



NYFOA
New York Forest Owners Association

SPRING 2026

NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER

The Chair's Message.

Greetings everyone from your new Chair; allow me to introduce myself. I am Brett Davidson, your new co-president for the Niagara Frontier Chapter of NYFOA. I have introduced myself to most/all of you via phone. I found that it was enlightening to hear your stories and intend to use what I have heard to direct our future events. Mark Gallo agreed to share the burden with me (actually he did not step back fast enough to get out of the way). We have some exciting news to share with you.

Right about now most people would like to have groundhog stew. But fear not, spring will arrive, as far as the calendar is concerned on or around March 21. Early signs are among us, walnut seeds that have been stratified are starting to poke out the very first beginning of a root. Herbivores are busily chewing down any of the plant growth that you worked so diligently to protect. And such is the way of the world.

Spring brings about thoughts of renewal, so get outside and do something refreshing, as described in my article that follows. Speaking of thoughts of the future, consider the past. The woods walk at Mark and Jean Gallo's property in Ransomville last summer was a great success. Individuals from Niagara County Soil and Water, the NYS Department of Conservation, members of NYFOA, and a member from the Tuscarora Nation were available to discuss various issues related to land use and management. Norwood Sawmills representatives were also on hand to put Mark's HD36 saw mill to the test on a big beech log. The sun was hot and the freshly cut wood let us know it. We had to get it into the shade quickly, slow and steady is the way to dry green lumber. Master woodworkers and woodturners were also on hand to show many traditional woodworking techniques. Their land is flat with many nice wide trails, the Gallos even provided tractor hay rides for those who didn't feel the need to get their steps in for the day. The Chapter intends to host another woods walk sometime in early June, more details to follow.



NFC NYFOA Members learning wood carving at 2025 woods walk



NFC NYFOA Members learning capabilities of Norwood HD36 sawmill at 2025 woods walk



NFC NYFOA Members learning turning at 2025 woods walk

Sincerely, Brett Davidson

Dendrochronology, Dendroarcheology, and Dendroprovenance

As I stare at one of the hand-hewn timbers in my house, I wondered what that tree encountered in its life, and more importantly when exactly did it live. Trees are amazing chroniclers of history in their wood. There is a field devoted to this known as dendrochronology which is tree-ring dating. The study of trees/wood and their use by humans over historical time is known as dendroarcheology. Dendroarcheologists can give relatively precise dates regarding older civilizations based on wooden artifacts.

How exactly does dendrochronology work? First a little biology. Trees in temperate regions grow one ring per year. Because tree growth is heavily influenced by climate (moisture, temperature, etc.) all trees of the same species in a specific region will share a similar pattern of growth. Some types of events can influence larger regions, and as we will see later some events can be detected in trees at a global level.

So let's say you cut down a number of trees, you will see, starting from the past growing season, a particular pattern to the size of the rings, larger spacing means faster growth that particular year, smaller rings mean poorer growth. Perhaps you would find that 20 years ago all trees showed a particularly small ring, maybe there was a particularly dry summer, or a late frost, or a cool summer?? If you cut down a really old tree you can see what the conditions were like 100, 200, 300 years ago. In a way it looks like a barcode, and that isn't a bad way to think about growth patterns. Then comes the fun part. One can keep "walking back" in time by finding wood in structures that overlap with your recently acquired history. (If your house was built in 1800 and some of the timbers are from trees that were 200 years old you can see what growing conditions were like the whole way back to the 1600's. Doing this has allowed dendrochronologists and dendroarcheologists to reach back thousands of years.

A search on the internet for interesting examples of dendroarcheology include the following: from a drought in Southwest U.S. from 1276 to 1300, which led to the Pueblo Indians abandoning their cities to the establishment of a settlement of people in ancient Greece over 5,000 years ago!

The spacing of the rings does not tell the whole story. Trees also bioaccumulate materials from the air. Volcanic eruptions, mini-ice ages, solar flares, and other events like giant meteorite hits can also be noted. Nuclear testing changed the chemistry of every living thing on Earth. When above-ground nuclear tests were conducted in the 1950s and 60s, they blasted massive amounts of neutrons into the atmosphere, which reacted with nitrogen to create Carbon-14. Chernobyl released measurable amounts of Cesium and Strontium into the atmosphere to be detected in trees.

