

Connecticut Horticultural Society

NEWSLETTER

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Serving Horticulturists Since 1887

January 2026



Editor's note: The annual Garden Trends Report is one of the most published garden studies in trade and consumer news. This is the 34th anniversary of the report compiled by the Garden Media Group, a public relations and marketing firm from Philadelphia. A summary of their findings for 2026, "Lemonading," is presented here. In addition, Garden Media has also graciously allowed us to use their images in this summary. To read the Trends Report in its entirety, visit: www.gardenmediagroup.com/trends.

Lemonading.

You've heard the phrase. In 2026, it's not fake optimism.

Lemonading is about curiosity in the face of chaos. Asking, 'What can I do with this?' Transforming setbacks into opportunities through creativity, mindfulness, and a sense of joy.

It's not about ignoring the hard stuff, but acknowledging it, feeling it, and then asking: How can I grow from this? Lemonading doesn't pretend everything is okay. It simply allows us to shine light on what's possible, without losing sight of reality.

According to recent research from Oregon State University, playful individuals showed higher resilience in times of crisis. Play is a psychological toolkit; it reframes problems, reduces anxiety, and fuels creativity.

We're celebrating our "joyspan" instead of lifespan, "minorstones" instead of milestones, small but meaningful personal wins. Things like paying off a loan, running a 5K, celebrating a half-birthday or pet birthdays. Today's consumers are less focused on status and more on intentional living.

So, when we talk about trends this year, we're not just talking about products; we're talking about values. About how people want to live, and how gardening is helping them get there.

The horticulture industry is uniquely positioned to embrace lemonading because we're rooted in resilience. We work with

living things, face seasonality, unpredictability, and failure as part of the process.

But we've hidden behind perfection: flawless blooms and pristine plants. Today's consumer wants transparency and relatability. They want to see what really grows, even after things go wrong. Lemonading allows us to express it out loud.

Lemonading in the garden means:

- Playing with something new, even if it flops
- Turning your space into a joyful, living experiment
- Laughing when something dies—and replanting anyway



Why we garden is changing. Gardens are no longer just private sanctuaries; they're powerful tools for personal expression and collective impact. Today's gardeners are using their hands and wallets to heal the world. In a time when many feel overwhelmed

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**Introducing
the Hort Hub!**

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Membership Dues:	
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Happy New Year!

Dear CT Hort Family,

We did it—another year on the books! As we look back on 2025, we are grateful for the incredible network of donors, partners, members, volunteers, grantees and scholarship recipients that makes our work possible.

This year has been about expanding our reach beyond Greater Hartford and trying new things; implementing new programs, establishing new partnerships, soliciting new speakers, recruiting new board members, and working on a new way to connect through the Hort Hub (see page 4).

In November, we had the honor of acknowledging the anniversaries of those who have been so invested in our mission for the last five to 40 years. A celebration over cake, kind words and a fabulous speaker was exactly the reminder we all needed. It was the reminder that connection is key.

Thank you to those of you who show up and spread the word about our mission. Your contributions are unmatched.

I'm looking forward to spending 2026 with you and embarking on a transformational year.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Ashley Stewart
Executive Director



Thank you to our generous business members and supporters!



FRIENDSHIP TOURS
THE SHIP SHOP

grace farms



Hollister House Garden

NATUREWORKS

White Flower Farm
PLANTSMEN SINCE 1950



Colorblends Wholesale Flower Bulbs
Connecticut's Historic Gardens
Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut
The Garden Barn Nursery

Garden Solutions
Go Organic LLC
Greater Bridgeport Opportunities
Industrialization Center, Inc.
Mountainview Landscaping LLC





Julie Zickefoose

Personal Habitat: 30 Years of Wildlife Gardening with Julie Zickefoose

Thursday, January 15 • 7 pm

On Zoom Only

(Members will receive the Zoom link the Sunday before the talk.)

Join author/artist Julie Zickefoose in a retrospective of 30 years of habitat enhancement on her 80-acre parcel in the Appalachian foothills of southeast Ohio.

This virtual garden tour showcases the stunning beauty of one place, deeply loved and closely observed, where thoughtful stewardship has made all the difference. You'll come away full of ideas for your own space, no matter how small.

