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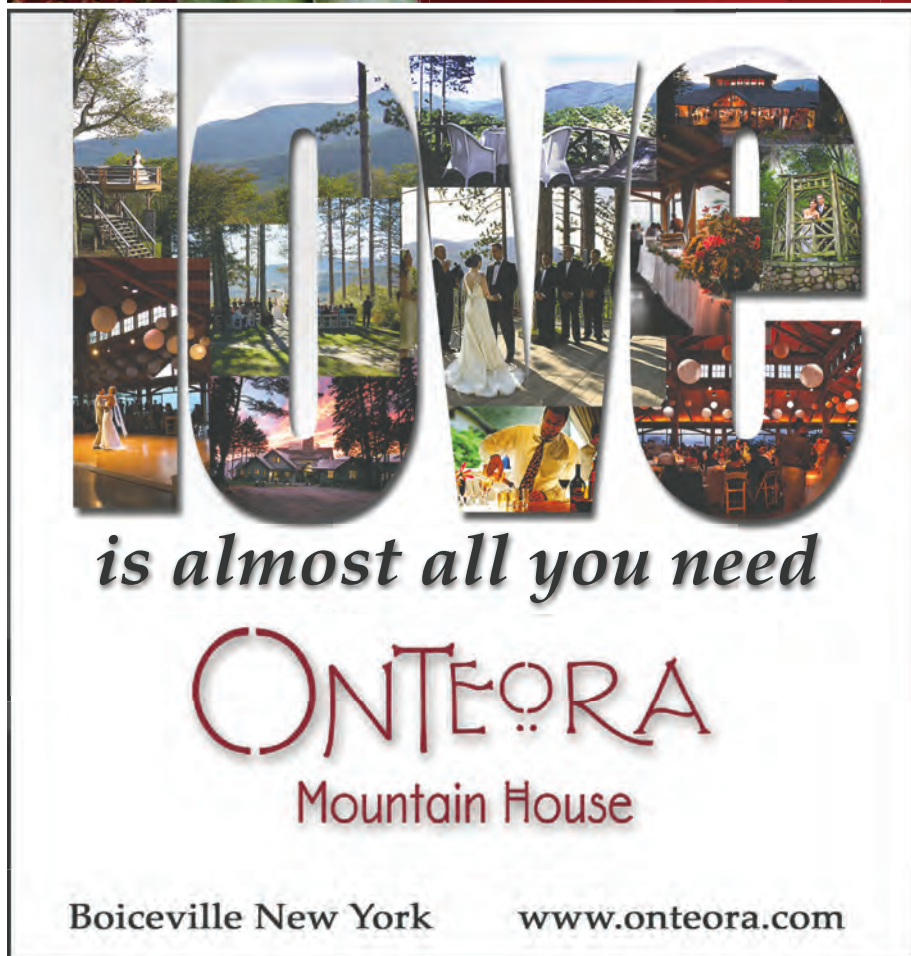
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PASTURE MAMA

Straight out of nature

Growing connections one flower at a time

by Zac Shaw

SO MUCH CAN bloom from adversity: Hope, art, community, purpose.

Local florist Amanda Perretta harvests all these delights and more in her dream job at Heart and Soil. The Newburgh-based floral design company where she works is famous for its locally grown, organic, sustainable arrangements, and naturalistic style.

The designs, Perretta said, “look like they just emerged from nature.”

Today she journeys throughout the Hudson Valley and beyond, bringing beauty to weddings and other events. But just a couple of years ago Perretta was in a completely different situation. After she spent over a decade as a professional hair stylist, the lockdown completely shut her

industry down.

“The pandemic really gave me that opportunity to see clearly and have extra time to focus on other things that interest me,” she said. “I’ve always had a passion for floral design and a high respect for flowers, but I only ever thought that I could do hair.”

What happened next was a case study in how to pursue a passion to the fullest.

The path to floral design

Perretta started with research and experimentation at home. This soon led her to seek educators and mentors in the field.

“I did take a lot of classes with florists from all over,” she explained. “That was another benefit of being home a lot. A lot of the florists weren’t able to do certain things, so they took the opportunity to sell some classes online over Zoom. I learned a lot from famous florists who worked for

high-end companies. That was a really great opportunity, because I don’t think I would have been able to do that while working at a hair salon.”

Despite receiving a crash course in floral design from top pros, the path toward a total career change was not an easy one for her to traverse. “I wrote a new résumé and reached out to florists high and low,” she said. “I kept hearing, ‘We’re not looking for help right now because of the pandemic.’”

Her lucky break finally occurred when she connected with Heart & Soil owner Kelsey Ter Meer. Of course, it was more than luck. She was ready.

“It was super-hard to find a connection with anyone else because they already formed their own connections,” she said. “It’s hard getting into a new career with such little experience. It’s hard to find that opportunity. I reached out to Kelsey,

and we instantly clicked. I liked what she was all about, and her passion and drive to keep flowers sustainable.”

