

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



MARCH 2006

GARDEN NEWS

COMING UP IN THE GARDEN

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION:

On **Saturday, March 25**, from 10 A.M. to noon, new gardeners may register for a plot. Registration is held at the Northampton Recreation Dep't., 90 Locust Street, behind Smith Vocational School. The fee is \$12 for the gardening season. The supply of available plots is good, so if you know someone who is interested, pass on the word. Registration also continues at the Recreation Dep't. during regular hours from March 27 on.

GARDEN POTLUCK AND SEED

SWAP: On **Saturday, April 8**, the Garden will hold a potluck supper at the Florence Civic Center (at the intersection of Meadow Street and Route 9 in Florence, just next to the Lilly Library). Come at 5:30, bring a dish to share (with serving implement), bring your kids, meet old gardening friends and make some new ones. If you have extra flower and vegetable seeds, bring them to share. If you'd like to help or for more information, contact Linda Wallack (lwallack@valinet.com).

COMPOST DAY: On **Saturday, April 15**, bring a garden fork or rake to the Garden and help turn the compost pile. Come as early as 9 A.M. or as late as noon; plan to work for an hour or two, or as long as you like. For more information contact Denny Wolfe at denny@direwolf.com.

SPRING CLEANUP: **Saturday, April 29**, is our annual spring cleanup day. (May 6, a week later, is the rain date).

- We'll clean out the tool shed, distribute hoses, clean up trash that accumulated during the winter, mulch common garden areas, start the Survival Center plot, and work on special projects for Garden improvement.

- Mulch hay and compost will be available by prior order.

- There will be workshops on

weedless gardening and on operating the power mowers.

- There will be a seed and plant swap; bring your extras, take something interesting in return.

Come between 10 A.M. and 1 P.M., or between 2 and 4 P.M., to get a head start on community service hours, to get the Garden ready for the season, and to meet fellow gardeners.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

The Garden Committee is sorry to say goodbye to

- **Carole and Muriel Goulet**, who have left the Garden Committee.

We're happy to note that they will continue to keep Community Service records.

- **Heather Damon**, a Garden Committee member, and **Rick Bean**, who has tended the mowers for several seasons.

- **Sylvia Bonadio**, a long-time member of the Garden Committee and a mainstay of the Garden, who over the years devoted a great many hours to making it the beautiful place it is, and who delighted gardeners with her own lovely garden, has finally and reluctantly given up her plots to move on to a challenging job which takes her between Boston, New York, and assorted European cities.

The Committee welcomes **Norma**

Sandowski, a returning member of the Committee, and **David Brownlee**, who has joined recently.

Richard Malinouskas, another long-time gardener, died in November, 2005. Many gardeners will remember him for his help in starting balky power mowers and for his pleasure in conversation. His presence will be missed.

SPECIAL THANKS TO...

Ed Hagelstein for cleaning, sharpening, painting, and repairing our tools to ready them for the 2006 gardening season.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Are you interested in taking on one of the following tasks? Get in touch with Mimi (584-0317, mtex@smith.edu).

- **SURVIVAL CENTER PLOT.**

Each year, the Garden plants and maintains a plot devoted to growing produce for the Northampton Survival Center. Needed is a manager for the plot, who will plan what to plant, buy the plants, supervise their planting on Cleanup Day, and schedule volunteers to weed and water the plot and to harvest the produce.

- **GARDEN NEIGHBORS.** If you have been gardening for several (say, three or more) years at the Garden, enjoy chatting with other gardeners and don't mind answering questions and giving advice, make it official and join the Garden Neighbors. You'll get a list of the gardeners in your neighborhood so that you can introduce yourself and introduce them to each other. You'll also keep in touch with a member of the Garden Committee to relay gardeners' concerns and questions to the Committee.

- **ADOPT-A-MOWER.** Our power mowers get a heavy workout and need frequent checking and maintenance. Would you be willing to adopt one or more of our mowers—check weekly for needed repairs, make sure it has adequate gas and oil, clean if necessary?

GARDEN CALENDAR

March 25 (Sat.)

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

April 8 (Sat.)

GARDEN POTLUCK

April 15 (Sat.)

COMPOST TURNOVER

April 29 (Sat.)

SPRING CLEANUP

WEEDLESS GARDENING WORKSHOP

with Lydia Rackenburg

• **TOOL SHED.** We need someone to keep an eye on the wheelbarrows (are the tires flat?), yard carts, tools (are they broken?). She/he would carry out fixes where feasible, notify the Garden Committee if not.

TIPS FROM THE HAPPY GARDENER

When can I start gardening? Eager as we all are to get started working our plots and planting seeds, we need to let nature prepare the way. The soil should drain and warm up. How can you tell when it's ready? Pick up a handful of soil and squeeze it: If you have a handful of mud, wait a week and check again; if you have something with the consistency of moist chocolate cake, you may start now. When the soil temperature is 45° F, you will get adequate germination for beet, carrot, lettuce, radish, and spinach seed. Wait for 50° to plant turnip seed, and 55° to plant cabbage, chard, corn, and even tomatoes. Remember that the last frost date at the Garden is around May 10, so plan your seed-starting and planting of sets with that in mind.

What about weeds? Weeds are always with us. Herewith some information about annual weeds culled from an article by Roger Swain in *Horticulture Magazine* (June 1984).

• The soil in your plot may contain as many as 5,000 weed seeds per square foot; whenever you dig, some of them are exposed to light, and about 250 of them will germinate in each square foot. They will grow rapidly, flower quickly, and produce many more seeds. In the process, they will take water and nutrients from the cultivated plants which are at a competitive disadvantage. Roughly speaking, you have about three weeks to get rid of the weeds before they start doing damage.

• You may weed by hand (tedious) or with a hoe. Use a sharp hoe and make shallow strokes. The deeper your stroke, the more new weed seeds will be exposed.

• If the soil is cultivated yearly, the number of weed seeds present decreases by half each year. In seven years, you will be down to about 50 seeds/square foot, and

about three will germinate. As new seeds blow in each year, you are not likely to do better than that.



Plantain (*Plantago major*)

Perennial weeds can be extremely difficult to control. Some, like plantain, have shallow roots and can be pulled up. Some, like dandelion, have long tap roots which must be completely dug up. Some, like violets, have nodules on the roots that can easily be left behind if you just pull – you need to get the whole mass of the plant out. And some, like the aptly-named witch grass or quack grass, will regrow if even a small section of root is left behind. A high-speed tiller (like a Rototiller) does not eliminate witch grass but creates many new plants by chopping up the rootstock, so – before you till a new plot – check for the presence of witch grass. To the right are photographs of this menace (known to botanists as *Agropyron repens*).

Should I despair? Take heart. There is an alternative to cultivating, while still building healthy soil and greatly diminishing the weeds. Sometimes called weedless gardening, it involves 1) digging as little as possible, 2) building the soil by layering compost and organic fertilizers on the soil surface, 3) covering all with a layer of newspaper, and 4) mulching so that bare soil is never exposed to blown seed. You may consult Lee Reich's book *Weedless Gardening* (Workman's Press, 2001) for a detailed description. You may also attend gardener Lydia Rackenburg's workshop on Spring Cleanup Day. 🌱



Quackgrass (*Agropyron repens*)
(a.k.a. *Elytrigia repens*)



Auricles clasp the stem



Sharp-pointed creeping rhizomes

Photographs from
<http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/weedguid/quackg.htm> and
<http://botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/p/placom43.html>