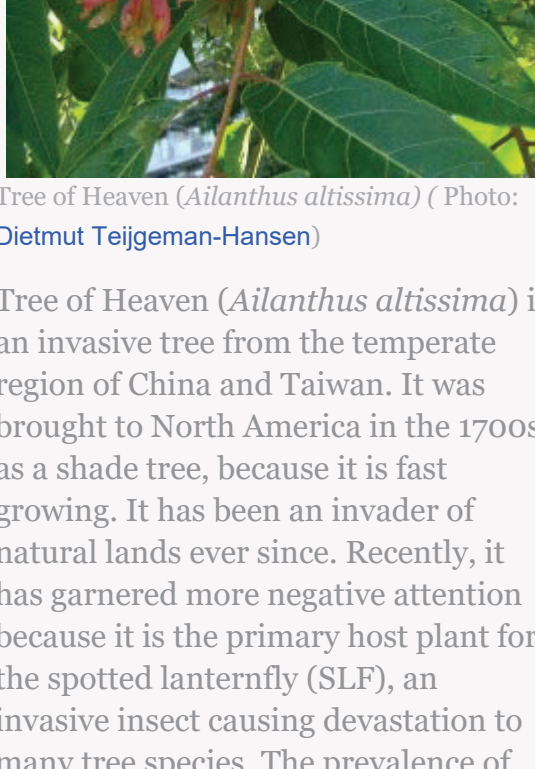
Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), Hockessin, DE (Photo: Shannon Modla)

American witch-hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), is a shrub native throughout our region. It is on the edge of "winter interest" as it may still be blooming in December. Its peak bloom is November. It is an interesting sight in fall, as all the leaves have changed colors, but still, small yellow flower clusters come to life. Witch hazel adds some off-season interest for sure, but is also a great plant for wildlife. It is host to over 62 species of caterpillars and provides late season nectar for pollinators. They are larger understory shrubs in their natural wooded habitat, but if you have the space they can add so much to your native garden.

[Read More](#)

## Space Invaders

Invasive Species Spotlight



Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) ( Photo: Dietmut Teigeman-Hansen)

Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) is an invasive tree from the temperate region of China and Taiwan. It was brought to North America in the 1700s as a shade tree, because it is fast growing. It has been an invader of natural lands ever since. Recently, it has garnered more negative attention because it is the primary host plant for the spotted lanternfly (SLF), an invasive insect causing devastation to many tree species. The prevalence of the tree of heaven on the landscape prior to the introduction of the SLF has most likely exacerbated the SLF problem. It is very difficult to eradicate, but any effort to do so is a step in the right direction.

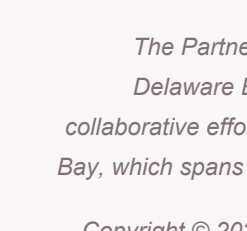
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## PDE News

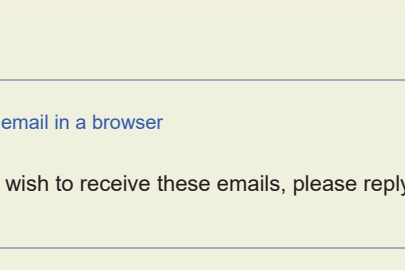
The PDE Science and Environmental Summit is going virtual March 1-3, 2021. Visit the summit [website](#) for more information or register [here!](#)

Feel free to send any of your gardening questions or topic ideas to Perennial Pages editor, Sarah Bouboulis; [sbouboulis@delawareestuary.org](mailto:sbouboulis@delawareestuary.org)

## Partner



Are you interested in supporting Perennial Pages? Contact [sbouboulis@delawareestuary.org](mailto:sbouboulis@delawareestuary.org) to find out how you can help!



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The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, host of the Delaware Estuary Program, leads science-based and collaborative efforts to improve the tidal Delaware River and Bay, which spans Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

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