Sensitivity to seasonality

Having found a true mentor who shared her respect for all things natural, sustainable and organic, Perretta triumphantly completed her career change. “I did learn a lot on the job with my boss because she’s an amazing designer,” she said. “I’ve seen so much respect for each flower.”

Top-notch on-the-job training was crucial, because she soon had to spring into frenetic floral activity. Phasing out of lockdowns meant a tidal wave of weddings was about to wash over the floral design world. Again, she was ready, which was good because Heart & Soil became flooded with clients interested in their trendsetting organic designs.

“This year is the largest year for the wedding industry since 1984. Almost every weekend is one to three weddings,” she said.

All that hard work happens in some of the most beautiful places in the Hudson Valley and surrounding area. Perretta pointed to the scenic grandeur of the area as a source of inspiration. She said being surrounded by nature “has given me a new appreciation” of the beauty of our area.

All of Heart & Soil’s flowers are sourced in our area. She travels all over the Catskills to acquire exquisite vegetation from the region’s best growers.

“We try to only use seasonal flowers that we can get during the time of the wedding,” she said. “All the growers are so passionate about what they do. It’s insane to see the countless hours of hard work that they’re putting into their farm. They’ll send out newsletters to us with their availability. Some will show the description of the flower and explain why they decided to grow it. It’s really cool to see the sense of care and thoughtfulness they put behind it.”

All that care and attention on the part of others changes one’s perspective and gives one a new sense of admiration towards the world of flowers, Perretta said.

Communication is key

Heart & Soil’s dedication to sustainability and respect for nature extends



GOLDEN HOUR STUDIOS

“This year is the largest year for the wedding industry since 1984. Almost every weekend is one to three weddings.”

beyond their close relationships with eco-conscious growers. They do all they can to minimize waste in packaging and

presenting their arrangements. “You don’t have to use floral foam and all these plastic containers,” she said.

The dedication for doing the right thing for nature extends throughout the entire life cycle of the flowers and foliage they use. When the party’s over, their team begins to return remaining greenery to the earth from whence it came. “When it comes to the day after or night of a breakdown, we try to recycle and reduce waste,” she said. “We are adamant about composting.”

Heart & Soil customizes each wedding package for the couple, offering the full spread of flowers you’d expect, but often

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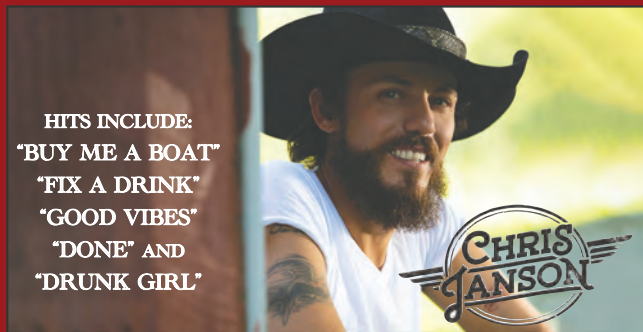
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in an unexpected and fresh way.

"We do the personals, which are bridal bouquets, boutineers and bridesmaids' bouquets," she said. "We do installation. Anything from an organic meadow going down the aisle to a ceiling install that looks like it's literally growing out of the wall. We also do a lot of bar arrangements, statement arrangements, centerpieces. It all depends on what design client wants and what's in the budget."

Perretta stressed that communication is the key to getting the most out of any wedding service provider, and especially florists, who have to deal with both the art and the science of getting fresh-cut flowers from local suppliers to your ceremony.

"Whatever the client wants," she explained, "we try to achieve it realistically. We're super into new and funky things. We do have a certain style, but we



EMILY MARTENS

do customize it to the client."

What's some advice she'd give to soon-to-be married couples currently considering how to festoon their celebration with unforgettable arrangements?

"We do a lot of check-in calls and try to touch base with them throughout the whole process," she responded. "It's nice to have constant communication. Picture-sharing between both client and florist is super important. It helps get everybody on the same page."

While she does get to have fun with flowers, the truth of the matter is that wedding arrangements are hard work. There's tons of preparation, many miles of travel, and a lot of time spent in the elements. And that's to say nothing of the physical toll. "You kind of have to have some strength, because you're lifting heavy objects," she explained.

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A meaningful connection

At the end of the weekend, as the flowers compost to feed the next growing cycle, Perretta sleeps well. Yes, she may be a bit exhausted from hauling flowers to multiple weddings. She's content with putting in the hard work to make her dream job happen, and doing it in a way that reflects her dedication to preserving the beauty of nature.

"Being sustainable is super-beneficial to the land, the economy, and our society," she said. "It's really eye-opening for people to see the hard work and passion that goes into making the world better."