Julie Zickefoose is a writer who illustrates her own books: *Saving Jemima*, *Baby Birds*, *The Bluebird Effect*, and *Natural Gardening for Birds*. She fights invasive plants, gardens, does a bit of songbird rehabilitation, and is advising editor for BWD Magazine (formerly *Bird Watcher's Digest*), to which she's contributed since 1986. She is currently writing about Carolina wrens, tiny geniuses.



COMING UP ON ZOOM ONLY:



FEBRUARY 19, 2026
Tree Preservation Techniques
with Heather Dionne



MARCH 19, 2026
An Engineer's Approach
to Houseplant Care
with Darryl Cheng



Speaker Feedback

After you attend a speaker meeting, please take a moment to tell us what you thought of the presenter. Your candid feedback helps us to arrange for speakers that will hold your interest. Take the six-question survey on our website – cthort.org. Click on the survey icon found on any page then chose the speaker you want to rate. Thank you for your feedback.

2025-2026 Scholarship Fund

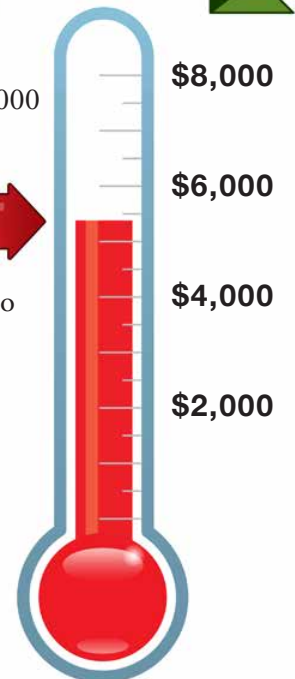
\$8,000

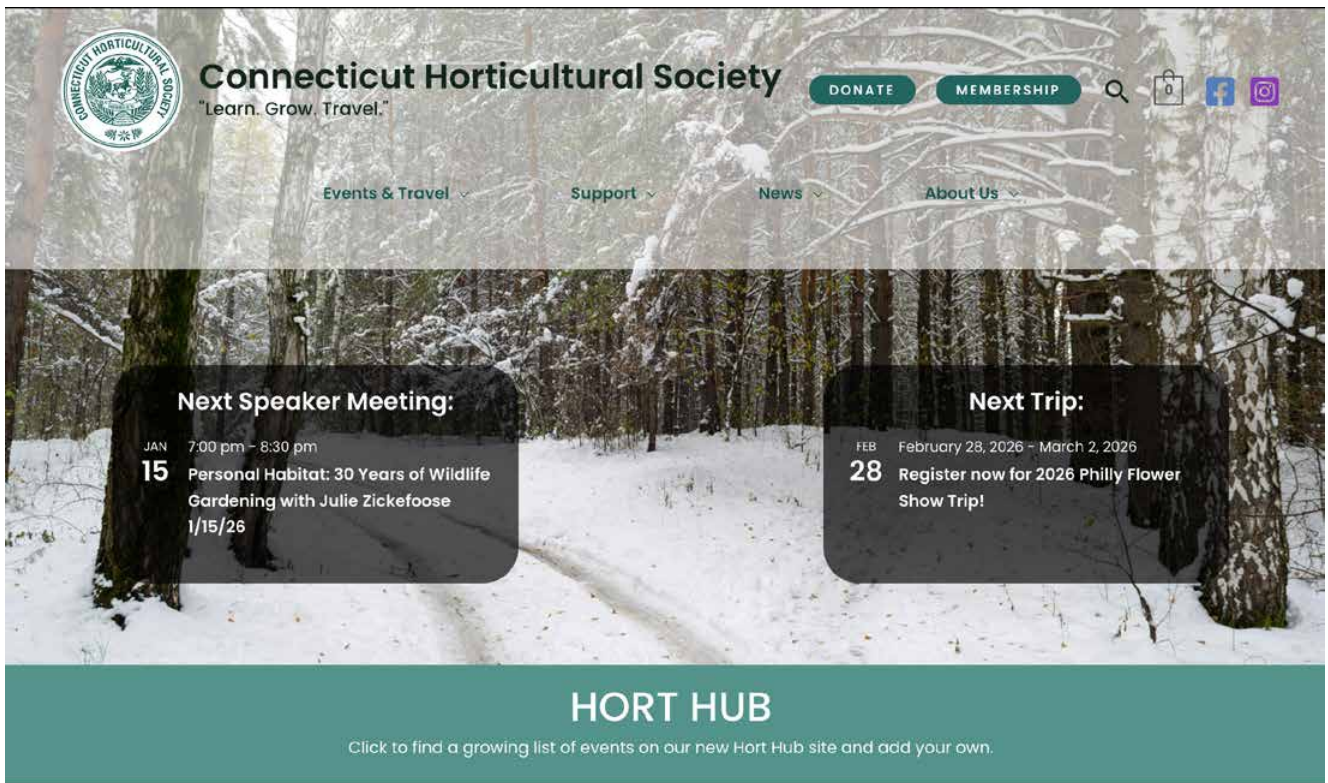
Won't you help us with our annual goal to raise \$8,000 to provide scholarships and grants?

