

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



MAY 2003

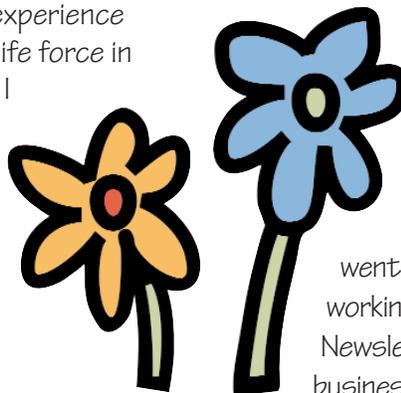
THE FLOWER PROJECT OF THE CANCER CONNECTION

MY NAME IS BLAKE WALTON, and I am a first-time gardener at the Community Garden this year. It was kind of an impulsive decision to rent a garden plot. I hadn't really thought it through. But after a particularly touching meeting recently of the breast cancer support group that I facilitate at the Cancer Connection in Florence, I found myself lost in reverie over a beautiful bouquet of flowers sitting on a table in a shaft of early spring sunlight.

I vividly remembered receiving a large bouquet of stunningly beautiful flowers when I was first undergoing treatment for breast cancer in 1993. I remembered feeling that surely everything would be all right if something as beautiful as those flowers could grow, and that I wanted to live if only to be able to experience again each spring the beauty of the life force in those flowers. In that moment when I thought, "What can I do to help relieve the suffering of cancer patients?" the answer came: Plant Flowers! Plant copius perennials and annuals and make enough bouquets to cheer up all the cancer patients I know – and then some. And so, The Flower Project was born.

I have made a modest beginning by soliciting donations of plants, bulbs, seeds, and labor. I welcome much more of the same. Please contact me at sueBwal@aol.com or at 586-9240 if you would like to donate something to the Flower Project or if you know of someone who could use a bouquet. Or stop by C4 sometime, and watch hope bloom! Thanks. 🌸

—Blake Walton, Plot C 4



GARDEN NEWS

🌸 **JUNE 1 PLANTING DEADLINE.** Memorial Day weekend (Saturday & Sunday, May 31 & June 1) is the traditional tomato-planting time in New England. It's also the Garden **deadline for starting your garden:** By June 1, you must have substantially cleared your plot and started working it. One perennial or a row of radishes, in a sea of crabgrass is not enough. The inspection teams that come around at 4:00 P.M. on the 1st are not expecting perfection, just evidence that you have been tending your garden.

Please remember that unplanted plots may be re-assigned to another gardener. Please also remember that you may ask for up to a 2-week extension of the deadline, which is automatically granted; send an e-mail to mtx@smith.edu or a note to Community Garden,

Recreation Dep't., 90 Locust St.,
Northampton 01060, before May 31
(phone requests not accepted).

🌸 **WEB SITE DOWN.** Anyone who has tried to access the Garden home page in the last several weeks has not succeeded. That's because our host company went bottoms up without warning. We have been working to find a new host and, by the time this Newsletter hits the stands, we should be back in business. We'll send out an e-mail message of notification as soon as that happens.

🌸 **CLEANUP DAYS.** Two dozen gardeners turned out for Cleanup Days on May 3 and 4, with fine results. The Survival Center plot around the tool shed was weeded, turned, raked, and early crops planted. Our shrub borders (one between the compost pile and Burts Pit Road, a more extended one at the northeast corner of the

continued on next page

Garden News continued

Garden) were edged, weeded, and mulched, and are looking especially fine with spring-blooming shrubs in flower. Our large "Northampton Community Garden" sign on Burts Pit Road was scraped and repainted and now awaits only relettering. A large tangle of branches from a fallen tree was reduced to an orderly pile and moved to a central location (see below), and a start was made toward reclaiming abandoned plots.

THANKS to the volunteers who accomplished this. THANKS also to Bart's Homemade for the coffee they donated and to Chris Teghtsoonian, who brewed and delivered it, along with a trayful of delicious cookies from Bart's.

✿ **WOODCHIPS AND BRUSH.** The wood chips to the north of the tool shed are left for us by the Northampton DPW and are available to all. They are especially useful for mulching paths in your plot. Be aware that as wood chips decay, they take up nitrogen from the soil; that makes them a less suitable mulch for vegetables. In the same location, you'll find a pile of large and small branches and brush, all useful for plant supports. Help yourself.

