



There is sure to be a nice variety of plants at the Wilmot Garden Club's annual sale on Saturday, May 25.

## Wilmot Garden Club to Host Annual Plant Sale May 25

**Press release**

The Wilmot Garden Club's famous annual plant sale will be held from 8 AM till Noon on Saturday, May 25 on the Wilmot Town Green, right off Route 11, next to the bandstand and town offices at 9 Kearsarge Valley Road. Follow the signs from Route 11.

In preparation for the plant sale, Wilmot Garden Club members dig, pot, and nurture perennials donated by local gardeners, to sell alongside a wide selection of picture-perfect greenhouse raised annuals and vegetable plants trucked di-

rectly from Jolly Farmer Nurseries.

Every year funds raised by the plant sale are used to beautify the town of Wilmot, and to award a scholarship to students demonstrating a strong interest in the field of horticulture.

As usual, the garden club's annual plant sale is a one-day only, rain or shine event. Mix or match 6 packs will be on sale at the bargain price of 2 packs for \$5. And, you will have the assistance of garden club members to help you with your choices. Convenient parking is on-site. See you there!



## Danbury Group Rescues Merrimack Pepper

**Press release**

From the late 1930s to the early 1980s, the Merrimack Wonder Pepper was a favorite among gardeners in the Granite State as a variety that produced abundant numbers of sweet red peppers in a mere 60 days, weeks earlier than standard varieties. Unfortunately, over the next 30 years, the Merrimack Wonder became increasingly less available and finally disappeared. Now, after pulling off a successful search-and-rescue for the plant, a small group of local farming and gardening advocates is making seeds for the Merrimack Wonder Pepper available once again.

New Hampshire has long been a leader in the development of food sources that thrive under our changeable conditions. One of the most productive breeds of laying hens, the New Hampshire Red, was developed here during World War I, and the extremely cold-tolerant variety of peach tree, the Reliance Peach, was offered by the UNH School of Agriculture in the 1940s. After plant breeder J.R. Hepler, also at UNH, introduced the Merrimack Wonder Pepper in 1939, it developed a loyal, enthusiastic following among local commercial growers and home gardeners alike. However, when the Merrimack Farmer's Exchange, headquartered in Concord, went out of business in the early 1980s, the Merrimack Wonder seeds disappeared along with the company.

Members of Danbury Grows, some of whom have been successful in locating other old vegetable varieties, have had their sights on this pepper for some time. "About four years ago," says Kathy Neustadt, the group's con-

vener, "we thought we'd hit pay dirt when Donna Sprague, a key person at the Blazing Star—our local Grange—found a Merrimack Wonder packet from the early 1950s folded up in an old jar in the summer kitchen of her farm. We were so excited! Those seeds didn't end up germinating, but the experience inspired us to keep looking, and we eventually did uncover a few dozen viable seeds. That's when we really got to work."

For the past three growing seasons, several Danbury Grows volunteers have started seeds while others have raised the plants, agreeing in advance to have only this one variety in their gardens to ensure the genetic purity of the seeds. It has been important to spread the work around, if only because, as Neustadt's farmer husband, Tom Curren, points out, "We didn't want to have the future of a species taken out by one marauding woodchuck!"

The primary attraction of this heirloom pepper was initially its short-season usefulness, but Danbury Grows members have been further impressed by the plant's vigor and productivity.

"These are very strong plants that flower early and often, and they go to red-ripe well before our frost dates, which is so unusual," notes Jessica Cook, a local architect and one of the volunteer growers. "But the real attraction to me is the taste and how well they keep in the freezer. When you pull out a bag of them in mid-winter, they cook up just as crisp and flavorful as they went into the freezer in August. I love that!"

The reintroduction of this long-missing heirloom represents a major new resource for some New Hampshire gardeners and a welcome return of a reliable old friend for others. For more information, please contact Kathy Neustadt at [kdn@comcast.net](mailto:kdn@comcast.net).



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Silent auction items including spa, wine and chocolate baskets.

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