

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



MAY 2004

GARDEN NEWS

Cleanup Days. The weather gods smiled on Cleanup Weekend (April 24 and 25) with sunny, mild spring days, and gardeners responded by turning out in force to tackle a variety of tasks. Our shrub borders by the compost pile and the old soccer field were weeded and mulched, several abandoned plots were cleared, and much of the compost pile was turned. The tool shed received a thorough cleaning and reorganization. And a large stand of Japanese knotweed, an exotic invader on the edge of the Garden, was cut down in preparation for heavy mulching to discourage regrowth.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- ✿ RICK BEAN, for leading the tool shed cleanup and getting the lawnmowers in shape.
- ✿ ALEX MACPHAIL, for providing an extra tool hanger for the shed.
- ✿ JOHANNA HALBEISEN, for arranging the delivery of mulch hay.
- ✿ MADELEINE CHARNEY, for giving a demonstration about composting with worms.
- ✿ DENNY WOLFE, for heading up the compost crew and for his own Herculean efforts.

TOOL SHED TIPS

Our tool shed was cleaned and re-organized during Clean-up Days, and we have some new tools for all gardeners to use. To keep the shed clean and our tools readily accessible, please take note:

There is a hook on the front of each door and a corresponding eye on each side of the wall – when you open the doors, **please latch** them so they don't blow in the wind.

Please clean off dirt and grass before you return **tools** to the shed. Clean debris from **wheel barrows** before you return them. Sweep grass off the wheels and chassis of **lawnmowers** before you return them to the shed.

Note the signs over the tool holders on the wall, and return tools to the appropriate slot.

CAN YOU HELP?

Do you have photos of the Garden that we could use in the gallery at our Web site (www.nohogardens.org)? Contact Robin Claremont at robin@elpnet.org.

Do you have an idea for an article or a feature for the Newsletter? Sketches of Garden scenes? Contact Betsey Wolfson at bwolfson@bikher.org.

Would you supervise the Survival Center plot around the tool shed? This involves scheduling volunteers to plant, weed, and water, and making sure produce is harvested in a timely fashion. Get in touch with Mimi Teghtsoonian at mtex@smith.edu.

COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS

If you're looking for a way to contribute time to improve the Garden and satisfy your community service requirements, you should check the bulletin board for a list of things that need doing. And, after you work on a project, be sure to fill out a log slip and put it in the mailbox beside the bulletin board.

DEADLINE FOR WORKING YOUR PLOT

Memorial Day weekend, May 29–31, is the last time to start your plot. Plots that are not worked by then may be reassigned to another gardener or planted for the Survival Center. Inspection teams will check plots on Monday afternoon, the 31st. They aren't looking for perfection – just evidence that you have been working at clearing and planting. If you have any questions about whether your plot is OK, check with your Garden Neighbor or a member of the Garden Committee. If you're unable to get started by June 1 but can do so soon after, you may request an extension, by either e-mail to

continued on page 2

Just BEE-cause...



BEGINNING THIS SUMMER, the Community Garden will be home to two hives of bees – located near the compost pile at the west end of the Garden. The bees, kept by Megan Wechsler and Dillon Sussman, will be pollinating all summer and should help crops significantly. The hives will be Bees are becoming increasingly important to gardeners and farmers, as development and pesticides decimate other pollinating insects. Unfortunately, bees are also suffering. In many parts of the country, it has become difficult to keep bees due to virulent mites, pesticides, invasive bees, and beekeepers' own dependency on chemical inputs.

Here in western Massachusetts, we are lucky to be able to still keep honeybee colonies. That gives us a responsibility to treat our bees well. This year we will be trying out a newly discovered variety of bees that seems to be resistant to mites. We will also be raising them in a sustainable style with minimal chemical inputs. We'll be using an electric fence around the hives to protect them from bears.

You're welcome to come check out the hives. On nice days, you'll see bees entering and exiting the hives, with yellow grains of pollen attached to their legs. You can also watch for the bee dance- circular movements bees use to communicate with each other. If you do choose to hang out with the bees, it is best to stay out of their flight path and not come within 15 feet of the front of the hive. That way, they'll stay relaxed and you can, too.

If a bee does start circling you, please don't swat at her. She will usually go away when she realizes you are not food. Honeybees die if they sting, so they will usually give a warning before they do it. If a bee bonks into you, that means "back away."

Feel free to talk to Megan or Dillon.

We'll be the people in the funny hats! ✿

— Dillon Sussman

GARDEN CALENDAR

👉 **LAST DATE TO START GARDENING: May 31**

mtex@smith.edu or by mail to the Recreation Dep't., 90 Locust St., Northampton 01060; tell us your name and plot number and the date by which you can start.

GARDEN NOTES

WE'VE HAD A SLOW START to the gardening season this year, but the warm weather at the end of April brought things along with a rush. Average last frost date for the Garden is around May 10, so – if you're a gambler – you could put in plants that can take cool temperatures but not frost. In another week or so, tomatoes, cosmos, zinnias, and nicotiana can go in if the weather is pleasant. Wait 'til warmer weather – around the second week of June – before setting out basil, eggplants, and peppers. Plant bean seeds after the last frost date.

