

# NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



## NEWS



MARCH 2007

### GARDEN NEWS

#### NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION SCHEDULED



**NEW GARDENERS MAY REGISTER** for a plot on Saturday, March 31, at the Recreation Dep't., on 90 Locust St., behind Smith Vocational School.

Registration will be open from 10:00 A.M. till noon. After that, registrations will be accepted at the Recreation Dep't. during their regular hours, 8:30-4:30 weekdays. If you have friends who would like to try gardening, let them know about this opportunity.

#### SURVIVAL CENTER PROGRAM IN PERIL

The Garden's Survival Center program may bite the dust this year, unless we find volunteers to carry it on. In 1996, the Garden contributed 1600 pounds(!) of vegetables to the Survival Center; last summer the amount fell to just 40 pounds. If the program is to continue, we need volunteers to take responsibility for it.

One or two people would manage a Survival Center plot, planning what to plant (in consultation with the Garden Committee), purchasing plants, seeds, fertilizer, and mulch as needed (expenses reimbursed), and scheduling volunteers to plant, weed, water, and harvest from the plot.

Another volunteer or two is needed to schedule deliveries from the Garden to the Survival Center and to arrange to harvest extra produce from gardeners' plots.

If you're interested, contact Mimi (mtex@smith.edu) or leave a message at the Recreation Dep't. (587-1040).

#### GARDEN WORKSHOPS

We're expanding our offering of workshops this year. The season starts with Lydia Rackenberg's workshop on **Weedless Gardening** (April 28), continues with workshops by Julie Abramson (May 12) and by Justine Bertram and Gloria Santa Anna on **Getting Your Garden Started**, and ends with a workshop by Gerry Shattuck on **Making Twig-and-Branch Structures** for your plot. Also in the works: **Improving your garden soil** and **Using Cover Crops**. Watch your e-mail for "Greetings from the Community Garden," or check the bulletin board for more information.

**GLOBAL WARMING?** In a revised classification of regions by horticultural zone, Northampton has moved from Zone 5 to Zone 6. If you've always wanted some plant that was listed as hardy only to Zone 6, now is the time to try it.

#### SPECIAL THANKS TO

▶ Ed Hagelstein (N/O 19) for cleaning, sharpening, and repairing our hand tools.

▶ Margaret Groesbeck, who is leaving the Garden Committee, for her many contributions to the Garden. 🍀

### BIRDS SIGNAL SPRING

**THE FIRST TIME I DARE TO HOPE** that spring is on its way is usually the last week of February. Suddenly it's light out when I get up for work and still light out when I'm driving home. Although snow remains on the ground, the birds that have been with us through late fall and the winter hint of warmer, brighter days ahead. The feathers of male American Goldfinches begin to turn back to their brilliant yellow. Male Northern Cardinals start to sing in earnest from perches. Mourning Doves coo from the telephone wires. Pairs of Tufted Titmice call to each other. Our winter visitors Dark-eyed Juncos and American Tree Sparrows also start singing; warming up for when they head north or to higher altitudes to breed. To get to know the songs of these birds, you can find most online at:

[WWW.NATURESONGS.COM/PARUICTE.HTML#EMBE](http://WWW.NATURESONGS.COM/PARUICTE.HTML#EMBE).

Another great place to learn about birds is the Cornell Lab of Ornithology: [WWW.BIRDS.CORNELL.EDU](http://WWW.BIRDS.CORNELL.EDU).

Starting the first week of March, small flocks of Common Grackles and Red-Winged Blackbirds appear from points south. Occasionally a lone, early Turkey Vulture soars overhead. Toward the middle of the month as the waterways start to thaw, more and more Canada Geese fill the skies, heading north with the geese who managed to winter over in the Valley. When it's very still, the squeaky calls of Wood Ducks and the rattling calls of Belted Kingfishers can be heard from the direction of the Mill River, near the Garden. Other ducks fly in small flocks over the garden, traveling

between the Mill and Connecticut Rivers, and Great Blue Herons soar on their way to various fishing spots.

As days get warmer, Chipmunks will emerge from their holes to have a look around. On warmer nights, Skunks will undoubtedly prowl the gardens looking for a snack.

Toward the end of March, when snow has started to melt (we hope) and expose some bare ground in the gardens, robins will start to trade their winter diet of fruit for whatever grubs and worms they can pull from the ground. The first few Killdeer to return to the Valley will also join the worm hunt. Bluebird pairs will begin inspecting nest boxes.