Although some events can have a global impact, others can be felt and affect trees regionally. This fact brings up another term dendroprovenance. With this field one can tell not only when something grew, but quite often where it was grown. Why can you find English Oak in a building in the new country? Maybe it was scavenged from a ship built in Europe. One example I heard of was the use of dendroprovenance to show that a violin believed to be a fake Stradivarius was indeed made of wood from the 1600's this helping to prove its authenticity and value. The same has been done with some of Rembrandt's works, thus indicating that the trees used were felled at least five years prior to the paintings.

Local interest in dendrochronology has been performed in the Niagara River Gorge. Some of the cedars found along the gorge were tested by individuals from the University of Guelph as well as Bruce Kershner on the U.S. side are well over 1,300 years old! These small centuries-old survivors most surely can tell a few tales. So go plant some trees and leave a legacy for the future.

By Mark Gallo, Ph.D.

Upcoming Events

Field & Forest Products online mushroom seminars - various dates

https://fieldforest.net/beginner-s-cultivation-workshop-march-14-2026/?utm_source=FFP+NEWSLETTER+MASTER+LIST&utm_campaign=f50f40de6d-

New York Nut Growers 2026 Spring Meeting - Saturday April 18, 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/newyorknutgrowersassociation/2069162>

Grand Island Arbor Day Celebration - April 25, 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM

Join your neighbors for a celebration of TREES & Community!

Family Crafts

GRAND ISLAND
ARBOR DAY
Growing Grand Island

Saturday, April 25
11 AM–2 PM
Western NY Welcome Center

Local Vendors

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Things to do in your woods in the winter of 2026:

Of course you could do any of these any other year, but this article talks specifically about what you can do right now. The weather this winter hasn't been real agreeable. We seem to go from bitter cold, to gale force winds, to torrential downpours, to snow events. With the drought conditions this past summer, my farm has managed to limit the standing water. Meaning there are no excuses to not get out and do something. I am betting on a reversion to the mean bringing some more stable weather allowing woods owners to get out and enjoy some good old fashioned forest bathing. Taking in the fresh air while you ...

1. Girdle a tree – Got that one-hundred foot behemoth with its crown intertwined with three or four of its neighbors. The only direction you can fell it has a whole bunch of young pole size stems that will get turned into toothpicks if you drop that monster on them. What to do? One solution may be to girdle that bad boy. Over the next couple of years, the crown will begin to drop starting with smaller branches and gradually increasing to larger branches. Breaking the flow of nutrients from the roots to the crown kills the tree. The reduction of the size of the crown reduces the chance of the tree falling inappropriately for two reasons. The first is the remaining branches become brittle and the second is that the width of the crown is greatly reduced. The slimmed down profile is much easier to drop between a maze of young stems. And, your firewood or cabinet lumber has already begun drying down.

Girdling involves removing a couple of inch band of bark from around the diameter of the tree. This disrupts the flow of water and nutrients allowing this controlled process to begin. I have taken an axe and removed a three to four inch strip of bark around the circumference on a 26" diameter beech growing among a patch of young sugar maples. I say three or four inch because my control with an axe is not what I would like it to be due to too much time wielding a chainsaw.

This approach will help to save the maples and to lessen the adrenaline rush (ordinarily read as fear), violence and danger of dropping a stem this size surrounded by a number of large neighbors. The process will be much safer and much more controlled with almost no crown left. I don't have to worry about a large limb catching and rotating the stem as it falls creating a dangerous situation. It also eliminates getting a stem this size hung up which for me is an almost an intractable problem. I am reluctant to undercut it and drop small sections one at a time due to the huge risk and do not have any equipment big enough to nudge it to the ground without the risk of it sending my two ton plus tractor airborne.

It has been four or five years since this tree was girdled, and it is finally ready to be dropped. There are not any widow makers because there is not enough branch structure to support a loose large limb stuck in the crown. It is still going to fall with

Things to do in your woods in the winter of 2026:

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the force of a tractor trailer being dropped from the sky, but it is more manageable and controllable with a much smaller crown and less water weight. The destruction it creates on its way down is also going to be much less with fewer large limbs looking to crush everything in its path. The forest floor has already eaten much of the crown that has fallen because the process has been so slow. It has been a multi-year fertilizer program.