✿ **COMPOST.** The compost pile at the west end of the Garden provides free compost for those who are willing to cart it to their plots. There is a compost screener there – thanks to Michael Filas who built it for us. The compost pile is also the place to put organic waste from your plot. Please – no sticks, plastic, paper, or metal – either take those home with you, or put them in the dumpster.

✿ **DOG SIGNS.** We owe special thanks to Sarah Metcalf for the amusing and elegantly-executed signs requesting dog walkers to leash their dogs as they come past the Garden. (The Garden is part of the City of Northampton, and leash laws apply.)

✿ **WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS.** A gardener reports bear prints around a birdhouse pulled to the ground and checked out for bird seed – not a sighting, but pretty good evidence that there are bears about. Last year, we had a mother and three cubs were regular visitors, and chances are good that they are

back. Therefore, we ask you NOT to put up birdfeeders or to put household garbage into compost.

The Garden is host to a variety of birds – redtailed hawks soar overhead, tree swallows and bluebirds are back, pileated woodpeckers are nesting in the woods, and the first Baltimore oriole of the season was spotted early in May.

✿ **COMMUNITY SERVICE.** If you are looking for a Community Service task, check the bulletin board for current projects. If you have spent time on such a task, remember to fill out a log slip; slips are in an envelope on the bulletin board, and there is a small black mailbox to the left of the bulletin board.

COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITY. If you're looking for a task that you could complete at home, we are looking for someone to keep Community Service records. This entails collecting slips from the mailbox every couple of weeks and entering the information into a table. If you are interested, send e-mail to mtex@smith.edu.

✿ **SPECIAL THANKS** to those who contributed to Cleanup Days:

Laurel Crooks and Lois Zissell of Master Gardeners, who performed soil tests for gardeners and answered their garden questions.

Rick Tracy of Intervale Farm, who brought his truck with flats of vegetables, herbs, and flowers for sale to gardeners.

Sandy Jaescke of Pinebrook Farm, who brought a truckload of mulch straw and Mainely Mulch for sale to gardeners. ✿

GARDEN COMPOSTING

ONE OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES of organic gardening is to replenish organic matter in the soil, and adding compost is an excellent way to do this. Compost is simply decomposed organic matter. Elaborate compost piles are constructed according to principles of balancing fresh (grass clippings, pulled weeds) and dried (old leaves) materials, adding soil and minerals, watering, and maintaining a

high temperature to kill weed seeds. More casual piles, which includes the Garden compost pile, simply involve piling up organic matter and leaving it over a season; internal temperatures don't get high enough to kill weed seeds.

Each spring, the folks from Smith Vocational's composting project come to our Garden with mechanical equipment to turn and pile up the

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Garden Committee meets on the second Monday of each month at 7:00 P.M., at the Recreation Dept. during fall, winter, and spring, and near the shed in the Garden in summer (weather permitting). Next meetings are June 9, July 14 and August 11.

All Gardeners are welcome to attend and participate; check with the Recreation Dept. (587-1040) the day of the meeting to confirm the time.

Gardeners are welcome to suggest items for the agenda. E-mail Mimi at mtex@smith.edu or call 584-0317.

compostable material. Between times, we are responsible for organizing and maintaining the material we accumulate. **When you add material to the pile, please use a pitchfork to put it on top of one of the rows, so we can maintain the paths between rows.** This is more work than just dumping it at the edge, but it is important to do. First, it keeps the compost pile from growing out to engulf adjacent plots, and, second, it allows air to reach material, which aids decomposition.

Your guide to what goes into the pile is that it should be readily decomposable. This does not include logs, lumber, metal, plastic (including plastic string), and paper. 🌻

— Mimi Teghtsoonian

ARMCHAIR ORGANIC GARDENING

While you're taking a break from planting or weeding, check out these links to web sites of local or organic farming organizations:

NOFA (Northeast Organic Farming Association/ Mass. Chapter – www.nofamass.org/index.php)

CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture)/Be a local hero – www.buylocalfood.com/

Local Farmers Markets: Good sources for organic plants – www.buylocalfood.com/farmmarket.html

Links from the **Organic Farming Research** Foundation – www.ofrf.org/general/weblinks/index.html

Links from **OrganicGardening.com: Seeds and plants:** – www.organicgardening.com/links/index.html

Links from **OrganicGardening.com: Organizations:** – www.organicgardening.com/links/organizations.html

Solid Waste Management Fact Sheets from Kansas State University: Advice about composting, recycling, and more – www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/solw2/

— Margaret Groesbeck with Susan Kimball

BOOK REVIEW

Weedless Gardening by Lee Reich; Workman Publishing, New York. 2001. \$8.95.