\$5,459



Go to cthort.org/donate to give. Thank you!





Introducing HORT HUB!

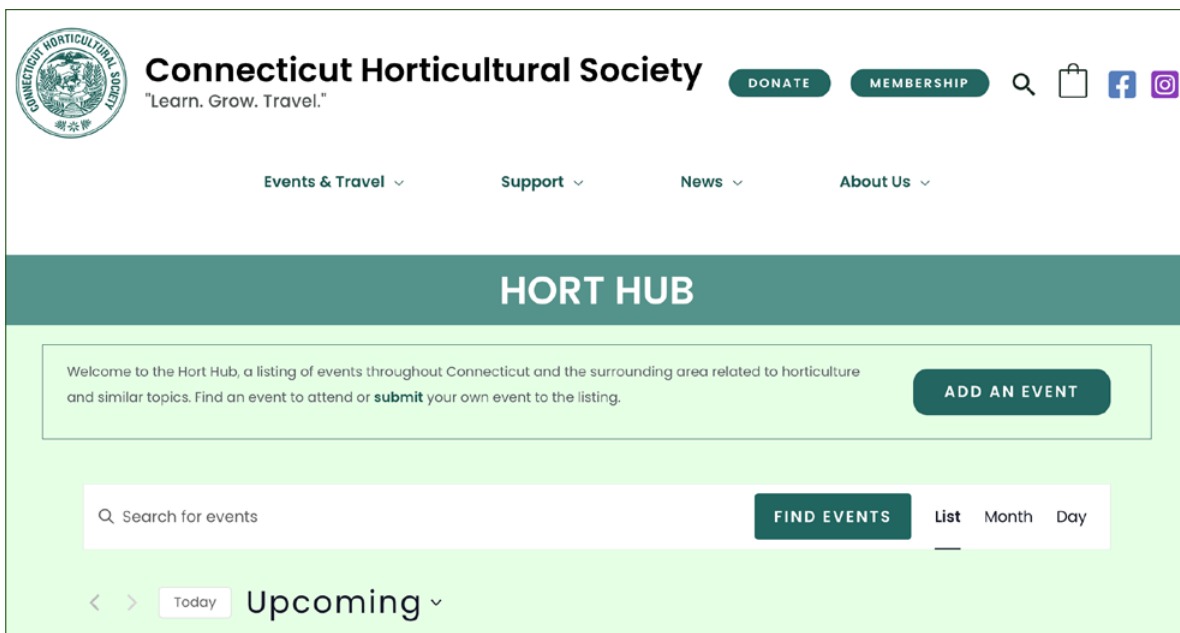
We're thrilled to announce the launch of **Hort Hub**—a new online home for all things horticulture in CT and beyond! Discover upcoming presentations, workshops, garden tours, and more.

Organizations, clubs, and businesses—share your events for FREE and reach a wider audience!

Listing is quick and easy. Go to CTHort.org and you will see the link to the page to see what's happening in the state and enter your own submission.

Let's keep our horticultural community connected and blooming.

Visit CTHort.org to learn more!



2026 Garden Trends Report from page 1

by global challenges, gardening offers a way to take tangible, visible action, right outside your door.