Fifteen minutes of work five years ago (five minutes if I had used the chainsaw) made five years of a controlled crown self-pruning and is going to make it far easier to break this down to saw logs when it hits the ground.

2. Order more trees – It is very frustrating getting tree catalogs in December. I get overly anxious to get out and start planting. With so much time left in the winter this is a recipe for disappointment. Sure enough, the weather has other plans and I just get frustrated at the lack of cooperation. I then have to temper my enthusiasm for another three months until I can finally get a shovel in the ground. This is not the only problem I have with ordering trees. My main problem is I want it all. When you don't have to dig any holes, it is easy to plug in two hundred fraser fir on the soil and water conservation district order form. Imagine the shock when I get that order in April, look into my pasture and see approximately zero holes dug. I really would like to have the area where I am going to plant tilled the fall before. By December when the order forms arrive that is a distant memory. I need to get on the tractor and till up some of that thick mat that parades as grass in my pasture and try and get those trees in the ground.

It would be nice to always be prepared. You know what they say about the best time to plant a tree? The best time to plant a tree is when you have a bucket of fifty with still moist roots sitting right next to your leg. If I was prepared maybe these poor things wouldn't have to struggle with this orchard grass trying to shade them out and strangle their tender roots. At best they get a four-month head start. This really ends up fine because my overarching planting strategy is the stun method (sheer total utter neglect).

So, what did I actually order. I am a real softie for fruit and nut trees. Who could resist a description like *luscious dessert apple with good resistance to fire-blight and scab, sweet juicy and crisp red fruit keep well*. Give me at least four of them. You would think they are doing this to take advantage of unsuspecting rubes. Fortunately, I know better. Give me five. This year I am truly showing some restraint. Due to an unknown outcome regarding a lingering shoulder issue, I am trying to avoid having to dig a lot of one-handed holes.

Things to do in your woods in the winter of 2026:

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Here is what was on my shopping list:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. 25 fraser fir | 7. 3 mulberry |
| 2. 8 hardy English walnut | 8. 6 honeyberry (bush) |
| 3. 10 eastern redbud | 9. 10 Siberian pea shrub |
| 4. 10 nannyberry | 10. 4 seaberry |
| 5. 10 sycamore | 11. 6 apple |
| 6. 5 Chinese chestnut | 12. 1 plum |

This list will probably grow. The soil and water conservation pickup event has extras available for purchase. As long as my shoulder isn't in a sling, picking up a few extras will be fair game. After the great tree shortage that occurred during covid (which apparently was another great time to plant a tree), there are many new tree sellers in the game. There should be plenty of trees available. Here are some of the sources I have used:

- ♦ W&J Awald Farms (berries)
- ♦ Niagara County Soil & Water Conservation District
- ♦ Schlaback's Nursery (no online presence, call for a catalog 866 600-5203)
- ♦ Musser Forests
- ♦ Burnt Ridge Nursery
- ♦ Double A Vineyards (grapes, berries)

Here are a couple of notes regarding ordering trees. Most of the plants (trees, shrubs) are ordered bare root. The roots have no soil on them. This greatly reduces the cost of shipping. They ship when the roots can go in the ground which in WNY is no earlier than mid-April. You don't want it too cold or too wet. They need to be planted promptly, and the roots need to stay moist before they are planted.

Each county in New York has a soil and water conservation district (SWCD). You can order from any of them. I sometimes order from the Erie and Niagara County in the same year. The pickup dates have never overlapped. They carry many of the same trees, but they both offer some different options. The prices are very reasonable.

Planting a conifer (pine, spruce, fir, etc.) from the SWCD is really easy. I use a regular garden shovel. Stick the blade of the shovel in as close as perpendicular as possible, rock the shovel back to create a small slit for an opening. Trim the roots if necessary with a knife, hedge shears or similar. Slide the roots in and stick the shovel in about six inches behind the first slit. Rock forward and take whatever other actions are necessary to close up the first slit (like press on it with the heel of your boot). You can do it all in 60 to 90 seconds. Planting fruit and nut trees takes a bit

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longer and usually requires digging a hole, but it usually is not a very big hole. There is a large variance in the size of the roots you will receive on a fruit or nut tree. The same applies to forest trees.