One hopes Perretta's story inspires others to not just do right by nature, but to do right by themselves and others. Aren't we all trying to develop a meaningful connection with what we love? Isn't that what jobs – and weddings – are supposed to be about?

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NILS SCHEBUSCH

A sauna party.

by Frances Marion Platt

AS COVID-19 WINDS fitfully down, with many a bump in the road and a few more to come, we mid-Hudsonites

are looking for ways to resume our social lives safely. Many of us have developed an increased interest in wellness practices – partly because we've seen friends and relations felled by illness in the past couple of years, and partly because many

months of social isolation gave us time, space and incentive to reframe the balance among work, family lives and self-care. Some have even moved here from other places with the deliberate intent to establish that new, healthier balance.

The trick now is to make these two streams – social connection and personal wellness – converge. In our neck of the woods, going for a hike, bike ride or other outdoor activity with friends is the obvious means. But vigorous exercise isn't possible for everyone. And even those of us with no impediments to mobility sometimes have more of a need to relax deeply than to add one more strenuous activity to an already busy schedule.

If you're lucky enough to own your own home, and have the space and financial



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wherewithal to spare, you may have considered adding a sauna, steam room or hot tub that's big enough to invite friends over. It's a great way to bond in the ultimate laid-back atmosphere, while doing your health a world of good.

Going ahead with such a project is a major commitment, though, best undertaken only after experiencing (preferably more than once) what it's like to spend time in a hot, enclosed space, whether bone-dry or steamy. It's not for everyone. And the steam room or sauna at the gym probably isn't your ideal model.

Of course, if you live in a space that's rented, very small or barely within your budget, building your own isn't even an option. But wouldn't it be nice to be able to do a test run in a really nice spa with a group of close friends? Or have easy access to one for a day, a weekend or a week for a group vacation or family reunion?

What's brilliant about a sauna for a healthful get-together in these socially anxious times is that it sanitizes itself, over and over.

The optimal temperature for a sauna session is between 170 and 190 degrees Fahrenheit. "Anywhere above 138 degrees, the virus dies," says Henning Grentz, proprietor of Spa Fleet and builder of the mobile sauna Cloudberry. Yes, we said mobile: You can rent this

It's a great way to bond in the ultimate laid-back atmosphere, while doing your health a world of good.

gorgeous spa-on-wheels to come to your home, business or vacation destination throughout the Northeast.

A native of the part of Germany closest to the Danish border, Grentz grew up "with saunas all around," in a culture where this Finnish art is part of everyday life and health maintenance. He came to New York City in his early twenties to pursue his master's degree, and began visiting Ulster County on his days off school for rock-climbing in the Gunks. After

graduation, he moved to Rosendale, commuting to the Big Apple to work.

"I haphazardly segued into doing car-

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PRODUCTION: Diane Congello-Brandes,
Josh Gilligan

CIRCULATION: Dominic Labate

COVER PHOTO: Hayes

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Ulster Publishing (est. 1972) is a Hudson Valley media company with its office at 322 Wall Street in Kingston. For more info on upcoming special sections, including how to place an ad, call (845) 334-8200, fax (845) 334-8202 or e-mail info@hudsonvalleyone.com.

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NILS SCHEBUSCH

A relaxing sauna experience.

penry: renovations and remodels,” he recounts. “I learned how to use tools and shape wood.”

But the Hudson Valley didn’t offer him much in the way of opportunities to enjoy the benefits of the sauna lifestyle, except at “swanky hotels.” He found himself missing the experience very much. Though he can easily enumerate the myriad ways in which it detoxifies the body and promotes health and elasticity, “The greatest benefit of sauna to me is the relaxation and the social aspect,” Grentz says.

One day, while “sitting in a friend’s sauna on an island in a pond in his yard,” inspiration struck:

He decided to build his own sauna – and to put it on wheels.

He acquired a seven-by-14-foot trailer base. Friends at the Clove Valley CSA in High Falls provided him space to build his vision, converting a greenhouse to a woodshop. It took him 16 months.

“I didn’t have a full design plan when I started; I did it in stages,” he says. “Every last detail was handled many times.”

He finished Cloudberry in the autumn of 2018 and introduced it to the public at the O+ Festival in Kingston, parked at Keegan Ales.

The mobile spa is a thing of beauty, clearly made by hand using fine materials: knotty cedar for the outside, clear cedar for the inside, basswood benches and backrests, lots of glossy copper. The interior wood

A day’s rental includes 15 hours’ worth of firewood, he says. Upon delivery, he demonstrates how to build the fire and provides specific instructions on how to tend it, as well as guidelines for how to time sauna sessions and cooldowns for maximum health benefits.

The contraption is outfitted with buckets, a dipper and essential oils for pour-

ing water onto the rocks for a burst of cleansing steam. If the temperature isn’t freezing, Grentz also supplies a garden hose and outdoor showerhead, though some users prefer to park the spa near a pond or stream that they can plunge into between

“You just have to ask yourself, are you comfortable with the person who’s in your bubble?”

is finished with food-grade mineral oil designed specifically for saunas.