Gen Z, in particular, is driving a more democratized, values-led, and hands-on approach to philanthropy.

- 76% of 18–34-year-olds say they prefer peer-to-peer giving,
- Platforms like GoFundMe have generated \$3.1 billion,
- People want transparency, impact, and immediacy.



The expectation for data-driven results is now expanding into horticulture, where every plant, patch of soil, and drop of water is part of a smarter, more sustainable system.

This is precision gardening. It uses site-specific, data informed strategies to grow healthier, more resilient landscapes. It is not about guessing. It is about gardening with intention.

Why it matters:

- Cuts the guesswork, saves resources, time, and money by preventing overwatering or overfertilizing,
- Builds customer trust,
- Sets you apart from the rest.

Technology like soil sensors, localized weather tracking, and plant monitoring tools gives gardeners access to the kind of personalized insights that are transforming healthcare and wellness.



Gaming is bigger and more diverse today than ever.

There are over 3.4 billion gamers worldwide, nearly half the globe. YPulse, an authority on Gen Z & Millennial market research, claims 97% of 13-39-year-olds are gaming. But what's more interesting is how they have evolved. Almost half of them are women, with an average age of 36.

In our stimulated and stressful world, cozy gaming is booming. Mentions of cozy games grew 57% this year 67% say relaxation is the top reason they play.

Designed to lower stress and prioritize relaxation, creativity, and

gentle, nature-inspired activities, Cozy games mimic real-life experiences, such as planting crops, caring for animals, fishing, and exploring nature. They offer small, achievable rewards that tap into the same satisfaction and mindfulness as tending a real garden. It's gaming for mental health.

Games like Harvest Moon and Stardew Valley (41 million copies) paved the way, focusing on farming, gardening, and building community.

And it's capturing the next generation: Grow a Garden, a Roblox-based farming sim, drew over 16 million concurrent players in June 2025, that's more than the popular Fortnite at its peak. These 13-year-old kids planted seeds, raised pets, and grew a garden. No guns. No fighting. Just the joy of nurturing.

Cozy gaming spaces, such as the CozyGamers on Reddit, are filled with hundreds of thousands of players sharing their digital landscapes alongside real-life gardening inspiration.

As one user put it: "It's not just a game—it's a mindset."



In a world of digital sameness, instant gratification and mass production, collecting is making a comeback, especially with Gen Z and Millennials. They're reclaiming individuality through collecting—a quiet rebellion against disposable culture.

On TikTok and Instagram, influencers are showcasing curated collections featuring sneakers, vinyl, and cars. But this wave is more about the story-driven ownership, building meaning and identity through curation.

Aesthetic-driven subcultures, such as #cluttercore (158M+ views on TikTok from 3M in 2021), #cottagecore, Eclectic Grandpa, and Kitschy Kitchens, are trending, signaling a preference for layered, nostalgic, and curated environments. In a disposable culture, collecting offers something radical: permanence.

Collecting plants is the new Pokémon; rare cultivars, new foliage colors, and variegations are being chased. Plant collecting taps the same emotions as gaming: achievement, progression, and control. It's slow joy.

Collectors range from:

- Specialists: curating 50+ monstera varieties, leading to an all-time best-seller from Costa Farms: Burle Marx Flame,
- Explorers: hunting rare, high-demand cultivars like Thai Constellation or Alocasia 'Dragon',
- Nativists: curating gardens to support pollinators, preserve

ecosystems, and restore biodiversity.

Foragers add a living layer to the Personal Museum, gathering nature's treasures: branches, seed pods, moss, blooms, bark, and berries. This isn't scavenging, it's intentional curation. Each item collected tells a story of place, season, and moment.

Foraging is collecting with a purpose:

- It teaches seasonal awareness,
- Builds a deeper relationship with nature,
- Transforms the mundane into meaningful,
- Emphasizes impermanence and observation.



We're living in an age of compression. Everything is distilled into smaller, smarter, and more intentional formats, from communication to content to consumer products.

But we're not just rushing. We're refining. This isn't about more, faster. It's about experiences designed with care, efficiency, elegance, and emotional resonance.

The rise of the bento design literally means curated spatial compartments. Each item has purpose and contributes visually to overall harmony. Small scale, highly considered, and deeply satisfying.

