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Home & Garden 2023



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or foe?*

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Syrphid fly, a beneficial insect, on cilantro.

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Companion planting

Diversity in the garden is a good thing

by Lee Reich

COMPANION PLANTING CAN be thought of as choosing a mixed and good neighborhood for your plants. Rather than planting marigolds in the flower garden, basil in the herb garden, and cabbages in the vegetable garden, you grow flower, herb, and vegetable plants together. And no solid blocks — mingle the cabbages freely with the tomatoes, the cucumbers with the corn.

The folklore on companion planting cautions against mixing plants too freely, though. Some plants might be hostile toward one another. Although they love the company of beets, you're supposed to keep onions away from beans. Similarly, cucumbers love beans, but dislike potatoes. The likes and dislikes of plants are reflected in how well a plant grows, whether pests will attack, even how a plant tastes!

The whole idea of companion planting is so appealing. It's almost as though plants were like, er, people. But folklore is often at odds with science. At its best, science tells us what really happens, not what we wish would happen.

As it turns out, companion planting is a mix of fact and fiction.

FIRST, THE FACTS: SCIENCE HAS SHOWN that some plants do, in fact, dislike each other. The best known example is black walnut, which can put a natural chemical, juglone, into the soil that is toxic to many other plants, most notably tomatoes.

Rye is another example, a residue of which in the soil temporarily inhibits the germination of small seeds. And did you ever notice dead lawn beneath your bird feeder? That's because a chemical in sunflower hulls is toxic to grass.

Science also has confirmed that the makeup of a plant community does, in fact, have an influence on pest problems.



PHOTOS BY LEE REICH

Above, ladybugs are perhaps best known for controlling aphids; below, Tomato Hornworm covered with white cocoons of beneficial Braconid Wasp.





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Interplant lettuce, broccoli, kale and escarole.

Just imagine that you are a female cabbage butterfly, flying around in search of cabbage leaves on which to lay your eggs. Which cabbage plant would you find first: one from an isolated row of cabbage plants, all staring skyward against well-tilled, brown soil; or one from a group of cabbage plants rubbing elbows with tomato plants, with colorful marigolds

and aromatic mint plants tucked in here and there? You would think that it would be most easy to pick out a plant from that isolated lineup. Yes, it's so.

Visual confusion is the main force at work in thwarting those cabbage butterflies (Astroturf would also probably be effective), but other forces might be at work in other situations. Aromatic plants

might repel insects or mask the aromas of potential host plants. A plant particularly tasty to an insect might be grown as a sacrificial crop: radishes for flea beetles, nasturtiums for aphids. I perhaps began

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planting nasturtiums in my vegetable garden for aphid management, although I pretty much never saw nor see aphids on my nasturtiums or vegetable plants. I still grow the nasturtiums there because the plants are pretty — and tasty, both the leaves and the flowers.

Another plant family prominent for fostering beneficial insects are the daisies.

Many of these plants, including cosmos, coneflowers, and coreopsis, sport nectar-ies on their stems and leaves. What a treat for beneficial insects!

Other plant families also attract ben-

eficial insects in varying degrees. When deciding where to plant these plant attractants, don't be straitjacketed by convention. There's no reason not to also plant flowers in the vegetable garden or

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to also plant vegetables in the flower garden. The clumps of Little Gem marigold at the head of my vegetable beds dresses up my vegetable garden and keeps beneficial insects nearby.

Now, the fiction. First, most of the details of companion planting — the specific congenial and antagonistic plant associations — are unsubstantiated. Onions really do not dislike or grow poorly near beans; and beans don't grow better near carrots.

Most of the alleged benefits of herbs in repelling pests also are unsubstantiated. Planting chives at the base of your rose bush will not thwart aphids (Are aphids even a problem on roses? Never on my roses). And basil plants will not enhance the flavor of tomatoes growing nearby, even if they do make a tasty combination in sauce. Nonetheless, my basil plants are intimate with my tomato plants; I grow them so that I can conveniently pick off a few basil leaves while I grab a couple of tomatoes for sandwiches.



Lemon Gem marigolds in the author's vegetable garden.

A second problem with companion planting is that even if a particular plant combination does repel a pest, growing the two plants close together might cause more problems than the potential pest. Planting snap beans and potatoes together has been shown to reduce the

numbers of Colorado potato beetles — but also the yields of potatoes and beans. I once planted mint between cabbage plants, as prescribed to foil cabbageworms. By the end of the season, a mesh of underground mint stems were threatening to grab hold of my entire garden. I spent more time getting rid of the mint than I ever did controlling cabbageworms (by either handpicking or spraying with an environmentally benign spray containing the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*).

Nowadays, my cabbages do still socialize, but with beans, lettuce, and other plants convenient to grow between, before, and after the cabbages. And I have strategically planted tansy and yarrow near the vegetables, mostly for looks. Although most of companion planting advice is bunk, it generally does no harm. And diversity is good in the garden, both for looks and for a balanced ecology.

New Paltz writer Lee Reich, author of The Pruning Book, Weedless Gardening, Growing Figs in Cold Climates, and other books, is also a garden consultant specializing in growing fruits, vegetables, and nuts. He hosts workshops at his New Paltz farm. For more information, go to www.leereich.com.

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LAUREN THOMAS

Wendy Toman has opened a “refillery” in New Paltz at Zero Place. The focus will be on BYO-containers to refill common household products over and over with the goal of reducing plastic packaging as much as possible.