“Everything is hypoallergenic,” notes Grentz. The interior space is divided between a sauna room that can seat eight comfortably and a changing room. A double-walled Finnish wood stove accommodating 80 pounds of sauna rocks supplies the heat, with wood and kindling storage cleverly hidden under a flip-up bench.

sauna rounds.

The mobile spa comes equipped with electronic amenities that run off a battery: LED lights that can be programmed to change color, and stereo speakers have a hookup in the changing room for your portable music player. There’s also an external outlet for a 110-volt extension cord to recharge the battery, but “It’s designed for off-grid use.”

If you rent Cloudberry, you will also receive all the information you need with regard to possible health concerns; who shouldn't use a sauna or should take extra precautions against hyperthermia; how

to tell when you've been inside too long. Surprisingly, according to Grentz, "Almost all people with hypertension benefit from sauna." And although pregnant women are advised to consult

their doctors before going in, "In Finland for hundreds of years women have been giving birth in a sauna."

So far, he says, there have been no major medical mishaps blamed on the

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NILS SCHEBUSCH

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As for safety during the pandemic,

"Covid did not work to my detriment," Grentz says. "Sauna is very beneficial for the immune system." Not only does the heat of the sauna kill the coronavirus, but

this spa is also outfitted with an ozone disinfection machine that can be run between sessions and "kills 99.99 percent of all bacteria, virus, mold, mildew and fungus on contact," through ionized particles that reach every surface.

Yes, if you invite someone you invite has Covid and they cough in your face while in the spa, you can still catch it, But most users have been family groups or close friends who were "in their own bubble, anywayYou just have to ask yourself, are you comfortable with the person who's in your bubble?"

While demand has been steady, Spa Fleet has openings in the coming weeks and months. Grentz asks for at least three days' lead notice for a booking. Prices range from \$650 for two nights to \$3400 for four weeks, plus delivery fees based on distances (the service area includes New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Vermont, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania). To check availability, visit <https://spafleet-rental.com/book>.

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Choosing jewelry

The right piece from the right place

by Theo Sassano

AS WE ENDURE the stunning August weather, we arrive at the prime time for the most romantic of honeymoons, proposals, and weddings. None of these events are complete, I contend, without one crucial component: jewelry.

For such momentous occasions, of course, it may prove difficult to find just the right piece. While deciding on the perfect item of jewelry may be challenging, choosing an optimal spot to search for one in is the first step of the way. For those who are looking to do just that, here are a few worthwhile locations to get you started.

Your decision is entirely up to personal preference. The first step to your special moment is only a drive away.

Hummingbird Jewelers

23A East Market Street, Rhinebeck

Hummingbird Jewelers holds the work of 75 jewelers and 44 years of experience behind its name. Owned by gemologist Bruce Lubman, the store is committed to preserving the integrity and high standard of its work. It believes in being transparent with customers and utilizing only ethically sourced gems and recycled metals. The process behind the work involves careful consideration and planning:

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master goldsmith Bruce Anderson, offering quality repairs and custom works. Anderson works with customers to bring their ideas to life, whether through wax models or CAD renderings.

Lubman provides customers with a selection of gems that are in accordance

with their tastes and budgets. The store also offers piece repurposing, often requested by those inheriting rings from family.

"This is always a gratifying process, as we maintain some of the sentimental value of a family piece and pay for a substantial part of the cost of the new piece with the gem material and precious metal we may not use," Lubman explained.

For those who do not have a particular vision in mind, Hummingbird designers are on top of current jewelry trends. They produce a variety of pre-designed pieces.

"We work every day to make sure that we are providing a good experience for every customer that walks through the door," Lubman said. "We tell people that anything is possible, and we mean it."

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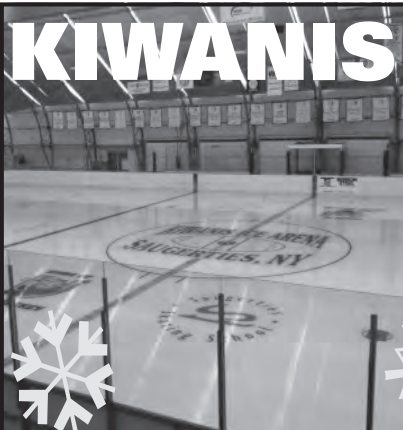
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J Bliss Studios

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J Bliss Studios, run by husband and wife Jared and Joanna Bliss, offers a unique and accommodating experience for all customers. “What’s different about our store is that it’s an artist studio. I create all the jewelry that’s here, and my husband creates all the illustrations and painted objects,” Joanna Bliss said.

