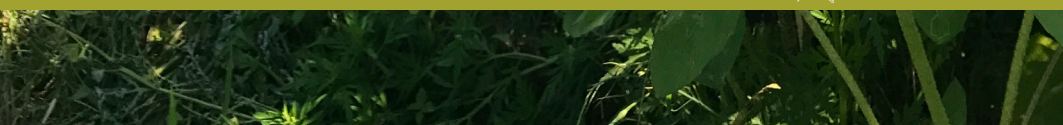
STONY KILL ALMANAC

SPRING | SUMMER 2025



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Stony Kill Foundation
79 Farmstead Lane
Wappingers Falls, NY 12590
845-831-3800
foundation@stonykill.org
https://stonykill.org

@stonykillfoundation

Our Mission

To connect the public with nature, sustainable farming, and local history. Our hands-on programs provide environmental education through the lens of agriculture.

Vision

A world where sustainable agriculture flourishes and people are inspired to care for their local environment.

Purpose

Stony Kill is a working farm and education center. It is a place to slow down, explore nature, and learn through experience.

Cover photo:
Stacey Lynch Adnams

Almanac Editorial Team

Stacey Lynch Adnams
Lauren Biniaris
Shelly Loveland
Margaret Maruschak
Kerri Morgan
Salita Signorelli
Tim Stanley

Layout and Design by Dorna Schroeter

To inquire about submitting an article or images for the Almanac, email: Almanac@stonykill.org

A Season of Renewal

Spring represents a reawakening: the first snowdrops to push their way through last fall's leaf mulch, the last drips of sap from the maple trees, and our Tunis ewes lambing at all hours. Stony Kill has experienced an early spring reawakening of its own, completing phase one of our barnyard restoration and a comprehensive strategic plan that will steer the course of the Foundation for the next three years.

As we head into one of my favorite seasons, our attention will turn to the community organic gardens, which have been thriving since 1979. We'll be welcoming 23 new gardeners to our 120 plots and introducing them to our water conservation and organic growing methods and, most importantly, our collective of community-minded individuals, families, and friends. Our goals this season: to be mindful and respectful of our neighbors and the land both in the gardens and outside its perimeters, conserve water using environmentally friendly methods, and continue sharing knowledge and best practices with each other to ensure a bountiful harvest. We look forward to growing together in the community gardens.

Stacey Lynch Adnams
Executive Director

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

Contents

Nature's Milestones

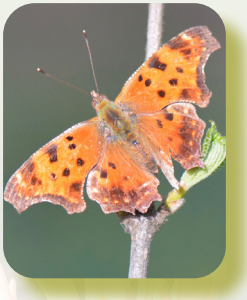
By Tim Stanley

Natural events and things to look for on the farm as the seasons unfold:

Mid-April—Stony Kill lies in the northern range of the tulip poplar tree, a member of the magnolia family. The trees' tulip-like flowers bloom in April, attracting a variety of pollinators and acting as host for eastern tiger swallowtail butterflies.

Mid-April—Mourning cloak and eastern comma butterflies are the first to emerge from hibernation.

April—Red foxes often repurpose old woodchuck holes as dens, where they raise three to six kits on average.



May 12—Full Moon (Planting Moon)

June—Bluegill fish nest in the farm's Muller Pond, with males standing guard over the eggs located in shallow depressions in the sand.

June 11—Full Moon (Strawberry Moon)

Mid-July—Barn swallows nest in the Stony Kill barn and begin to gather in migratory groups in preparation for returning to their South American wintering grounds.

July–August—Look for the "Summer Triangle" in the night sky, made up of three bright stars: Vega in the constellation Lyra, Deneb in Cygnus, and Altair in Aquila.

August 19–24—The farm's heritage livestock will be showcased at the Dutchess County Fair.

Tim Stanley is president of Stony Kill Foundation.

Top: Mourning cloak butterfly
Bottom: Eastern comma butterfly
Photos by Tim Stanley

Humans of Stony Kill

"Being able to see the turkeys and cows up close. Gobble gobble."