A number of gardeners had partial or complete failure of their garlic crops. Best results seem to have come from fairly heavy mulching with straw last fall.

An alternative to manufactured herbicides is vinegar. Spray it on the leaves of plants you want to kill; it's said to be especially effective for broad-leafed weeds.

As the weather gets warmer and there are dry spells, consider using mulch in your garden to keep down weeds and conserve moisture. Mulch hay and chopped leaves are two possibilities. It's best not use wood chips in planted beds; the decaying wood uses lots of nitrogen, and your plants will start looking yellow because of nitrogen deficiency. Wood chips are good for paths, especially if you put down a layer of 4 sheets of newspaper first in order to prevent weeds from growing there.

If you want to put up a plant "teepee" to support vining plants, here are some useful facts. Start by placing 3 or more stakes to form the outline of a circle; the fewer the legs, the stronger each leg needs to be. For taller, heavier crops needing serious support, figure a ratio of 1 foot of circle width to 1.5 or 2 feet of height. For a narrower teepee supporting less weight, figure 1 foot of width to 3-4 feet of height. Set the supports, sinking them well into the ground. Draw the tops together, overlapping in the same direction, and tie with sturdy string.

The New England Wild Flower Society has purchased Nasami Farm and Nursery in Whately. They plan to create a retail native plant nursery to supply western Massachusetts. They are open each spring weekend through June 6th, 9:00-4:30, with a selection of native perennials, ferns, and woody plants for sale. For directions, visit <http://www.newfs.org/nasami/04avail.htm> or phone 508-877-7630, X3303.

Add this to your list of sources for organic seeds – High Mowing Seeds (813 Brook Road, Wolcott VT 05680). These seeds are open-pollinated as well, and High Mowing encourages you to save seeds; when you order seeds, they'll send you a booklet on seed-saving. 🌱

VERMICOMPOSTING: COMPOSTING WITH WORMS

continued from last issue...

PROCESSING AND USING THE CASTINGS:



A) (optional: for a finer end product) Place castings on a screen laid flat with good ventilation around it. When dry, push/rub the castings through screen.

B) Spread on the surface of house-plant soil, add to potting mix, side dress garden plants, or package as a unique gift. Allow castings to dry before storing them.

TROUBLESHOOTING

PROBLEM: mold

REASON: overloading system

SOLUTION: slow down addition of scraps

PROBLEM: slow productivity

REASON: too hot or too cold

SOLUTION: when too hot, move into shade or basement; when too cold, move to warmer/sunnier locale; ideal temperature is 55-75°

PROBLEM: drying out

REASON: dry weather, not adding enough water

SOLUTION: lay a sheet of plastic under cover; add water until bedding is as moist as a "wrung-out sponge"

PROBLEM: odor

REASON: food/bedding is too wet

SOLUTION: loosen bedding with a trowel; allow to dry out before adding more moisture

PROBLEM: worms escaping

REASON: bedding is too wet or there is too much noise or vibration near bin
SOLUTION: loosen bedding with a trowel and allow bedding to dry out; move the box to a quiet, undisturbed location

PROBLEM: silverfish, ants, etc.

REASON: overloaded system

SOLUTION: slow down the rate of adding scraps

PROBLEM: fruit flies

REASON: not burying food deep enough

SOLUTION: add another layer of bedding, set a shallow dish of beer/vinegar or a fly trap near bin, sprinkle lime (calcium carbonate) on top on top of food scraps

WHERE TO BUY YOUR WORMS:

– Merchants Bay / Mt. Laurel, NJ / 888-622-9863

– Connecticut Valley Worm Farm / Enfield, CT / 866-998-9676 / <http://www.ctvalley.com/index.shtml>

– Worm World / Arell, PA / <http://www.wormworld.com>

– A compost or manure pile, or a local bait shop.

– Make sure you're collecting red wigglers (*Eisenia foetida*). Look for the alternating bands of yellow and maroon down the length of the body, plus wiggling and squirming behavior! Expect to pay about \$20-25 per pound of worms.

CHECK OUT THESE WEBSITES:

– <http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/worms/wormhome.html> / Worm Bins – guidelines and instructions from Cornell University's Center for the Environment.

– http://www.oldgrowth.org/compost/forum_vermi/index.html / A vermicomposting forum – Join the discussion!

– <http://www.wormwoman.com/> Vermicomposting resources for all experience levels. Created and maintained by Mary Appelhoff, worm guru and author of *Worms Eat My Garbage*. <http://www.wormdigest.org/> Worm Digest, an online newsletter and more.

I've been vermicomposting since 1995 and would be glad to answer your questions on this topic: greenzinnia@hotmail.com. Or read *Worms Eat My Garbage: How to Set up and Maintain a Vermicomposting System* by worm guru Mary Appelhof. 🌱

— Madeleine Charney