A plea for small steps

We can all do our part to protect the environment

by Erin Quinn

*And this mess is so big
And so deep and so tall,
We cannot pick it up.
There is no way at all!*

— Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*

IT IS COMMONLY accepted that we are living in the Anthropocene era — a geologic time period that began with the Industrial Revolution or the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The actions of humankind in this era have been so vast and dramatic as to cause mass

extinctions of plant and animal species, pollute the oceans, alter the atmosphere, and heat the earth’s core temperature. Congratulations human kind! We have our very own geological age, born of abuse, exploitation and greed sugar-coated under the guise of progress.

But where are we progressing to? Our own end?

Our systems are implemented by enterprises which plunder the earth of its resources. The coral reefs are bleached, the Amazon shrinks, heat waves and fires scorch the earth, and an occasional snowfall leaves climate deniers, mistakenly thinking that an act of weather is the

same thing as climate, jumping for joy.

We may all look at this environmental pogrom differently. In the end, however, I would guess that most of us would want a sustainable earth for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to inherit. They deserve a life that is not all plastic refuse, abandoned strip malls and parched pavements covering up the things we love: rivers, streams, waterfalls, tree canopies, forests, meadows and farmland.

As Dr. Seuss once wrote, there are times in all our lives that we feel overwhelmed. It is beyond our individual scope to reverse the tide of this destructive impend-

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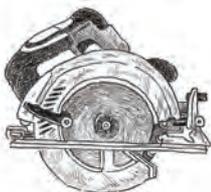
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ing cataclysm. What do we do?

There are some small steps we can all take. Changing our basic lifestyles within our homes can help keep us more aligned with what is hopeful, sustainable, and not only good for the planet but also good for ourselves. If we can begin to create a space within our own dwellings that reflects our values of treading a bit more lightly on this earth we all share, we will find ourselves becoming a bit more hopeful, healthier and happier.

We start at home

But how? Where do people start to make their homes more environmentally friendly?

One of the biggest ways that people attempt to live in way that creates less waste and uses up fewer resources begins with how they shop for food. New Paltz resident Janelle Peotter suggests that people understand that most plastics are not recyclable, and those that are might make it one round before ending up in the landfill.

“You can seek out places such as food coops and health-food stores where you can shop for items in bulk and refill your own container,” Peotter said. “In New Paltz, we have a new store called the Second Nature Refillery at Zero Place where nothing is encased in plastic or excessively packaged.”

When shopping for produce, buy things



that are “naked,” meaning not encased in plastic. “If you want a melon, buy a

melon rather than a pre-cut melon in a plastic container,” she suggested. Pre-cut costs more money and adds plastic to the waste stream.

She encourages people to avoid buying “flying food,” things that have been shipped in rather than those that are in season where they live. “For example, asparagus grows in the spring around here. Buy it then. Asparagus bought at other times of the year may be air-freighted here from another continent, which is 50 times more carbon-costly.”

“After fossil-fuel use — travel, heating, etc. — I would say thinking about your diet is important,” said New Paltz town supervisor Neil Bettez. “You do not have to become a vegan or even a vegetarian. Just cutting back on the amount of meat, especially red meat, can have an impact. It is not only better for the planet, it is better for your health and your budget.”

“Also, eat local food. Maybe join a CSA or shop at a local farm. I am huge fan of Wallkill View Farm. This will reduce the carbon footprint of the food you eat and support our local farms, which also help

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“Finally, waste less food by planning your meals out for the week. You not only save money, when you shop you can reuse leftovers for another meal or for lunch.”

We waste food waste

Rosendale resident reverend Dr. Leonisa Ardizzone, a visiting professor at Vassar College, stressed the importance of reducing food waste. “Buy what you

need, and eat what you have,” she said. Compost food waste rather than throw it into the landfill.

“Have almost no food waste,” she counseled. “According to Project Drawdown,

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LAUREN THOMAS

Erik Hoover fixes a desk lamp at a recent Repair Café.

this is one of the biggest causes of global warming, so we only buy what we are going to eat and we also try to only by

things that are grown locally.”

Try to make as little waste as possible. Compost food waste rather than throw it

into the landfill. Don't use paper towels, paper napkins, or paper plates. Instead, use handkerchiefs, rags, cloth napkins, glass containers. Avoid anything that is single-use whenever possible. She counsels using only biodegradable packaging.

“Food, tissues, paper products we put into our compost and clean fill area in our yard,” Ardizzone said. “This means we make almost no garbage. Anything that can't be composted goes to the dump as recycling — which readers should know is not the panacea we are sold on.”

Peotter shares the emphasis on waste management

“Did you know that Ulster County throws away 40 million pounds of food scraps every year?” asked Peotter. “If they are put in the garbage, they go to landfill, where they do not compost but create methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. You can compost at home, or if that is not practical you can bring your compost to many available community sites. In New Paltz, you can bring your compost

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to the Community Center or to the New Paltz ReUse and Recycling Center at 99 Clearwater Road.”

Buy fresh local produce whenever possible. Eat lower on the food chain (plants, veggies and fruit). Buy only what you are going to eat, and if waste is created, throw it in a compost bin. What you do doesn't have to be fancy or perfect. It just needs to be kept out of the waste stream and be broken down organically — which is also great for the soil.

When shopping, think about places you can buy in bulk in an attempt not to use plastic. Try to purchase things in season and not encased in plastic. If that becomes challenging, as it can be at many larger grocery stores, tell the management that you'd prefer bulk items and food not packaged in plastic.

Beyond Plastic is a great resource for how to combat single-use plastic and effectuate policy change. It's at <https://www.beyondplastics.org/learn/>.