—Ava, age 2, pictured with her mom, Emily, LaGrange

Photo by Kara Cerilli

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

"For the general public, for people who need wheelchair access, it couldn't be greater. I never thought I would see such an improvement in the whole facility."

—Dick Lahey, Hughsonville

What is your favorite part of the barn renovations?

"This is wonderful. It's flat, it's level for us elderly. It gives the birds access to the outside so they get the fresh air and sunshine and you can see them a whole lot better than when they were just in the barn."

—Kathy Griffey and Richard Medwick, Fishkill

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

Photo by Brianna Vivace

"The new pathways and pens bring openness and accessibility to the barnyard and allow visitors to get up close to observe the animals. As a photographer, being able to view the animals from this new perspective will allow me to take even more unique pictures."

—Kara Cerilli, Wappingers Falls

Does the Worm Think His Home is Lovely?

By Theresa Frey

It is a warm spring morning on Stony Kill Farm. We are sitting in our sit spots*, observing the grass, the clovers, and the spring green growth below us. Our sit spots are on an old tree that has been cut and sanded, perfect for sitting close to the earth. Some of the students—who are on a field trip from a local public school—have twigs and are investigating just below the topsoil. The grown-ups sit on the picnic benches just a few meters away. We all sit and share what we observe, feel, and dream about as we expand our senses to take in the morning and the excitement about the day ahead. We meet insects living just below our feet, greeting the ants and the worms. We take deep breaths, and I pass around a worm situated in moist compost, whom we welcome like a caring friend. Together, through the Nature's Recyclers module of our outdoor environmental education experience, we learn about how this worm is essential.

Photo by Kaetlyn Stamper

Learning by Doing

We pause to read a few pages from *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt*, which helps us critically think through a story and illustrations on why ants (insects), roly-polys (crustaceans), earthworms (invertebrates), and other soil animals are our garden heroes! After, we walk over to our compost pile, taking turns to water the decomposing nutrient-rich soil made from vegetable and fruit scraps and leaves. We investigate by digging. Questions are abundant: "What is that?" "Why is that moldy?" "Who put this dirt in here?" "How many days has it been in there?" Then, together we discuss—though there is a moment of silence as all eyes are fixed on decomposition in action!

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

And by Sharing

One student asks, "Does the worm think his home is lovely?" I smile and remember a quote by education scholar bell hooks: "Love is an action, a participatory emotion." The student, who has taken in and distilled all that we've learned today, can now answer her own question. She shares with us and teaches us why the worm indeed thinks his home is lovely.

*__Sit Spot__ is the practice of returning repeatedly to the same spot to observe and be in nature, which I learned about from Dr. Darcia Narvaez and Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows) in their book *Restoring the Kinship Worldview*.

Theresa L. Frey is an outdoor environmental educator at Stony Kill and PhD candidate in Education at the University of East Anglia, UK.

Lambing Watch

By Shelly Loveland

If you follow the farm on social media (and you should!), you likely saw posts of some pretty adorable Tunis lambs that were born this spring. But what you may not know is all that goes on behind the scenes to support the lambing, thanks to a dedicated team of staff, board, and Stony Ground 4-H members.

Preparing for the Birth

"About four weeks before the expected lambing, we get all of the equipment in order," says Kim Pennock, Stony Ground 4-H Club leader. "Then, about two weeks ahead, we hang heat lamps and create the lambing jugs, where we cordon off a section of the pen to create a small space where the ewe and her newly born lambs will stay and bond." Next, "lamb cams" are set up so that the ewes can be monitored remotely as their due dates approach. Outside of regular farm hours, Stony Ground 4-H Club members keep watch in the early evenings, and Stony Kill staff and board members take turns with the overnights, waking every few hours to check the live video stream.

Photo by Kara Cerilli

So how do they know when it's time? "The ewe will seem uncomfortable and paw at the ground," Kim notes. "She doesn't sleep, and stops eating. When she starts pushing, she will get up and lay down, up and down, up and down. Eventually, the water bag will come out, and then we'll start to see two hooves poking out; if we don't, we start to get concerned and will check the position of the lamb. If it's malpositioned, we will help. We really try to be completely hands-off unless there is an issue."

