

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



JULY 2003

TIPS FOR ORGANIC GARDENING

ORGANIC GARDENING PRACTICES are horticultural techniques that work in harmony with nature rather than against it, and are based on a philosophy of sustainability that protects the large and small ecosystems of our planet.

What this means is that when you garden organically, you think of your garden as part of a larger natural system that includes the soil, the microorganisms and insects in it, the water supply, wildlife, and of course, you. As an organic gardener, you use natural techniques and products that do not harm the environment but that replenish the resources of the garden. This is the sustainable part. Organic gardening is also what you don't do: you don't add poisons or otherwise harm the environment or wildlife.

Organic techniques concentrate on developing healthy soil, which is why organic gardeners don't use petroleum-based chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides. Although, admittedly, these products often produce lovely, showy, large vegetables and flowers with no weeds in sight, this is a short-term effect. Adding poisons and chemicals to the soil has been shown to cause cancer, nerve damage, and birth defects, and has deleterious effects on wildlife and beneficial insects, such as pollinating bees and earthworms. Many of us can remember the effects of DDT on the eggs of the California condor, almost causing extinction of the species. The fact that these products pollute our soil, water, and air is the reason that I think everyone should seriously consider using organic practices. The basic practices of organic

gardening commonly include composting, green manures, crop rotation, companion planting, mulching, manual weeding, and natural pest controls.

COMPOSTING adds humus, beneficial microorganisms, and nutrients to the soil, and encourages healthy insect- and disease-resistant plants that do not require chemical pesticides. It aerates the soil, conserves water, diminishes erosion, and supports microorganisms and earthworms that in turn add nutrients and aeration to the soil. Best of all, compost is free. Ingredients of compost are dead plant and organic matter, straws, manures, and weeds.

GREEN MANURES are cover crops such as buckwheat or winter rye. They are grown on temporarily fallow land and turned under before maturity to add valuable nutrients and organic materials to the soil and prevent erosion and damage from winter frost heaves.

CROP ROTATION means moving your crops around every season so that no crop is grown on the same spot two years in a row. This practice is helpful because (1) growing the same plants in the same soil year after year results in an accumulation of soil-borne pests and diseases; and (2) different crops have different nutritional requirements. Rotation helps to prevent soil depletion and in some cases adds nutrients; for example, planting legumes adds nitrogen to the soil.

COMPANION PLANTING aids plant growth. Many plants exude chemicals from their roots that either help or hinder the growth of what is planted next to them. Chamomile, for instance, has been called the "physician of the garden" since it seems to improve the health of ailing plants around it.

GARDEN CALENDAR

RAGWEED CHECK
Sunday, July 20

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, July 21, 7 P.M.
at the Garden

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MULCHING helps conserve soil nutrients, prevents rapid water loss due to evaporation, and acts as a physical barrier to harmful insects and weeds. Slugs, for instance, don't like scratchy mulch on their soft bellies and will avoid it.

WEEDING by hand or using the multitude of tools and mulches now available, is far less harmful than spraying the many poisons and weed-killers offered at local garden centers. Don't take my word for it – lots of research has been done on the toxicity of these chemicals to humans and animals. (Note the skull and crossbones and warnings on the cans.)

NATURAL PEST CONTROLS include physical barriers (row covers, cutworm collars), natural predators, and environmentally-friendly substances such as garlic and cayenne pepper sprays. Organic pest control does require a bit more work, but the benefit is that

you don't have to spray, dust, or eat harmful poisons. For example, I love arugula, mustards, and spicy spring vegetables, but so, unfortunately, does the flea beetle. If you find your arugula leaves riddled with tiny holes, it is probably the work of the flea beetle. You can either 1) eat it with the holes (it won't hurt you); 2) cover the crop with a row cover to reduce the damage; or, even better, 3) grow it in the fall after the life cycle of the flea beetle is over. All of these methods are a little more challenging but ultimately very rewarding (foiled you, you rotten flea beetle!). Most of all they are non-toxic to plants, to beneficial insects and microorganisms, to animals, and to your community garden neighbors.

Happy organic gardening! 🌸

— Sylvia Michaels

GARDEN NEWS

🌸 JULY 20 – WEED AND RAGWEED CHECK

MARK THIS DATE on your Garden calendar. On Sunday, July 20, volunteers will check for weeds (especially ragweed) in Garden plots. Garden rules state that plots should be “free of ragweed and substantially free of other weeds.”

If you don't know what ragweed looks like, check the Survival Center plot around the tool shed; there is a labelled plant there. If we find ragweed, we'll tag it and send you a notice.

If there are more weeds than planned plants in your plot(s), you need to do some weeding before that date. Also, make sure that the grasses and other plants at the edges of your plot are cut to no more than 6". Again, we'll notify you if you need to do more.

We ask you to keep your plots free of ragweed because it is a severe allergen for many people, and the presence of ragweed makes it difficult or impossible for these people to garden during ragweed season. The reason we ask you to keep weeds in general under control is that when they go to seed, the seeds do not stay in your

plot but are carried all over the Garden to germinate unwanted in other people's plots.

🌸 GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETING

MONDAY, JULY 21 IS THE DATE of the next Garden Committee meeting – we meet at 7:00 P.M. at the picnic table near the tool shed. All gardeners are welcome to attend. If you have a topic you'd like to discuss, let us know a week ahead, so that we can put it on the agenda (mtex@smith.edu; by mail c/o Recreation Dep't., 90 Locust St., 01060). It's a good idea to check with the Recreation Dep't. (587-1040) the day of the meeting to make sure it hasn't been postponed.