We must recycle

The kitchen is an area where people gather, sit down for a meal, or grab something fast. We shouldn't be waste-

cups, mason jars, cloth napkins.

When the meal is done, throw those food scraps in a bucket or canister and put them out in the yard. Your compost bin could just be a pile in the back corner of your lawn or a box with worms that break down the food waste, as Ardizzone and her daughter did when they lived in an apartment in the city

Clare Hussain, the owner of Runa, the French bistro and B&B in the Village of New Paltz, is a committed composter. “I believe 100 percent in composting. Rotting scraps in trash that is brought to landfills is incredibly damaging, with

the amount of methane gas being released into the atmosphere.”

The myth of recycling as a cure-all is one that people need to be more critical of, particularly when it comes to plastic, 90 percent of which is never reused even when brought to a recycling center.

“To recycle, of course, but to understand that not all items are recyclable or even being recycled,” Hussain said. “The thought of those large oversized vessels with Tide detergent, etc. going into the landfills makes me cringe. I recycle the oil in the restaurant, and all beverages are in cans, glass bottles. No plastic vessels.”

As Bettez noted, the basic idea of reuse is simple once you make the commitment to it. Make coffee at home. Thrown the coffee grinds into the compost. Carry a refillable coffee cup with you. Tap water is healthier than bottled water, as it has to go through so much local, state and federal testing. All you need to do is use a glass and carry a reusable water bottle with you.

Tap water is a huge luxury that we all have. Yet we treat it as something we need to avoid.

Peotter called single-use plastic water bottles one of the biggest problems. Having your water encased in plastic at all different temperatures unhealthy, as the plastic and toxins leach into the water. It also has to be transported, and then the plastics buried or burned.

“For most people, water out of your kitchen tap is of better quality than you will find in bottled water,” argued Peotter. “If you have any issues with your tap water, an inexpensive water filter can

An occasional snowfall leaves climate deniers, mistakenly thinking that an act of weather is the same thing as climate, jumping for joy.

ful in it. Just as it's healthier to eat more vegetables, it's better for the soil if we compost waste. Try to live so you have less garbage to cart out to the street or to the dump. You can use real plates, real



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address most problems. A 2007 study found that making the billions of plastic bottles manufactured every year to hold all the bottled water American buy used the equivalent of around 17 million barrels of oil, enough energy to fuel more than a million American cars and light trucks for a year."

Practice mindfulness

Turning off lights, heat and electricity whenever possible is the next big item that people can use to make their homes more ecofriendly on the inside. There are alternative electricity options that they can buy into, like community wind or solar.

"We try to be mindful of our use of heat and electricity, and we joined a solar farm since we can't put solar panels on our house, said Ardizonne. "We capitalize on our passive solar working with window shades and spending time in parts of the house that are warmed by the sun."

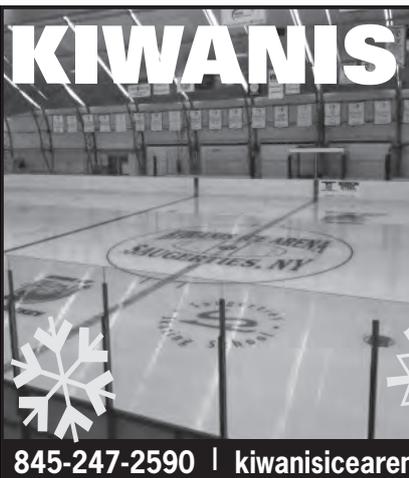
A basic clothesline or drying rack for clothes should be considered rather than running a dryer. There's that fresh scent of clothes hung out in the fresh air. If you're going to wash clothes, do it sparingly and only when necessary.

"For clothes, use a front-loading high-efficiency washer," advised Peotter. The old top-loading washers with agitators are hard on clothes and create more microplastics faster as they break down synthetic fabrics. Start using laundry detergent sheets that don't come in plastic jugs such as TruEarth or Earth Breeze. They are ultra-concentrated, lightweight and packaged in paper. Whenever possible, hang your clothes out to dry on a clothesline or drying rack. Clothes dryers use a tremendous amount of energy."

Mother, business owner and chef Husain makes her own cleaning solutions at home with vinegar and eucalyptus oil. She also subscribes to companies for washing detergents, and uses vegan bar soap to wash dishes.

"There are also affordable compostable sandwich bags these days to store food," she noted. "It is not necessary to buy produce in the supermarket and put them in the plastic bags. Just throw them into a shopping basket."

When it comes to clothing or bedding, try to buy quality rather than quantity. Move away from the fast, disposable and child-labor heavy synthetic clothes industry.



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Repair rather than discard

“If something breaks, try to fix it rather than throwing out the old one and simply buying another one. Here in Ulster County, we are fortunate to have Repair Cafes in almost every community,” said Peotter. “A Repair Cafe is a free community event. You bring your broken but beloved items, and together with volunteer repair coaches you fix them! People bring all kinds of things to a repair

cafe: clocks and other mechanical items; chairs, frames, and other wooden items; electrical items and small appliances; digital devices.”

For Ardizzone, it basically comes down to rejecting consumerism. “We live in a world of exploitive capitalism and we’re told to buy, buy, buy, when we really don’t need much to live a full life. Buying less things and supporting local businesses is the way to go.”

Everyone agreed that there was no need to buy the endless amounts of chemical cleaning products lining the shelves at supermarkets. Hot water, soap and a bit of baking soda and vinegar can clean just about everything. With some old dishrags and cloth, there’s no need for a Swiffer!