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

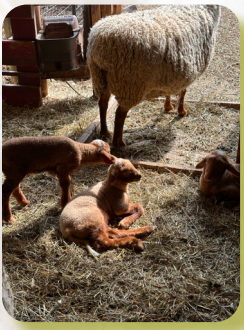


Photo by Kara Cerilli

Caring for the Flock

Once the lambs are born, the team watches to make sure the ewe is feeding them. After just a few days, the lambs no longer need the heat lamp and they head outside with the flock, no matter how cold the weather. The Stony Ground 4-Hers take it from there, helping raise the lambs as they prepare for the Dutchess County Fair in August.

From start to finish, successful lambing at Stony Kill Farm is a year-round process. "Our team has worked hard on supporting and growing the health and care and safety of our flock," says Kim. "The ewes receive regular vet care, they get lots of hands-on attention, and our knowledge has grown, thanks to workshops and webinars we've taken. It's so rewarding to see the results—the ewes can do it on their own!"

Photo by Kara Cerilli

Shelly Loveland is a Stony Kill communications and event volunteer.

Look to the Skies: Birds of Prey

By **Stacey Lynch Adnams**

Driving onto the farm each day, my eyes immediately look to the skies, tree tops, and fence posts. I'm looking for hawks, one of the many birds of prey that inhabit the farm. It's my passion. I almost never use binoculars; the birds are too fast. I stop my truck and observe from afar.

At Home in the Forests

The farm is the perfect habitat to host these majestic predators. The forest near the Woodland Trail is home to three juvenile red-tailed hawks (or chicken hawks, as they're sometimes called) who are often soaring in unison high above the fields. In addition, the grazing pastures provide a variety of varmints for our smallest raptors, the kestrel and peregrine falcons. Both have been spotted diving into the fields, pinning their kills to the ground. A pair of barred owls once called the Sierra and Woodland Trail woods their home, exhibiting their nocturnal tendencies in the moonlight. In the past few years, they have been harder to witness, as a great horned owl has infiltrated their territory, forcing the pair to find another home.

A Welcome Visitor in the Gardens

Most recently, the community gardens have become a fantastic environment to spot our most popular raptor. A cooper's hawk—sometimes confused with the red-shouldered hawk—has staked her claim. Although she sometimes hunts from the fence posts along the farm lane, the gardens are her favorite place. She perches daily on the many available six-foot fence posts, hunting for moles, mice, and rabbits—the gardeners' worst enemies. She might be the most photographed hawk on the property, since there are almost always people in her chosen habitat, but she has no fear and will hop to another post should someone get too close.

Last summer, we received a call from concerned gardeners that she might be injured, so we contacted an experienced rehabber to catch her. We followed her around the gardens with a large net. In the hour we chased her, she pounced on three rodents in three different plots and made her intentions and health clear—she was doing just fine. She's found a home that provides for her needs at Stony Kill Farm, helping gardeners with pest control and giving visitors who encounter her a thrilling experience in nature.

Stacey Lynch Adnams is executive director of Stony Kill Foundation.

Photos by Stacey Lynch Adnams

Give (Shelling) Peas a Chance

By Andra Sramek

One of my earliest memories of garden life was sitting with my mom and siblings on our west-facing back porch shelling peas that we had just picked from our bountiful garden. We'd split open the fat, green pods, and there, inside, were the sweetest, most tender, delicious peas we could ever imagine. We would pluck them out and place them in the waiting colander, all the while trying not to eat the entire stash sitting in the palms of our hands.

I'm told by a few longtime gardeners that shelling peas have fallen out of vogue since the introduction of edible-pod peas that people eat like candy. Pick, eat, repeat: that pretty much describes the "sugar" varieties of sweet peas.