The two have had extensive experience in the arts, and their dedication is shown in their handmade works. Emphasis is placed on using ethical materials. The Blisses pride themselves on their creativity. The pair embrace a spectrum of styles and are willing to accommodate all ranges of customer requests and price points.

“A lot of what we do in here is for people who are looking into an alternative style,” Joanna Bliss explained. “There’s a lot less people feeling like they have to be traditional.”

The store also works with heirloom stones, offering refurbishments that better align pieces with a customer’s style. J Bliss Studios is a good option for couples looking to find high-quality jewelry to fit their tastes.

Cavallo Fine Jewelry

7492 S Broadway, Red Hook

An establishment with several decades of experience, Cavallo Fine Jewelry is a great option for folks seeking a reliable jewelry shop. The Red Hook store is run by two deeply passionate and talented jewelers, John DiGregorio and Connie Ravigo. It offers high-quality handmade items, custom designs, and item repairs.



Hummingbird Jewelers.



Facets of Earth Jewelry.



A display at J Bliss Jewelry.

PHOTOS BY THEO SASSANO

“If you think of it, we can make it. Our forte is making wedding bands and engagement rings,” Ravigo proclaimed.

When shopping for jewelry, many

customers are rightly concerned about expense. “Custom jewelry is not unaffordable,” said Ravigo. “Most people can have it, and you don’t have to have the same thing as everyone else.”

Each custom creation can be as simplistic or extravagant as desired. Customers should receive their money’s worth. At Cavallo Fine Jewelry, Ravigo said, imagination is the only limit.

Facets of Earth

22 Broadway, Kingston

Facets of Earth is owned and operated by jeweler Morgan Mikula. Mikula is highly accomplished in the jewelry industry, with a fine-arts degree in jewelry and metalsmithing. She demonstrates her crafts within her ethical and elegant works.

The store’s comfortable, well-conditioned atmosphere reflects Mikula’s desire to establish a transparent relationship with customers. “[Our store] is meant to be open, airy, with low-pressure sales,” Mikula explained. “We certainly want to give you the time to think about the investment that you’re making.”

Facets of Earth places an emphasis on fitting the needs of all customers, which often involves non-conventional approaches to jewelry. “We like to make a lot of non-traditional jewelry,” Mikula explained. “Just making it so that it’s something that could be tailored to whatever your design style is.”

Facets of Earth offers a variety of jewelry to people of all circumstances “It’s less about trying to make a sale as it is really trying to make something that is going to be very special to you and your family for generations.”



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Corn-utopia

*It's peak time to celebrate
the mid-Hudson's bounteous sweet-corn harvest*

by Frances Marion Platt

FOLKS MAY FLOCK to the mid-Hudson in September to pick apples and October for pumpkins, but sweet corn reigns supreme as summer reaches its peak and draws to an end. The earliest varieties begin to come in the second week in July, and the latest ones are brought in by the first of October. But peak harvest happens in August.

If you're visiting or living here now, don't let the month go by without feasting on the brief wonder that is *Zea mays*, as fresh as you can get it.

In the 1980s, Ulster County produced the most sweet corn in New York State. Nowadays Ulster has fallen to third place statewide, but it's still a hotbed of corn production. Its epicenter the rich alluvial soils deposited by the Rondout and lower



Corn at Davenport Farm Stand.

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Esopus Creeks in the Route 209 corridor.

Until sold to the not-for-profit NoVo Foundation in 2013, Gill Farm was the largest producer in the county, devoting more than 1200 acres on the Hurley Flats to the growing of sweet corn. That site is now the home of the Hudson Valley Farm Hub, whose focus is on training farmers in sustainable agriculture methods. Although plans are afoot to begin producing food-grade grains for cornmeal, the only corn grown there these days is field corn used for animal feed. The Farm Hub is also a partner in the New York State Integrated Pest Management program's Sweet Corn Pheromone Trap Network, testing new alternatives to chemical pesticides for cornfields.

The largest sweet corn producer in Ulster is now Davenport Farms (www.davenportfarms.com) in Stone Ridge. Since 1840, five generations of Davenports have farmed the family's 1000-plus acres, which in recent years have been

divided up among four cousins.

Sweet corn has long been their specialty and the favorite for flavor of many a local corn connoisseur. It's available from many regional supermarket chains and smaller stores, as well as from Davenport Farms Market at 3411 Route 209.

Jostling with the Davenports for the title of tastiest sweet-corn source in Ulster County is the Wallkill View Farm Market (<http://wallkillviewfarmmarket.com>) at 15 Route 299 in New Paltz. Unlike Davenport's no-nonsense, all-business approach, Wallkill View has embraced agritourism, enticing visitors of all ages with an elaborate corn maze with picnic tables tucked inside. But locals mostly just come for a sack of fresh-picked corn.

Pick-your-own, corn mazes etc.