Having more plants in and around your dwelling is a great way to hold carbon. Let your lawn rewild and plant native pollinator plants and trees — anything that is green and alive will help create shade, texture and food for all.

How small steps add up

“According to the International Panel on Climate Change, we have less than six years to limit the release of greenhouse gases in the environment to cap the increase in planetary temperature rise,” said Ardizzone. “We all need to do our part — big and small — to protect our planet. In the USA, we are tied in first place as the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, yet we don’t always feel it, so we tend not to think it’s our responsibility. But as we see, people around the world are being displaced due to ocean levels rising, or flooding, or wildfires. So something has to change. We also have to realize that we are part of an interconnected web of life, and that we each play a part in caring for all of creation.”

What can we do? We have to vote for leaders who support environmental initiatives and policies that will work to slow or stop climate change. We can become those leaders ourselves, put our names on a petition to get on a ballot, join the volunteer boards in our communities that are working together to help combat an unsustainable lifestyle, a culture of excess, and a pattern of fuel consumption that cannot have a good ending.

We can write letters, sign petitions, work within our means to switch to more regenerative energy systems or simply use public transit, walk, bike, get out of the cars that we’ve built our entire country around. It has become a luxury to live in a walkable community, to be in a place that is willing to pay for greater access to public lands, trails, parks and sidewalks. Many small steps add up to big steps.

Contact the local Climate Smart task force in your community and get involved. Go to <https://climatesmart.ny.gov/> to learn more.



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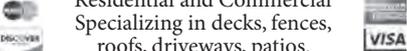


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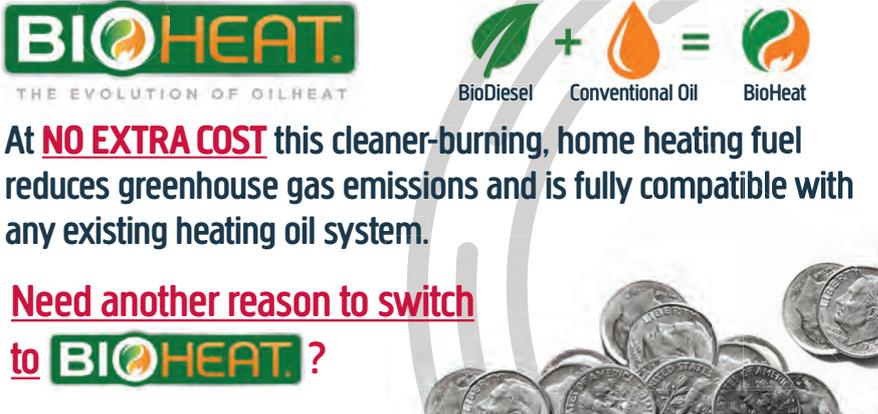
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Sharpest tool in the shed

How I used AI to plan and manage a garden

by Zac Shaw

AS THE PANDEMIC swept across the world and lockdowns shuttered the economy, my partner and I, like many others, began to discuss the potential for disruption to the food supply chain. Toilet paper and canned goods were disappearing from store shelves. We have always had a two-month supply of food and water (and toilet paper) on hand. With the pandemic, we bulked some of our food supply up to six months (I'm still eating the ramen). As "mostly" vegetarians who only occasionally eat meat, one thing we didn't have and needed to go out to buy often was fresh produce.

Thus the garden adventure began as a practical act of self-sufficiency to prepare for an uncertain future. Maybe we'd save some cash on groceries to boot.

We soon realized that we were way out of our soil depth. Despite managing to keep a small army of houseplants alive, gardening required a level of knowledge and experience that was formidable. Our first bounty was not bountiful, it was pitiful. What did manage to grow to maturity was unimpressive in its yield. It quickly became clear that we had no idea what we were doing and needed some help if we were going to succeed.

We turned to the internet for advice, scouring online resources and watching countless YouTube and TikTok tutorials. We asked friends with green thumbs for tips, but it still felt like we were missing so much information. We were in need of a detailed, fool-proof plan that we could follow to actually produce some crops.

That's when we discovered ChatGPT, the AI language model taking the world by storm with its ability to use natural language processing to generate responses to text-based prompts.

This isn't computer hacker stuff. If you can use Google, you can use ChatGPT.

Within 20 minutes of our first conver-

sation, the AI model had generated a detailed spreadsheet containing week-by-week instructions for care of each of dozens of plants in the garden. After being fed a list of the main vegetables we eat – along with the admission that we're beginner gardeners at best – ChatGPT helped us pick the crops and specific varieties for our climate zone and soil characteristics that we were the least challenging for beginners to grow. The instructions included fertilizer composition and timing, watering and light requirements, common plant problems and their solutions, and even guidance on which part of our property we should plant on based on our local climate and specific limitations. It gave us valuable advice on clearing land, composting, weed and pest control – all customized with our specific terrain, food waste and local critters.

AI was going to plan and manage our garden.

WHEN WE RELATED OUR EXPERIENCE with ChatGPT to friends and family, most were surprisingly freaked out. It was like we'd teamed up with the killer AI Skynet robots in Terminator. We learned that many still view AI through the lens of dystopian sci-fi, and they have every right to. I still do. It's going to change everything, and not always in a good way.

But fairly quickly, I invited ChatGPT lovingly into my life. The technology is a friendly, inexhaustible and unpaid expert in anything you want it to be. I, for one, welcome our robot overlords.