When to Plant

However, there are still "shelling" peas available on any seed rack (though pea packets tend to go quickly since they're one of the first seeds you can plant early). My dad would plant his on or around St. Patrick's Day, and they'd usually germinate and break through the soil in seven to ten days. Nowadays, it feels like the seasons have shifted a bit, and colder temperatures are hanging around longer in the spring, so March 17 seems way too early, even for peas. I generally plant in late April or early to mid-May, when the soil is warm and inviting and the seeds sprout in no time. If you miss the spring planting window, you can always plant pea seeds in late summer for an autumn crop.

Enlist the Kids!

If you have young children who are anxious to help in the garden patch, sweet pea seeds, because of their large size, are one of the best for demonstrating how to plant properly. Simply make a hole in your soil about 2" deep, and have your helper drop in one pea. Go right down the line: one hole, one big pea seed. Cover with soil, water a bit if the soil is dry and air temps are warm, and wait for the magic to happen. Soil temperature is more important than air temperature with seed germination, so any pea-planting latecomers will catch up in no time.

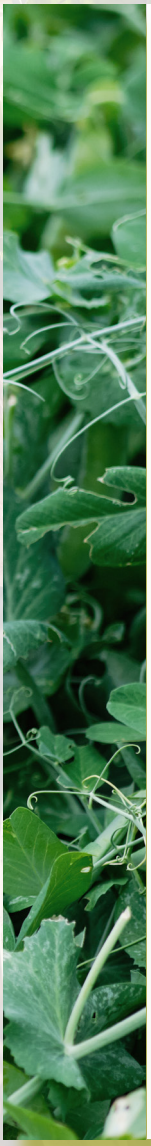
So grow some peas and have a shelling party with your family or neighbors! (And don't forget to save some peas from your harvest to plant as the next year's crop.) Here are three varieties of shelling peas you can try:

Blue Bantam (Burpee Organics): 80 days to harvest
Super Snappy (Burpee Organics): 65 days to harvest
Little Marvel (Ferry-Morse): 65 days to harvest (non-GMO)

Andra Sramek is a horticulturist and Stony Kill Foundation member.

Simple Recipe for Freshly Picked Peas

By Andra Sramek



This is a nice recipe for children who have planted the seeds, harvested the pods, shelled the peas, and can now enjoy the benefits of their labor. Easy breezy, delicious, and nutritious.

Ingredients: boiling water, shelled peas, butter, salt

Bring a saucepan of water to a boil. The size of the pan depends on how many cups of fresh peas you have. Smaller quantities of peas; smaller pan, but enough water for the peas to dance around in.

2 to 2½ cups of peas already shelled, rinsed, and sitting in a colander is a good amount.

When the water is at a steady boil, drop in the peas and cook for about 60 seconds. When the peas all rise to the top, they're done. Beware: they can go mushy in a heartbeat.

Remove from the heat and drain immediately. Do not rinse with water.

Toss the warm, cooked peas with butter and salt, or any other alternative if you prefer. A very dear friend of mine sprinkles the peas with brewer's yeast. I like the taste of that too.

Volunteer Spotlight:
Robert Dohrenwend

By Lauren Biniaris

If you have ever taken a hayride at a Stony Kill event, it is quite possible that Robert Dohrenwend was driving the tractor pulling you around. One of the invaluable volunteers who help keep the farm running, he has done a little bit of everything in his six years here, especially when it comes to tractors. He helps turn and spread manure in the pasture; helps clean and muck out the barn and barnyard, and has even bottle fed Stony Kill lambs in his own home when they needed some extra TLC.

Robert's love of farming began in middle school, while working with the buffalo at Tucker's Farm in Stormville. Over the course of his lifetime, he added other species to his repertoire, such as cows and sheep. But his all-time favorite animals to work with are horses.

For many years, Robert worked for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's thoroughbred breeding program in Poughquag. One of his responsibilities was to hold the mares while they were being bred—a task not for the faint of heart! He has also assisted in equine surgeries and emergency farm veterinary care.

Robert became a volunteer at Stony Kill to stay connected to farming, but it isn't just the animals he loves. When asked about his favorite thing at Stony Kill, he responded without hesitation: the people. It is people like Robert who help make the farm such a special place, and we cannot thank him enough. Stony Kill loves you, Robert!