While pick-your-own operations have become highly popular draws for day and weekend visitors to our region, u-pick corn-on-the-cob hasn't quite taken off in the same way as yet. We were able to identify two such operations in Ulster County: Hurds Family Farm (www.hurdsfamilyfarm.com) at 2187 Route 32 in Modena and Kelder's Farm (<https://keldersfarm.com>) at 5755 Route 209 in Kerhonkson.

Both Hurds and Kelder's have gone all-in on providing family-friendly entertainment, offering such enticements for the little ones as petting zoos, bouncy houses and games. Kelder's Farm is particularly renowned as the home of the 13-foot Gnome Chomsky, formerly the world's tallest garden gnome and the third-tallest at present.

Hurds and Kelder's offer corn mazes, an ingenious way to repurpose cornstalks once the harvest is done, and an added attraction to apple- and pumpkin-picking operations later in the season.

Among other farmstands that sell sweet corn in Ulster County also host corn mazes are Clarke's Family Farm, 2086 Route 44/55, Modena (<http://clarkesfamilyfarm.com>); Dressel Farms, 271 Route 208, New Paltz (www.dresselfarms.com); DuBois Farms, 209 Perkinsville Road, Highland (<https://duboisfarms.com>); Jenkins & Lueken Orchards, 69 Yankee Folly Road, New Paltz (www.jlorchards.com); Minard's Family Farm, 250 Hurds Road, Clintondale (www.minardsfamilyfarms.com); Prospect Hill Orchards, 40 Clark's Lane, Milton (<https://prospecthillorchards.com>); Rich Farms, 260 Glasco



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Turnpike, Saugerties (<https://richfarms.com>); and Saunderskill Farms, 41 Garden Lane, Accord (<https://saunderskill.com>).

Farms that offer extra bells and whistles and kiddie attractions are far from your only choices when you're out shopping for a dozen ears of corn for dinner, of course. Two more farms that, like Davenport, pride themselves as specializing in fresh-daily sweet corn but don't go the maze route are Apple Hill Farm (<https://applehillfarm.com>) at 124 Route 32 South in New Paltz and Boice's Farm & Garden (www.facebook.com/BoicesFarm) at 600 Kings Highway in Saugerties.

The weekend farm markets hosted by many towns in our area are also great places to find sweet corn for sale. They're often the preferred point-of-sale for smaller family farms and organic operations that don't maintain their own on-site farmstands. Explore more!

A shopper's guide

Choosing the perfect ears for your dinner guests can prove a metaphorical sort of corn maze. If you haven't tried to grow corn yourself (and most home gardens aren't big enough to provide proper pollination), then you may have only a vague idea about the different types and varieties of sweet corn. Here's a primer:

"Variety" denotes a particular hybrid cultivar of corn, bred to have certain desirable characteristics such as whether it's early or late to mature, yellow, white or bicolor. "Type" or "genotype" refers to how fast the



sugars in the corn kernels break down.

Our great-grandparents only had the choice of normal or "sugary" (su) type corn, whose natural sugars quickly turned starchy after picking. Some corn fanciers (longtime garden columnist Lee Reich among them) still prefer the older, more corny-tasting hybrids such as Golden Bantam and Silver Queen; but these days you pretty much have to grow them yourself.

Commercial corn growers have almost entirely switched over to planting the more modern "sugar-enhanced" (se) and "super-sweet" or "shrunk" types (sh2), which remain tasty longer. (Shrunk refers to the collapsed look of the dried seeds.)

Se varieties have a higher initial sugar content and can be stored (or shipped) for

three to five days before eating. Sh2 types have double the sugar content of su types, with a storage life of five to ten days. They also have a different kernel texture: crisper on the outside, less creamy on the inside. If it noticeably pops when you bite into it, it's likely an sh2.

As for varieties, farmstands typically offer whichever is ready for harvest, sometimes more than one at a time. You may have a choice of colors, though that's more a matter of aesthetics than flavor. All but five of the two dozen sweet corn varieties currently recommended for fresh-market growing in New York State by the Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences are bicolor. All but seven are se types.

Early and Second Early varieties include Jester II, Sweet Chorus, Trinity, Chippewa, Temptation

and Bon Appetit, all of them bicolor se types. Of the three Midseason varieties, all bicolor, Mystique is se and Candy Corner sh2; Sweet Rhythm is a bit of an oddball, belonging to a newer hybrid class that combines strong points of the other types, called "sweet breed" or sb.

Most sweet corn varieties bred for our short-seasoned northerly growing zone are classified as Main or Late. Bicolors include the sh2-types Xtra Tender 277a and 278 and Obsession, and se-types Bojangles, Absolute, Accord, Delectable, Precious Gem, Lancelot and Brocade. Late white varieties Argent, Silverado and Silver King are all se-type. And late yellow varieties, both sh2-type, are Bandit and Zenith.

