

## The farming way of life in Easton



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The region may be recovering from last weekend's wild weather but the farmers in town deal with the effects of Mother Nature all year long. And to them it is second nature and fulfilling.

When Patti Popp of Sport Hill Farm was growing up, her grandfather had a garden, and she remembers all the sayings he repeated over and over that have to do with the timetable for planting and harvesting food.

"Corn is knee-high by the fourth of July," said Popp, remembering just one of the many adages that fill her head, and her memories, from childhood.

"Farming is a way of life," she said. "It's all the things people used to do and some places are losing that. I never understood before I went into this."

Right now, Popp is planting in her greenhouse and raised beds. All the seeds for this summer's bounty on her farm will be in place by the end of the month.



Tom Sherwood and his family on Sherwood Farm spend St. Patrick's Day each year planting peas. It's an old farming tradition — peas on St. Patty's Day, and a family ritual at his house.

"It's when we begin planting for the year," Sherwood said. "Peas can frost and freeze and be OK."

Spinach and arugula also are among the vegetables that may be planted directly in the ground (direct seeded) now and will come up when they are ready.

Other early season vegetables, like broccoli, lettuce, cauliflower and bok choy, need to be started in a greenhouse and planted outside once the threat of heavy frost has passed.

Planting peas on St. Patty's Day is just one part of the traditions in Sherwood's family. And they have all been going on for the last several generations.

It is a life he is content living. "I like to wake up in the morning, go outside and check on my crops," Sherwood said.

Johan van Achterberg has the new beginnings of garlic and rhubarb at his Hidden Meadow Farm in town. Later on he will begin his potatoes, tomatoes and basil. It is a routine, a connection with the earth, that he has enjoyed for decades.

"Life is about recycling," van Achterberg said. "It's a cycle, it's how the world works."

He likes to recall another old farming saying: "If you make a mistake with a seed or a plant you have to wait a whole year to start all over again."

But even if you do get things done on time, farming really is a year-round job. And an art, according to Irv Silverman of Silverman's Farm.

"We're pruning all winter — the apples, peaches and plums," Silverman said.

*(Story continues below)*



Some of the trees are taken down to make room for new growth and variety. Discernment is required, as is a <http://www.acorn-online.com/joomla15/eastoncourier/news/localnews/52909-the-farming-...> 3/24/2010

rhythm that Silverman has grown to understand over the years.

This year's new trees will be delivered on April 1. "And we're starting something new this year," Silverman said. "We're planting grapes."

The grape plants will take three years to mature. That is just the way nature works.

It is a process he feels people are starting to understand and value again.

"The new appreciation of farming is bringing the younger generation back to an appreciation of dirt," Silverman said.

And you can't farm without getting at least a little dirty.

There are other benefits as well. Like the trees and the birds and the sunshine.

"That's my office," Popp said of working outdoors.

She also appreciates the miracle of nature that is her livelihood and her passion.

Right now, spring is showing its first signs and bringing to life the land that has lain fallow all winter.

"The babies are all popping," Popp said. "Especially with the warm weather we've been having... How miraculous is it to watch something that started as a little seed in the ground."

The hard work is also worth it to Sherwood, who feels that people are starting to get back to eating locally and seasonally again.

"It's a way of life," Sherwood said. "You know what to eat, when. You don't look for asparagus in the middle of winter because it will be from far away."

But soon it will no longer be a matter of looking a far distance for fresh fruits and vegetables. Easton is a matter of weeks away from freshly grown produce. The ground is thawing and getting ready to create fresh food. With a little help from the town's farmers.

March 18 is Connecticut Agriculture Day this year. State legislators and the public will gather in Hartford to look at what is being done to help farming in the state. There will be demonstrations and awards.

On Friday, April 9, the Easton Library will kick off its One Book, One Town selection with a showing of the film, *Food, Inc.* and a presentation by Patti Popp in the library community room. This year's book is Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, an account of her family's efforts to eat locally for one year.

*Laura Modlin of Easton writes a blog on farming at [thefarmingjournalist.com](http://thefarmingjournalist.com).*

[< Prev](#)

[Next >](#)

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