🌸 SURVIVAL CENTER

Survival Center pick up times are Tuesday and Thursday at 6:00 P.M. If you have surplus produce to donate, please leave it on (or under, to keep it from the sun) the picnic table on those days. If you would like to volunteer to make deliveries, contact Heather Damon (hmdamon@earthlink.net, 586-5347) or Norma Sandowski (n.sandowski@verizon.net, 587-9659). This counts as Community Service.

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✿ GARDEN WEB SITE BACK ONLINE

The Garden Web site is up and functioning again, after a brief blackout when our host company went out of business. Check it out at <www.nohogardens.org>. (*The new address has an “s” after “nohogarden”.)

✿ SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- **Trudy Hooks**, for handling dumpster problems this season.
- **Robin Claremont and Susan Kimball**, for maintaining our Web site and setting up our e-mail distribution list.
- **Muriel Goulet**, for keeping Community Service records.
- **Jeff McCullough**, for cutting and clearing the area behind the access road to the north of the Garden, ridding us of ragweed and other weeds that grow there and giving the groundhogs less cover.
- **Jim Clark**, a friend of the Garden, for supplying us with free woodchips.

✿ MOWER TIPS

“Mower Tips” are posted on the rear wall of the tool shed. All gardeners who use the mowers are urged to read and follow these guidelines.

✿ TOOL SHED TIPS

- If you open the tool shed, be aware that there is a hook on the front of each door that goes into an eye on the wall, preventing the door from banging around in the wind.
- If you close the tool shed, be aware that there is a latch at the top of the right hand door that secures the door to the frame; close that before you lock the door.
- Please clean dirt off tools before you return them to the shed.
- Please empty dirt and other debris from the wheelbarrows before you return them to the shed.
- Please return tools to the holders provided on the right hand wall of the shed.

✿ WATERING TIPS

- Please coil hoses after you use them. We’ve installed new holders to make this easier. Leaving hoses stretched out in the path makes things difficult for the next user as well as for walking in the path.
- Make sure the hose or faucet is not leaking when you finish. The faucet handles need to be securely tightened when not in use.
- Each water outlet is numbered. If something needs fixing, call Bill Griffiths (923-1353) to tell him about it, and give him the number of the post in question.

✿ ROAD REPAIRS

Repairs to the road that runs along the east side of the Garden, between the Garden and the State Hospital grounds, should be underway this summer. A crew from the Northampton Department of Public Works will scrape the roadway, bring in several tons of gravel, put it in place, and compact it. Only the gravel will be charged to the Garden budget. This will solve what has been a constant problem for all gardeners whose plots abut this road; cars have been driving around large potholes and damaging both the plots on one side and the trees on the other.

✿ COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

The gardening season is half over, and many gardeners have not yet completed their Community Service hours. Remember that you need to fulfill this work contribution in order to renew your registration for next year.

You can select a task that need doing from the list posted on the bulletin board. Or you could join a Garden crew responsible for some aspect of maintaining the Garden – the newsletter, the Survival Center plot, the tool shed (mowers, tools, shed repairs), the compost pile, common areas (shrub borders, garden beneath the Northampton Community Garden sign). If you’re interested in any of these, you may contact Mimi (<mtex@smith.edu>, 584-0317 between 2 and 5 P.M.) ✿

COMPOST PILE DOs AND DON'Ts

DO add healthy plants .

DO add weeds and grass clippings.

DO add disease- and bug-free compostable materials.

DO dump materials over the back fence.

DO pitch materials into the center of the pile, away from the edges.

DO spend community service time cleaning up the pile.

DON'T add diseased or bug infested material. (These belong in the dumpster.)

DON'T dump at the path edge of the heap. This causes the pile to spill over into the path and other people's gardens.

DON'T add stakes, sticks, or rocks to the compost pile.

DON'T put kitchen waste in the compost pile.

ASK THE GARDENER

Q: What is the difference between determinate and indeterminate tomatoes?

The main differences are in their growth habit and maturity.

DETERMINATE TOMATOES are small, compact plants that cease growing after a certain number of nodes are produced. With stems averaging 12" to 18" long, they need no staking and no pinching of suckers. They DO need a good bed of mulch around them, so that the tomatoes do not lie directly on the soil. Determinate tomatoes stop bearing once they reach full size, and the fruits ripen all at once. This is desirable if you want a lot of tomatoes all at once for canning purposes.

There is also a group called SEMIDETERMINATE. Similar to the determinate varieties, semideterminates stop producing when their stems become 18" to 24" long.

INDETERMINATE tomatoes come in a wide variety and have a longer season of growth and ripening. They can grow to be quite tall and should be staked or caged for support. They will also need to have any side suckers pinched. Indeterminate tomatoes will continue to grow and bear fruits until they are killed off by frost or disease.

Nothing beats the taste of a tomato picked at perfect ripeness, but if there is the possibility of frost, it's better to pick tomatoes sooner rather than later, and let them ripen in the house. 🌸

—Justine Bertram

Submit your gardening questions online to nohog@nohogardens.org or by mail to the Rec. Dept., and we'll try to answer them in future newsletters.