Yes, folks: That's only two yellow varieties commonly grown in New York all season. Lucky for the characters seeking someone with "hair as yellow as corn" that Into the Woods isn't set in the modern era.

To select for freshness, look at the break in the stem where the ear was removed from the plant. It should be white and a little "juicy," not shriveled, dry and yellowing. Husks should be as bright green as possible and still retain some moisture. Ears should feel plump, and rounded near the tip; young, underdeveloped ones are neither sweeter nor tenderer than large ears.

Preparing sweet corn

Since most of the sweet corn varieties available from farm markets these days

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are sugar-enhanced or supersweet, the traditional advice to put the water up to boil before you go out to the field to pick the ears is no longer as pertinent as it used to be. Even so, it's important to keep your haul as cool as possible on the way home and then refrigerate it until ready to cook. Bring a cooler stocked with freezer packs in your car when you head out to the farmstand, if you can.

And frankly, boiling the heck out of your corn-on-the-cob is way passé. Steam it for not more than five minutes instead, or microwave it for about four minutes with the inner leaves of the husk still on.

If you cut off the bottom before microwaving, all you need to do when it's done is to yank the husk off by the tassel, and voilà! Most of the cornsilk will slip off with it.

Grilling ears of corn right in the husk is also a popular method of preparation. Bruce Davenport recommends soaking them for about 15 minutes beforehand so that they steam inside the husks.

My favorite sweet corn recipe

It's easy to tell that I still use my copy of *Vegetarian Gourmet Cookery* (1971) all the time. Both the front and back covers have fallen right off, and many pages are spattered with food drips. But alas, it's long out of print; the author, Alan Hooker, founder of the Ranch House restaurant in Ojai, California, died in 1993.

It's probably safe at this point to share a simple recipe from its pages (slightly adapted, as I don't have a pressure cooker) that represents for me the culinary zenith of what can be done with the two superstars of the late-summer harvest: tomatoes and sweet corn.

Fresh Corn and Tomato Soup

Wash, quarter and core (don't peel) three pounds of fresh tomatoes.

Steam them over one pint of water for 15 minutes. Set aside to cool; reserve

steaming water.

Cut kernels from the cobs of two ears of corn (stand on end and cut downwards).

Simmer corn kernels for seven minutes in two tablespoons of butter (margarine if you're vegan), half a cup of water, one bay leaf, a pinch of powdered thyme, a quarter-teaspoon each of marjoram and basil, two grinds of black pepper and five cubes of vegetable bouillon (or five

level teaspoons of Better than Bouillon). Chicken bouillon can be substituted, but the idea here is to preserve the fresh corn and tomato flavor as purely as possible.

Put the cooked tomatoes through a Foley mill or coarse sieve.

Add tomatoes and steaming water to corn mixture. Return to a boil, lower heat, simmer for ten minutes and serve. This is what summer in the country tastes like.

Upcoming local corn festivals

Beacon Sloop Club Annual Corn Festival

Sunday, August 14, noon to 5 p.m.
Pete & Toshi Seeger Riverfront Park
2 Red Flynn Drive, Beacon
Free admission
www.beaconsloopclub.org

Corn-on-the-cob, cold watermelon, hot chili, cold drinks, live music, environmental advocacy. The sloop Clearwater should be moored nearby for deck tours. Across the Hudson at West Point, the Military Academy will join in to celebrate the festival with a 5K/10K run/walk.

Third annual Uncle Shohorn's Funky Corn Festival

Saturday, September 3, noon to 6 p.m.
Wright Family Farm
329 King's Highway, Warwick
Adults \$20 advance/\$25 gate, Children

three to twelve \$10, younger free

Uncle Shohorn Funky Dance Party featuring live bands No Soap Radio, Wood Hippie, E'lissa Jones Band. Corn-themed farm fun for all ages including two corn mazes, food trucks, kettle corn, Mexican street corn, cornhole tournament, cow train rides, candy/pumpkin/apple canons, local craft beer, ciders, wine. Rain or shine. Bring chairs/blankets. No dogs or coolers.

Orange County Sweet Corn Festival

Sunday, September 11, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sunflower Valley Farm
366 County Road 12, New Hampton

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Minimal hosting

How to throw a low-cost, low-stress party

by Violet Snow

SOME PEOPLE LOVE the creativity involved in giving parties. Organizing the menu, the decorations, the table arrangements, the entertainment — all that designing turns them on, even though, in most cases, it also stresses them out, as they strive for the perfect gathering.

Then there are those of us that just love to see our friends come together in an unpredictable swirl, enabling us to surf the waves of friendship and ride on the joy that results — but we don't have much money and would rather invest our energy in socializing than in organizing.

My husband Sparrow and I fall into this second category. So here are our tips for creating parties that don't cost much and don't drive us crazy. Actually, he's a natural at this kind of creation, while I had to learn, as you might have to, how to let go of being the ideal host and trust that your guests know how to enjoy themselves.