Is it coming for your job? For many of us, the answer is "Yes". Some Fortune 500 companies are already freezing hiring for jobs they anticipate AI will be able to do better than humans within a

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year or less. There are white-collar job-killers training AI to replace humans as we speak. If a widely predicted recession takes hold this year, the bounceback may be historically unprecedented as entire industries are first supplanted and then replaced by AI tools and their operators.

Today, I'm sure a professional gardening expert could do an exponentially better job than AI at planning our garden. I'm also sure that would not be free (nor should it be). Nor are we good enough gardeners yet to go have confidence we'd use expert advice wisely without constant attention. For zero dollars (at least for now), our professional gardening expert is a blink of natural language processing in a supercomputer cluster, open 24/7.

Soon, professional gardening experts will begin to use AI tools like ChatGPT to assist in the busywork. AI will automatically handle invoicing and collections, bill payments, and most financial and administrative tasks. But it will also be used in domain-specific ways in every industry. In gardening, folks are already building AI tools to read smart sensors embedded in soil to automatically adjust watering conditions, temperature and humidity. AI will save professional gardening experts a ton of time, allowing them to focus on why they're in the business in the first place. If you're passionate about gardening, you get to garden when you would have been "business-ing". Or go to the golf course. Up to you what you do with your time. That's the beauty of AI from the most optimistic view.

But you probably already see the sharp side of the double-edged sword: It won't be long before AI upends the whole value

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ZAC SHAW

AI in action.

proposition of having human expertise in a field where humans are outclassed. This is already true in the medical space, where it would be unethical NOT to use AI in certain cases where it is more accurate in making diagnoses than humans.

A lot of people are going to lose their jobs, but a lot of people will use AI to do their jobs and build their businesses better, succeeding at a more rapid pace than was ever possible in human history.

This is why (1) I suggest you start becoming familiar with AI right now by using ChatGPT while it's still free and (2) It's good to know how to garden when everyone starts losing their jobs... you'll need something to do.

So, HOW DID I USE CHATGPT TO GET our garden on track? Two words: "Prompt engineering".

As I got my feet wet with ChatGPT, I thoroughly enjoyed the novelty of it, but I wasn't convinced I would actually be using it in my day-to-day life. That all

changed once I began learning the art of prompt engineering, which entails strategically crafting questions and demands to generate truly amazing results from AI.

Information on how to engineer the best prompts abounds online, and of course you can always just ask ChatGPT what the best prompts are. In my experience, the most effective prompts are highly customized to the goal you're trying to achieve. And this is the first, most important tip: Have a clear goal and a clear plan for how you'll use prompts to steer AI toward helping you reach that goal.

Our goal with the garden was simply to grow a modest amount of vegetables while avoiding making mistakes. Our approach was to give ChatGPT as many relevant details about our gardening situation, and have it spit out planing instructions and maintenance schedules for each crop. Take the time to clearly define the end goal of the prompting, and you shall receive what you're looking for.

Another key to using ChatGPT is to

iterate on your prompts. Because the AI system has memory, you don't need to necessarily rewrite prompts over and over. You can just say, "Give me the same response, but this time change X, Y, and Z." You'll find yourself revising and polishing its output until you have something extraordinarily useful, like a week-by-week table of how to care for each plant in your garden, with columns on each critical detail.

Don't forget to put AI in its place. Telling ChatGPT which role you want it to play delivers better results than allowing it to spew information as a generalist. I input "you are a gardening expert consulting with me" and "I am a beginner gardener prone to forgetting about plant maintenance", and the software made sure to fill the role while gently addressing my limitations.

I'm under no illusions that the plan AI gave me for my garden is fool-proof. That's why I plan on using AI to diagnose any problems I encounter in real-time, and not just ChatGPT AI. Plantin is

an AI-driven app we already use to photograph houseplants and diagnose problems. Soon we plan on automating the process of receiving plant care reminders, sending texts to our phones when AI-designated tasks have to be completed. We'll use it to cut costs on supplies, devise delicious recipes to use our produce in, and make sure our garden is prepared properly for the cold seasons after the harvest is complete.

Turns out this "killer AI" will always be there to get us back on track. Killer indeed.

Can ChatGPT write entire articles? Humbly, AI can't write as well as I do ... yet.

But it certainly helped.

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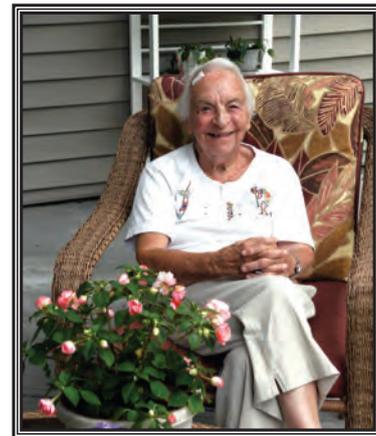
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Kingston's stewards of history

Please, no vinyl siding

by Lynn Woods

FEW PLACES IN America rival the architectural heritage of Kingston. “On Fair Street, there’s every architectural style between 1720 and 1920, which is very rare,” noted Derrick McNab, a specialist in historic restoration trades. In recent years, the richness of this historical infrastructure has come to light as many homeowners, both longtime Kingston residents and migrants from New York City alike, have restored their buildings, removing vinyl siding, repairing porches, and preserving bluestone walls and sidewalks.

Back in March, McNab was the featured speaker at a historic preservation talk at the Kingston Public Library, part of a monthly series at the library launched by historic preservationist Marissa Marvelli in January.