I like shagbark hickory, cherry and black walnut trees, but I also like apples and English walnuts and chestnuts. If I am going to plant more trees and I like to eat fruit and nuts, I see no problem solving both issues with the same tree. Now is the time to order ... and you know what they say about the best time to plant a tree.

Make sure you are out in your woods compiling your order or planning out the planting location or the title of this article makes absolutely no sense.

3. Well, it is about time you head out and tap a maple tree. If you haven't tapped a maple tree I suggest you do it this winter. Maple sap is nature's Gatorade. This is something that is really easy. It takes only a little longer than planting a conifer. You need a spile (like a mini spigot without a valve) to tap into the tree, a food safe bucket (available at any brewing supply store and may include nearly all plastic buckets from what I have heard) and a little piece of small diameter hose to run from the spile to the bucket. Head out into the woods with a drill motor and a 5/16" bit and drill a hole with a very slight downward tilt from parallel to the ground about 1/2 to 3/4 inch deep. Grab the nearest downed branch and tap in the spile. Attach a small length of tubing, route it into the bucket and come back in a couple of days if the sap is running.

The sap runs when the temperatures are below freezing at night and above freezing during the day. Sometimes this weather begins in January, sometimes much later like last year when this weather pattern didn't start until March in my woodlot. Most years the sap begins to run in February in Lockport. Your location may provide a different experience.

The sap is wonderful. It is ice cold coming out of the tree and sterile. If you are out working hard in the woods and build up a thirst, maple sap is an extremely satisfying thirst quencher. The best description is a sweet water. I use it to make tea, but have to cut it 50/50 with water or my tea is too sweet for my taste. It is loaded with minerals, and you already paid for the tree.



Typical small scale maple sap tapping and collection set up.

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If you want to tap a few trees you can find maple supplies at some local hardware stores. I have ordered mine from eBay. If you search for maple tap on eBay you are certain to get far more hits that you really need. The kits run around \$25 and generally provide enough supplies to tap 10 trees. I put in one or two taps a year.

What I collect is shared with friends, family and work colleagues. Almost nobody I know had ever tasted maple sap. I have changed that reality for a couple of dozen people. You too will get plenty of sap from one tap. On a reasonable year I get at least ten gallons. Be the first kid on the block to introduce your social circle to the joys of maple sap. It makes a great reason to get out in the woodlot this winter. And remember, it is easy.

Note: For those who are interested in a medium scale syrup operation, we have an offer from a chapter member to host a small group towards the end of sugaring season. He is willing to help a small group that has an interest in starting a small commercial operation or to help a small scale operation get bigger. If you meet this criteria and are interested in “tapping” the brain of an experienced sugarer please text a response to 716 541-7973 or email bjd5@verizon.net.

4. I could go on, but I need to make sure I have something to write about for next newsletter. Your homework is to respond to this email with any ideas you have to get in your woods this winter. Not really too concerned about how insignificant you might think the idea is, send it along. If we get enough ideas, they might just become another article. Include a statement whether you are open to receiving attribution for the idea in an article, otherwise indicate anonymous.

By Brett Davidson

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Got a forest management question or story?
 Share it with us — we'd love to hear from you.



Niagara Frontier Chapter

Wayne Forrest, Editor
 7683 Highland Drive
 Gasport NY 14067
 Phone: (716) 628-3345
 Email: wayne357@rochester.rr.com

2026 NFC Steering Committee			
Brett Davidson	Chairman	716 541-7973	bid5@verizon.net
Mitch Banas	Vice Chairman	716-983-6895	mitchbanas@roadrunner.com
Bob and Pat Glidden	Treasurer/Woods walks	716-622-6497	pfglidden@verizon.net
Wayne & Brenda Forrest	Editor	716-628-3345	wayne357@rochester.rr.com
Vacant	Secretary		
Jim DeLellis	Woods walks	716-634-3843	idel634@gmail.com
Mark & Jean Gallo	Program	716-525-5973	mgallo@niagara.edu
Herb & Jeri Linderman	Member	716-795-9237	bitternut@roadrunner.com
Eric & Eleanor Randall	State Delegates	585-547-3596	randall-maple@msn.com
Don Kuhn	Program	716-583-1997	deekuhnzie@verizon.net