Lauren Biniaris is vice president of Stony Kill Foundation.

Stony Kill Then and Now: The Barn

By Ed Cigna

Tenant farming was the main economic engine for Stony Kill for about 100 years. In the 19th century, three forces changed that. First, as western New York and U.S. expansion provided better lands for farming, the Hudson Valley became less attractive. Second, the 1850s "swill milk scandal" in New York City resulted in the deaths of about 8,000 babies and created demand for safe milk. Third, the expansion of Vanderbilt's railroad from New York City and up the Hudson River provided fast delivery of farm products to the huge city market.

Built for Opportunity

Because of its location, Stony Kill became attractive as a dairy farm. To meet this opportunity, the barn was built circa 1860. The architecture is typical of English basement barns, called gambrel barns, with wooden pegs holding the beams together and several levels serving distinct functions. The cattle were kept on the east end of the building, facing the warm morning sun, where we see the livestock today. Feed hay was stored on the level above where the animals were kept and farm equipment was housed in the lower portion, under what is now the classroom, facing the farmhouse.

And from Necessity

When visitors go to the north side of the barn, they see an inclined soil bank leading to large barn doors that allowed the farmer to drive the hay wagon directly to the upper level without the need to lift the crop. There are also "trap" doors above the middle level that allowed easy access to the hay bales stored above. As a result, hay could easily be dropped to the level where the animals are kept today.

Photo by Ed Cigna

Keeping it Cool

Keeping the milk cool was a challenge, so an icehouse was built on the top of the hill near the Tenant House. The ice was cut each winter from the Muller Pond once it froze over. There is also a large water tub in the basement of the farmhouse where cool water from the running stream behind the house could be diverted to bathe the milk containers.

Thus, the barn enabled the Verplanck descendants to take full advantage of the milk and cheese markets in New York City. Their business lasted until the early 20th century, when the farm would take a new direction.

Ed Cigna is an educator and a former board member of Stony Kill Foundation

Photos by Tim Stanley

Straw's Superpower: Water Conservation

By Tim Stanley

Straw is an exceptional mulch, offering a range of benefits for gardeners. It's made from the dried stems left over after grain crops such as wheat, rye, or oats are harvested—a process known as threshing. It's important not to confuse straw with hay, which is dried perennial grasses often used as livestock feed and contains seeds.

Among the many advantages of straw as mulch, one of the most significant is its ability to retain moisture in the soil. Mulch helps **conserve water** by preventing rapid temperature fluctuations, keeping the soil cooler during hot summer months and warmer in early spring and late fall. This moisture retention reduces the amount of water plants need, making straw an ideal solution for gardeners seeking to conserve water.

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

Water conservation is crucial to the success of any garden, especially during drought periods. Water is a vital environmental resource, and its availability can vary—sometimes abundant, other times scarce. At Stony Kill Farm, for example, the average monthly precipitation in June, July, and August is just 4.5 inches. The community garden relies on a single well to supply water, which can struggle to meet the increased demand during dry spells. Straw helps mitigate the need for frequent watering, supporting efforts to conserve this precious resource.

Photo by Tim Stanley

The benefits go beyond water conservation. Straw also **protects soil and plants from the impact of heavy rain**. A thick layer of straw cushions rainfall, reducing erosion and preventing the formation of hardpan soil. Additionally, as fruit ripens, straw provides a clean surface for it to mature, keeping it off the ground and free from dirt.

Straw is also an effective **natural weed barrier,** especially when combined with newspaper or cardboard placed on the soil before applying the straw. This simple method can save gardeners hours of weeding. Any weeds that manage to push through are much easier to remove from the soft, moist soil than from dry, compacted earth.

Photo by Tim Stanley

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

Lastly, as straw decomposes, it **enriches soil fertility,** making it a valuable tool for no-till gardening. As the straw breaks down, it improves soil structure and texture, creating a healthier environment for beneficial soil organisms like earthworms, pill bugs, fungi, and collembola. These creatures thrive in rich, well-balanced soil, which in turn supports strong, healthy plants.

Tim Stanley is president of Stony Kill Foundation.

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