“It really frustrates me how difficult it is for property owners to get information about historic preservation resources,” said Marvelli, who moved to Kingston with her husband Andrei in 2014 and served on the city’s Historic Landmarks Preservation Commission. “We have a community of people passionate about historic preservation. At the first talk, I was expecting ten people to come, but it was standing room only.”

In response, Marvelli has compiled a comprehensive “(Working) Preservation Guide for Historic Property Owners in Ulster Co.” in a Google document that is impressively comprehensive, including maps, books, sources of historic photographs and newspapers, instructions on how to research a deed, and information on the state’s program of historic tax credits. Soon She plans to add information on window preservation.



Marisa Marvelli outside her historic renovated house.

PHYLLIS McCABE

Marvelli worked for a New York architectural firm for nine years and is now an independent historic preservation consultant. Her clients include local governments, nonprofit organizations, developers and homeowners. She won two Excellence in Preservation awards, from the Preservation League of NYS and the state government, for her 2022 cultural resources study of El Barrio — the East Harlem neighborhood which is the heart of the Puerto Rican diaspora, has the largest concentration of public housing projects in the nation — and recently completed a cultural resources survey for Lansingburgh, in North Troy, which just got listed as a historic district in the state and national Registers of Historic Places.

She and Andrei and their two-year-old twin daughters reside in a nineteenth-century brick building that was the carriage house and stables of the nearby mansion on Pearl Street built for limestone dealer Luke Noone. Fallen limestone columns and other remnants from Noone’s quarry still grace the grotto-like back yard. Inside, the earthy charm of the building with its layers of history has been preserved, down to the rustic ceiling beams, massive porcelain sink in the kitchen, and rough wood floor of the former stables.

“We instantly fell in love with Kingston’s distinctive sense of place and special architectural heritage,” Marvelli said.

Marvelli and McNab are two of the names that come up when you talk to a Kingston property owner who has done research on his or her historic house and is committed to restoration as opposed to renovation, which tends to be “more expensive due to the duration, intensity and unpredictability of the jobs,” according to McNab. (Another name that comes up frequently is Rob Sweeney, Town of Ulster historian and pastor at Old Dutch Church.)

Their homes are a testament to the rewards of a careful approach to preser-



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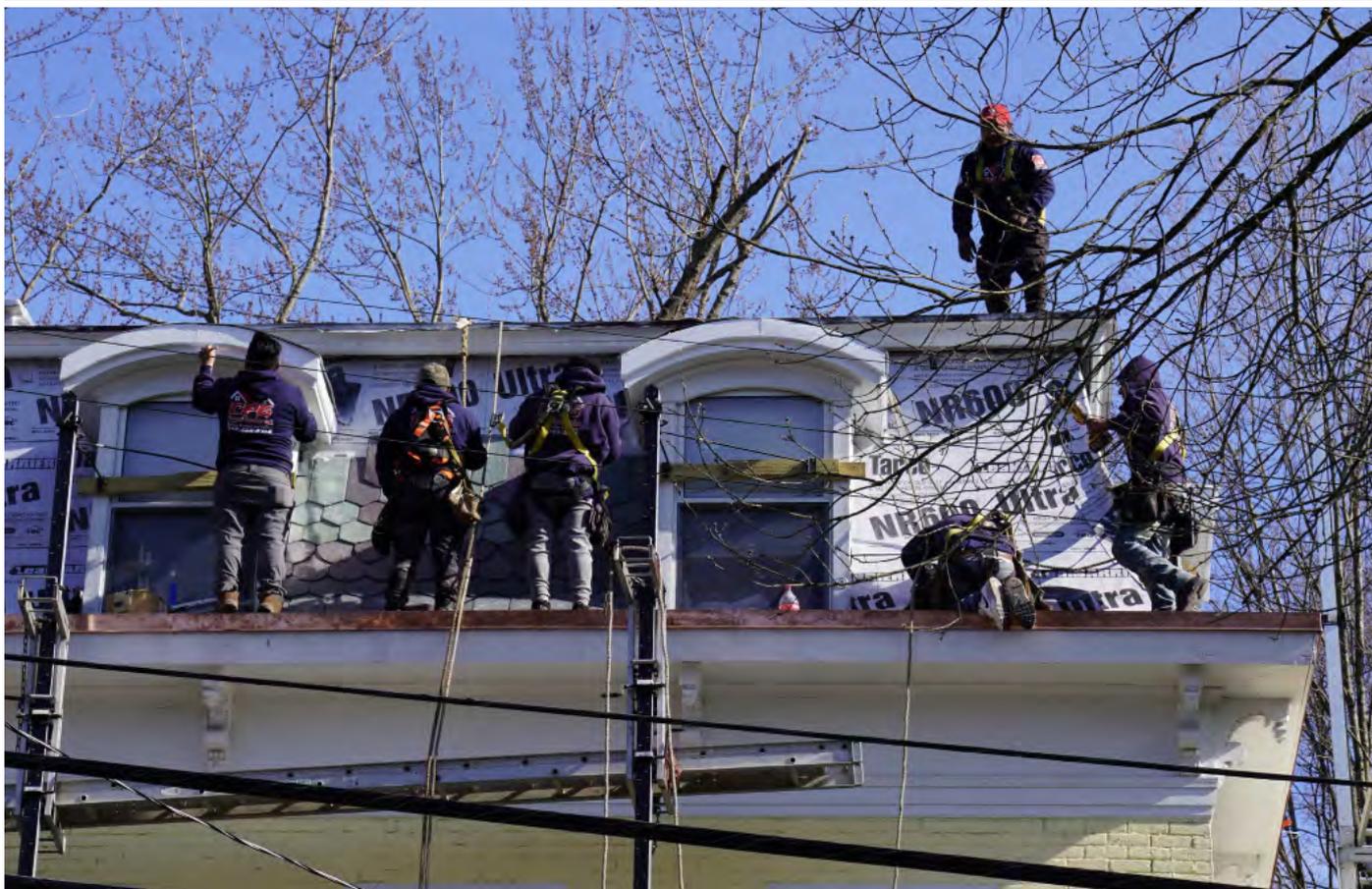
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The slate roof of the Linderman House being repaired with historic accuracy.