A bento box isn't just a container — it's a concept. Everything has its place. Every element is curated. It's portable pleasure, packaged with care. Apply it to your garden.



Pets and gardening go together like peanut butter and jelly. Surveys say 70% of gardeners also own pets, and that pets aren't just companions; 87% consider them family.

As pet ownership rises, especially among Millennials, it's unsurprising that gardens and outdoor spaces are evolving to accommodate them. But after 25 years of reporting, why would they hit now?

Horticulturist, broadcaster and author Monty Don made history by designing a dog-inclusive garden at the 2025 Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Flower Show. He reminded us that thoughtful design can also be pet friendly.

Key needs:

- Lush Native Lawn—unusual for a show garden—so dogs can roll around and play. Diverse lawns are hardier for pets' needs, as well as offering many new things to sniff. However, clover is especially beneficial because it remains green during periods of drought and dog waste, whereas grass will turn yellow.
- Non-Toxic Plants: Choose plants that are safe for pets,
- Secure Fencing & Boundaries: Ensure the space is escape-proof with pet-friendly, durable fencing that meets your needs,
- Shade & Water: Provide cool, shaded areas with trees or shrubs and access to water,
- Play & Relaxation Zones: Add agility spaces, splash areas, or comfy resting spots.

Designing outdoor spaces with our furry friends in mind is more than a luxury; it's a necessity. Make it easy with a curated collection of pet-friendly plants:

- Lavender – Plant along paths for a calming scent and natural pest deterrent,
- Bee Balm – Use in borders to keep curious noses out of the pollinator party,
- Nepeta Cat's Pajamas – Edge garden beds; resilient to pet traffic and full of texture,
- Coral Bells – Add to shaded areas for color without toxic worry,
- Creeping Thyme – Ideal as a groundcover between steppingstones; soft on paws and fragrant,
- DownHome Harvest Bless Your Heart Rabbiteye Blueberry – Sweet treats for the whole family and safe for Fido,
- Mojo Pittosporum – Beautiful variegation makes this a safe and stunning structure shrub.

Reshaping gardens

Pet ownership isn't just influencing small changes; it's reshaping home design. Nearly half of pet owners already have dedicated outdoor spaces for their pets, and many more plan to add them. Homeowners and renters are factoring pets into their outdoor and interior design decisions, creating what's now dubbed "barkitecture."

This trend shows no signs of slowing, from feeding stations and catios to custom sleeping areas.

The takeaway? The future of home and garden design is pet-inclusive, making life better for both pets and people.

The message is clear—gardens are no longer just for people. They're for pets, too. 🐾



Horticultural Happenings & Announcements

Note: Happenings are listed on a space-available basis. To submit an event, send details to news@cthort.org. Please format the announcement to resemble the entries below. Deadline for the January issue is December 15.

Thursday, Jan. 8, 6-7pm—Bartlett Book Group, Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens, 151 Brookdale Road, Stamford. This month's discussion focuses on Club meeting features the National Book Award finalist *When It All Burns* by Jordan Thomas. The book is a firsthand account of Thomas, a hotshot firefighter's gripping firsthand account of a record-setting fire season. New members are always welcome. Register at www.bartlettarboretum.org/bartlett-book-club.

Friday, Jan. 16, 10am—Federated Garden Clubs of CT presents "Fundraising...Rethinking Your Annual Plant Sale," on Zoom only. A panel will present tips on achieving successful plant sales, overcoming challenges, and alternative fundraising ideas. Hosted by FGCT Board Members, this is the first of "Federation Fridays," a new workshop series that provide a deep dive on important topics such as membership, club finances, fundraising, events, flower shows, parliamentary procedures, awards, social media, youth, FGCT resources, and more. Register at www.ctgardenclubs.org/club-corner/federation-Fridays