Make it a potluck

The number-one rule is to ask people to bring either food or drink. Not only does this step eliminate the work of menu planning and cooking, but it also means you don't have to worry about RSVPs and



Clear off the biggest table you own and throw a tablecloth over it.

how many people are coming to the party, since more people automatically means more food. The ones who can't cook can bring a bottle of something, and since alcohol is the most expensive aspect of a party, you're saving a lot of money right

there. The guests who like to cook will generally make enough for several people, so food will not be a problem, as long as you've invited enough people to cover a range of potluck styles.

Avoid grilling

Ask yourself, do you really love grilling? Some people do, and they are welcome to perform all the work that grilling involves, not to mention spend the money on food and fuel. But if you're interested in a low-stress party, my advice is to push the grill in a corner, throw a tarp over it, and save it for intimate family dinners or four-person dinner parties. (I do not own a grill, so I'm not an expert, but this one seems like a no-brainer.)

Let guests fend for themselves

Sparrow is a Taoist, go-with-the-flow kind of fellow, but it took me a while to learn that I don't have to play the gracious hostess, since I don't have a gracious-hostess personality. For instance, when guests arrived with food I used to bustle around tracking down serving implements,

making space on the table, turning on the oven for items that needed heating up. This alertness to duty meant interrupting, every five minutes, whatever conversation I was in, and I ultimately felt frustrated and put-upon. I discovered how easy it is



to just point to the right drawer and let my intelligent guests paw through for the big spoons and forks. They know how to turn on an oven, and they are certainly capable of moving platters around on the table.

At every party, there are people who can't resist clearing away empty plates, and will voluntarily plunge their hands in soapy water or place dirty dishes in the dishwasher. Let them exercise their generosity! They will feel good about

Request, in the email invitation, that each guest bring their own cup, plate, and spoon.

themselves, as they should, and you won't have so much clean-up to do. Also such activity is sometimes an outlet for social anxiety, so you will do them a favor by letting them take a break from conversation.

Invite musicians

Entertainment makes a party more festive, and live music has always worked well for us. Be selective about inviting

musician friends, since electronic music means amps and such. Is your house laid out for heavy noise-making equipment? I'm thinking more of a friend who plays acoustic guitar obsessively and has a repertoire of cover songs, creating the possibility of a singalong. You could add someone like me, who studied flute in fourth grade and likes to jam along, if another musician provides structure. Someone with a beautiful singing voice is another nice touch.

What to set up in advance

There is a small amount of low-pressure work you can do in advance to make your party go smoothly. Clear off the biggest table you own and throw a tablecloth over it. Even if the tabletop is not wood, clean-up from a variegated potluck can be arduous, whereas it's easy to shake out a tablecloth and throw it in the wash.

You may think that buying paper plates and plastic cutlery is the key to a low-stress party, but I get stressed just thinking of sending all that junk to the landfill. Also, it costs less to wash dishes than to buy disposables. It's your decision, but I recommend picking a corner of the table to stack up every plate and bowl in the house. Put out all your silverware as

well. See my comment above regarding guests who will, I am confident, help with the washing, especially if you run out of plates. On the drinks counter, you can place glasses and mugs, or better yet, station the drinks under the relevant cabinet and leave the door open so people can select drinking vessels.

An ecological and strategic alternative is to request, in the email invitation, that each guest bring their own cup, plate, and spoon. Then they will quite naturally wash their own items.

Unless you're having an alcohol-free party, which we did once because of a dear friend who was on the wagon, it's vital that you put out a corkscrew and a bottle opener. Otherwise, you'll be scrambling to locate tools while drinkers tap their feet.

Since it will take a while (hopefully a short while) for dishes and drinks to arrive, I like to buy two bottles of seltzer, a bag of chips, a jar of salsa, and a container of hummus, just so the first few guests to arrive don't feel deprived. It's a small investment that does not require cooking and alleviates anxiety in the early stage of the party.

Lastly, bring out every chair you own (desk chairs, lawn chairs, beanbag chairs, etc.) and arrange them in small groups. Soon they will be filled with talking, eating, laughing people, and your party will be a grand success.

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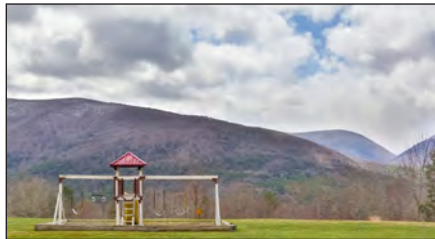
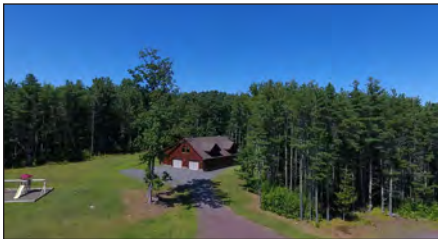


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