vation. “Slow down and study what you have before you undertake stuff,” advised Marvelli. “There’s probably a long line of owners of the building. You’re not the first nor the last, just temporary stewards of the building. In a sense, it belongs to the community.”

A common mistake is removing the original windows. “I’m so tired of people being misled that the windows must

be replaced,” Marvelli said. “Even the state has done a study showing there’s no justification for replacing a historic window in terms of energy savings. You’ll never get your return on investment. As Derrick says, the window replacement industry is the vinyl siding of our time. Windows need maintenance, and one of the most common issues is excessive layers of paint.” Indeed, one of the themes

of McNab’s talk was that there’s no such thing as a maintenance-free building, and that materials such as vinyl siding marketed as such actually create more problems.

McNab’s 1880 stick-style house, which he purchased with his wife, Giovanna Righini, in 2006, had the original windows (a few had new glass, which he replaced with antique glass for consistency). The structure was covered in gray aluminum siding and broken up into a dentist’s office when the couple bought it. After years of research, experimentation, and skilled hand work by McNab, it has regained its sumptuous High Victorian style.

Inside, richly hued plaster walls are topped by muted multi-color ceiling medallions and plaster crown moldings; most rooms have a marbled slate mantel (hand-painted by McNab to match the period style), and gaslight-era chandeliers that draw the eye upward. Original features are indistinguishable from recreations, one of which is the shellacked herringbone floor in the front parlor, which was crafted from red oak bought at Herzog’s, carefully sawed and stained.

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McNab is self-taught, a necessity given that his skill set went the way of the horse and buggy when cheap, synthetic materials that purported to be maintenance-free hit the market. He was trained as a painter. After earning an MFA from the Maryland Institute of Art, he moved to New York City, earning money as a decorative painter for wealthy people. Cracked plaster walls were a common problem, so he was hired to fix them, and the disappointing results caused him to spend a decade learning how to master traditional plastering techniques.

When the rent on their Brooklyn loft went up, he and Righini bought a storefront in Croton-on-Hudson. The couple never took to the commuting town, and six years later they moved to Kingston. Righini subsequently served on the city's Heritage Area Commission and is a local preservation activist.

McNab's finely honed skills and purist approach are unique, but he is hardly alone in his passion for historic preservation, which seems to be a hazard of buying property in Kingston. Many owners have taken on the role of steward and are committed to preserving and restoring their building's integrity. They have discovered doing work that will endure well beyond their lifetime is highly rewarding.

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The right to play

Play can happen anywhere, and at any time



PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

Forsyth Park, Kingston.

by Abigail Gierke

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL day at Hasbrouck Park, bordered by residences in the middle of the Village of New Paltz and adjacent to SUNY New Paltz. Its main attraction is its recently upgraded playground.

Today, this dedicated play space is alive with children and families, some of whom helped rebuild it back in 2019. There's a buzz of joyful screams, murmurs from the sandbox, hollering from the slides, and the cadenced sound of adults socializing with one another.

One lady sitting on the edge of a sandbox is checking in on two children side

by side deep within their own imaginations. Across the way, an older child is running around another part of the gated playground with a new friend, negotiating how to get to the top of the slide. Hasbrouck offers opportunities to swing, climb, glide, manipulate, run, slide, spin, balance, hang, dig, and find activities that only children can dream up.

There are options for inclusive play. Accessibility here is moving in the right direction.

As the weather has now turned in favor of more time outside, it's worth taking a look at the importance of play and the spaces dedicated to children in Ulster County.

Philosophers, psychologists and anthropologists tell us how play can assist in the physical, cognitive and social development of children. The activity is a way for children to become aware of themselves, to interact with other humans, to take risks, to react to the actions of others, and to learn to navigate through space in a dynamic fashion.

The idea of play was first introduced as a form of education, then to expend energy, spark creativity, and manage downtime. Playing freely lets children build upon social skills, and thrive in life. According to psychologist Peter Gray of Boston College, research shows that all

children — regardless of race, living environment or socioeconomic status — learn best when they are afforded the freedom of movement, choice, and fresh air that outdoor environments can provide.

Unstructured outdoor play is critical for the development trajectory of a young person's life. It prepares them to take on the greatest challenges of our time. We will need thinkers, leaders, innovators, and collaborators who know how to get along with others.

Our minds and bodies were able to evolve over time through play. John Dewey noted that the action of play for children is the equivalent of work for adults. He said that work and play cannot be separated.

The difference lies in the outcome or goal. In play, there is no end goal or outcome. It is about the process. Playing freely helps children in ways a classroom or other organized activities and sports cannot. According to play scholar and advocate Joe Frost, children playing freely are self-directed, and use their



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Kingston Point Park.

imaginations to create their own tasks. If their activities end too soon, they can be picked up again later in the day or on the next day — allowing children to exercise memory.