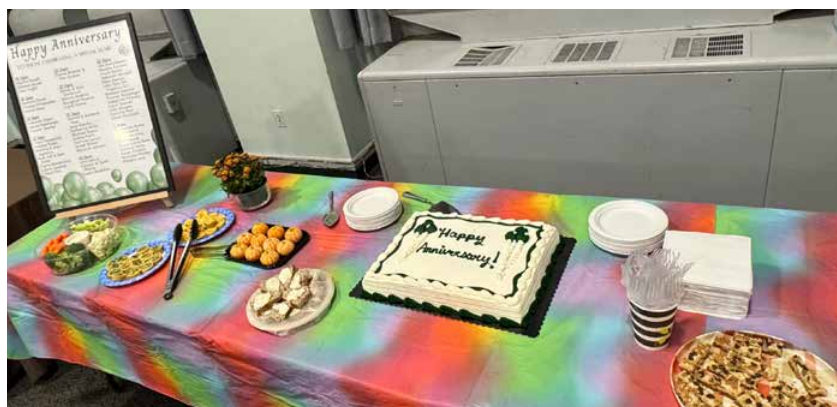
Saturday, Jan. 17, 1-3pm—West Hartford Garden Club presents "Gardening Workshop Series: Winter Sowing," Noah Webster Library, 20 South Main Street, West Hartford. Learn how to use the winter sowing method to

grow your own native wildflowers and grasses in recycled containers. This workshop will cover the benefits of this method of germinating seeds over indoor seed-starting, which requires grow lights and hardening-off of seedlings. We'll send you home with a mini greenhouse made from an upcycled plastic jug filled with a planted seed selection. Proper aftercare will also be shared. Participants should bring their own transparent or translucent gallon jugs (clean milk or water jugs are perfect!). Event is free, but registration is required. <https://westhartford.librarymarket.com/event/gardening-workshop-series-winter-sowing-nwl-93392>

Friday, Jan. 23, 6-8pm—Musical: Concert in the Drawing Room, Hill-Stead Museum, 35 Mountain Road, Farmington. Celebrate Manet's birthday with an intimate evening of music in the Drawing Room. Musical features a classical guitar concert by Dr. Ben Lougheed. The program, "Dancing on Six Strings," is inspired by the universal connection between dance and music across cultures and centuries. Tickets: \$10 children; \$25 members; \$30 non-members. Register: www.hillstead.org/event/musical-concert-in-the-drawing-room.

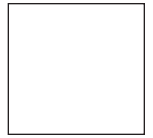


Visit cthort.org for the MOST CURRENT listings and links.



November Photos Roundup

More than 100 people tuned in online and in person to see Michael Wojtech's *The Growth of Trees: A Journey Through Time* in November. CT Hort hosted the event and recognized our members celebrating special anniversaries (5-40 years).



Dated Material 🌿 *Please Rush*

CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

- Tuesday, Jan. 13** – Board of Directors Remote Meeting, 7 pm
- Thurs., Jan. 15** – Speaker presentation:
*Personal Habitat:
30 Years of Wildlife Gardening*
with Julie Zickefoose,
7 pm, on Zoom only
- Thurs., Jan. 15** – Deadline for the February 2026 *Newsletter*

Go to CTHort.org for information on these and all other meetings and programs.

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**Historic Virginia Garden Week and Charlottesville Gardens
April 21-26, 2026**

Federated Garden Clubs of CT is hosting Historic Virginia Garden Week and Charlottesville Gardens, running April 21-26, 2026. It includes five nights at the Mendenhall Inn and some amazing stops. Contact Kathy Lindroth at kathleen.lindroth@gmail.com with questions. Click here for the brochure and registrations materials. <https://cthort.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Historic-Virginia-GW-Fed-Garden-Clubs.pdf>



**Gardens of the Brandywine Valley
May 4-8, 2026**

Enjoy a spectacular trip through the gardens of the Brandywine Valley from May 4-8, 2026. Stops during the trip include the Mansion at Andalusia, Winterthur, Mt. Cuba Center, Jenkins Arboretum, Chanticleer, Valley Flowers, Tyler Arboretum, Longwood Gardens, Greenwood Gardens and more! Go to www.friendshiptours.net or call Barbara at Friendship Tours at 860-243-1630.



**Andalusia, Spain
May 8-19, 2026**

Step into a world of color, fragrance, and timeless beauty on this unforgettable 12-day tour through Andalusia, Spain's sun-drenched southern region with our guide, Cole Burrell. Go to www.friendshiptours.net or call Barbara at Friendship Tours at 860-243-1630.