No spading up your plot every year? No weeding all summer long? Nourishing soil for your plants without chemical fertilizers? Sounds pretty improbable, doesn't it? But Lee Reich tells us that if we follow a few easy steps, we can have this and more.

The key to weedless gardening is to avoid disturbing the soil and to build healthy soil from the top down. Every time a piece of ground is turned over or rototilled, buried weed seeds are exposed to light and germinate; since some seeds (ragweed and crabgrass, for instance) can live dormant for many years, annual tilling of the ground guarantees a fine crop of plants you don't want. It also puts too much air into the soil, resulting in the rapid utilization and depletion of nutritive elements.

Instead, Reich suggests the following steps for plot preparation:

1.) Sprinkle the fertilizer of your choice on top of the soil. 2.) Knock or cut down existing vegetation. Don't pull it up, because that will disturb the soil and expose weed seed. 3.) Cover the soil with paper (4 layers of newsprint or 1 layer of landscape barrier paper) and moisten it. 4.) Cover the paper with 1 to 3 inches of mulch. Use something like straw, shredded leaves, or weed-free compost for planting areas; use woodchips for paths.

When you plant, you can make a hole in the mulch and paper to place seedlings or plants directly in the soil, plant small seeds directly in the mulch, and provide a layer of fine compost for smaller seeds.

Reich discusses the uses of cover crops, how to deal with the weeds that do show their heads, how to fertilize and what to use, and how to build up your soil over the years. He shares ideas about how to make the most efficient use of your garden space by thoughtful layout, intercropping, succession planting, and utilizing the third dimension with stakes and trellises to support climbing plants.

The new gardener will find this a terrific guide, simply and clearly written, to establishing a plot, and the experienced gardener will find enough good ideas to justify the read. Community Gardeners who are interested may check out plots H and I, 28 and 29, to see a garden in transition from till to no-till. 🌸

— Mimi Teghtsoonian

ORGANIC GARDENING AND HOUSE RABBITS

LAST AUGUST WE ADOPTED Mississippi Buttercup, a six-month-old Rex-New Zealand-English Spot mix from the House Rabbit Connection for around \$50. Mississippi is about the same size as a large cat. His diet consists primarily of hay and fresh greens, fruit waste, and rabbit pellets. It costs between \$3.50-\$6.50 a week to keep him fed and fresh, depending on the season, but he pays us back handsomely with hours of domestic entertainment, soft affection, endless charm and a regular supply of weedless mulch and manure.

Unlike caged hamsters or guinea pigs, house rabbits may spend part of their day in a hutch, but they must be able to roam a room (or several rooms) of the house, free to interact and develop closer relationships with everyone. They are litter-box trained and spayed or neutered before adoption.

GARDENER'S HELPER: The rabbit functions not only as companion, but as an automated speed-composter with ears. Each week we end up with about a cubic foot of seed-free hay (he eats the



seed heads off) and a quart of manure, hard odorless pellets that can be added directly to the soil. The manure is a great source of humus, potassium, nitrogen and beneficial bacteria in our garden – it breaks down fairly quickly too. We're happy to make use of our fruit skins and cores (sans seeds), carrot tops, strawberry tops, cilantro stems and other vegetable waste. Things we'd otherwise put in our compost pile make a great treat for the rabbit.

CLEANLINESS: House rabbits, like cats, use a litter box. In order to keep the box fresh and dry, we line the bottom with paper grocery bags about 1/4 full of recycled newspaper absorbent (available at Dave's). This pulls the urine off the hay/mulch and keeps the box odorless for a few weeks at a time. When we change his box, we throw away the soaked bags filled with wet litter. Hay is put on top of this and we daily add a little fresh hay to his box, which functions as a feeding station and, in one corner, his bathroom. Mississippi has two boxes, one in the house and one in his hutch in the basement.

to be continued in the next issue...