THERE WAS A TIME — AS MANY will remember — when playing outside was easier. Adults didn't worry as much about children having time outside or enough opportunities in the day to play. There were fewer organized activities. Kids got together before dinner or after school and came home to do their chores and homework. People felt safer, despite there being more dangers than there are now.

In the past couple of decades the so-called attention economy has had a profound impact on the lives of all of us, especially children. Children are not outdoors as much as they should be and have less unstructured play by themselves or with others. School districts continue to reduce or cut recess altogether. Childhood obesity is a serious health problem. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control, one in five children and adolescents in the United States are affected.

There's plenty of opportunity in the 1100 square miles of Ulster County to get outside: seven state parks and preserves, hundreds of miles of hiking trails, and communities actively trying to provide



access to transportation in a connected way. Playgrounds serve a critically different purpose. A playground is the only space where a child can have complete control — decision-making, choice, timing, building the space, who is playing, who is generating ideas, negotiating, and solving unforeseen problems among a wide range of ages. Playgrounds are spaces for exploration, realization, interaction and discovery.

There is no substitute for this type of environment in a child's life. Well-designed playgrounds can offer skills to children preparing them for the future that classrooms, organized activities and sports simply cannot. Perhaps one of the

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most important developments in a child that a thoughtful playground can provide is risk management. Access to meaningful and relevant playgrounds is critical for the development of the 21st-century child and arguably just as important to the adults who accompany them.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO MAKE A COMPREHENSIVE list of playgrounds in Ulster County. Most are managed by their respective municipalities, are private, or are simply still off the beaten path. Those looking to find a play space nearby will have luck by searching for playgrounds within specific towns or cities on the internet. Larger playgrounds are listed on the Visit Ulster County website. Most elementary and some middle schools have notable playgrounds open to the public after school hours. Additionally, a recent article ranked all 17 parks in Kingston, many with playgrounds.

The majority of playgrounds in Ulster County are largely rectilin-



Exploration happens at Forsyth Park (top) and Small World (above) playgrounds.

ear, with functional and dramatic play equipment the majority of structures. Moving and manipulating the body to navigate space is encouraged. Some playgrounds are more aesthetically pleasing than others, featuring evolving forms and bright colors covering plastic, metal or wood.

Others have novelty pieces such as fire-truck structures or small play rockets. The George Freer Memorial Beach has musical components, Kingston Point Park and Forsyth Park climbing walls. Many of the larger playgrounds have designated structures for different age groups. These playgrounds are often within parks that include amenities like bathrooms and have trails, wooded areas, and ponds to explore. Still others include opportunities for adults such as disc golf in the George Majestic Memorial Park or exercise equipment at the Thomas Felten Park in Modena.

Many playgrounds in Ulster County need attention, creativity, and innovation. Most are in dire need of updates and opportunities for greater accessibility and inclusive play.

The good news is that local community members care and are aware of the need for more play spaces, including natural playgrounds. In the fall of 2022, state senator Michelle Hinchey obtained a \$50,000 grant for the YWCA of Ulster County in Kingston to fund two nature-based playgrounds for the Magic Circle School and Kingston community on the weekends. Businesses like Wildflower Farms Resort in Gardiner are including natural playgrounds on their properties as designed and built by Hudson Valley Trailworks. Various towns throughout Ulster County are dedicating funds to improve and upgrade existing parks and playgrounds.

Children have the right to play. Our communities must make creating spaces for play with safety in mind — but not so much that it takes away from the experiences and invaluable teachings play can offer.

Be intentional about making time to get outside, but don't beat yourself up if you can't make it to a playground as much as you'd like. Self-driven and self-directed play can happen in the back yard, after school, or for a few minutes on the nearest plot of green grass. Remember that play can happen anywhere, at any time, and is as enjoyable for adults as it is for kids.

A select list of eleven playgrounds in Ulster County:

George Majestic Memorial Park, 40 Murphy Lane, Gardiner.
 Forsyth Park and Nature Center, 157 Lucas Avenue, Kingston
 George W. Ross Memorial Park, 204 Bowne Street, Port Ewen
 Thomas Felten Park and Playground, 11 Patura Road, Modena
 Kenneth Wilson Campground and Playground, 859 Wittenberg Road, Mount Tremper
 Hasbrouck Park and Playground, 15 Mohonk Avenue, New Paltz
 Block Park, 305 Abeel Street, Kingston
 Berme Road Playground, 20 Berme Road, Ellenville
 Andy Lee Playground, 56 Rock City Road, Woodstock
 Kingston Point Park, 49 Delaware Avenue, Kingston
 Small World Playground, 19 Small World Avenue, Saugerties



HELLO, SUNSHINE!

Some things are just better in a particular season, like wool socks, fresh tomatoes, and pumpkin spice lattes. It's true, too, if you want to go solar. While adding solar to your home or business is a smart decision at any time, **spring is the ideal time to go solar and save money!**

Fun fact: on average, there's 15-20% more sunshine in March than in February, and those numbers only get better as we move into the summer months. More sunshine plus more daylight means more energy fueling your solar array. And in New York, your utility even allows you to "bank" the unused energy you produce as credits toward your energy bill in the off-season. That means the solar goodness just keeps on giving all year round.

Need a few more reasons to check out solar? Going solar means moving away from fossil fuels and using the sun's clean energy to power your life, which is huge for our communities and for the world...Not to mention you could reduce your electricity bill by as much as 90% and have nearly 50% of the cost of your solar installation covered if you're eligible for New York State and Federal incentives.

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