Finally, at the very end of March (or perhaps the first few days of April), a persistent FEE-BEE, FEE-BEE will catch my ear – the first Eastern Phoebe I see in the Valley. This for me is the true harbinger of spring! 🌱

— Heather McQueen



## WHERE DO YOUR GARDEN FEES GO?

**SEVERAL GARDENERS ASKED** on the questionnaires they returned why the plot fee at the Garden took a big jump – up from \$12 to \$18.

The \$18 reflects what the Garden needs to pay for expenses incurred, which (as we all know from our household budgets) continue to increase. Here are our yearly expenditures; some items vary from year to year, and for those we've shown a 4-year average.

- Payment to the City of Northampton for services provided by the Recreation Dep't.: bookkeeping, paying bills, receiving mail and phone calls, duplicating, keeping computer records of gardener registration.... We wouldn't be able to function without the support and advice of the Rec. Dep't. \$2000
- Water charges paid to the City \$1300 (4-year average)
- Trash removal \$1200
- Portable toilet rental \$ 725
- Mowers: purchase, repairs, gas and oil \$350 (4-year average)
- Garden carts, tools, hoses, hose holders: purchase and repair \$200 (4-year average)
- Mailings \$150

- Web site \$100
- Special projects – as available money allows \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL EXPENSES \$6020**

The Garden pays for all of this through the annual fee. There are 415 plots. Of these, 25–30 go to gardeners aged 65 or over or to non-profit groups, to whom no fee is charged. In recent years, all plots have eventually been assigned, so we receive fees from about 370 plots.

About 55% of gardeners do not take the credit for downloading the Newsletter, so our estimated income is

203 plots @ \$18 (no credit) \$3564

167 plots @ \$16 (\$2 credit) \$2672

**TOTAL INCOME \$6236**

You can see that the Garden is just covering expenses with the \$18 fee. When you consider what each gardener gets for that outlay – a generously-sized plot as well as access to water, communal tools, and communal compost – it's a real bargain. 🌱



## GARDEN TIPS

**IT'S MARCH**, and gardeners are developing itchy green thumbs and having voluptuous dreams involving beautiful little radishes and gently-rounded broccoli heads. What can we do to stay happy?

First, a caution. Don't till your garden before it's ready. Take a handful of earth and squeeze it. If it's like chocolate cake, moist and crumbly, you can go ahead; but if what you have resembles chocolate pudding, you must wait. While you wait, there are things you can do:

**START SEEDS.** You can start seeds now. All you need is a mix for germinating seeds, a grow-light, containers (which may be improvised from milk cartons or clear plastic containers), and – of course – seeds. It's not too early to start slow-to-germinate annuals like petunias and snapdragons, or cool-weather crops like broccoli and cabbage. Seed packages will usually tell you how many weeks before the last frost date you may start that variety, so you need to know that the average last frost date in the Garden is around May 7.

**START DAHLIAS.** You can get a jump start on dahlias by starting the tubers indoors now. Pot them in 7" or 9" pots with the growing tip just above the soil level.

Keep them watered, lighted, and warm. Here's a tip from James Crockett (of *Victory Garden* fame, for those of us old enough to remember): In April, you can cut off the central stalk and root it, thus doubling the number of dahlia plants you will have to set out after all danger of frost, at about the same time you set out tomato plants.

**PLANT PEAS.** For most of us, peas are the first seed to go into the earth. *Pisum sativum* is one of the oldest legumes in cultivation. Until the 1600s, peas were eaten dried (as pease porridge, hot or cold); then it became fashionable in France and England to eat them green and immature, as we do now.

Those peas are what we call garden peas: they require shelling. There are also sugar peas, including mangetouts and snow peas: They are flat and are eaten whole when the seeds are very young. Finally, there are the recently developed sugar snap peas, with plump pods: They look like garden peas but are eaten whole. Many people prefer the sugar peas because they are less work to prepare; the Happy Gardener is one of those who thinks they don't compare in flavor to garden peas. Try all three, and decide for yourself.

You can plant peas and expect a good germination rate when the soil temperature is at least 40° F. Peas grow best when the temperature is 55–65°. From the time of planting, count 57–75 days to first harvest. Another tip from Crockett, this one about planting garden peas: Make a trench 4" deep and 6" wide, and scatter your seed thickly in the trench; some seeds should touch, others will be no more than an inch apart. Put dead, leafless branches with lots of twigs along the trench to provide support for the vines as they grow. Cover the seed with about an inch of soil and tamp it down. As the vines grow, pull in soil from the sides of the trench. Cultivate lightly once a week, keeping the top half-inch of soil around the plants loose, and pull some up around the base of the plants. If you have more than one trench, space them 16" apart.

Many sources recommend succession planting for peas, but my experience has been that the second planting always catches up with the first. A better idea is to plant varieties that mature at different rates.

If you grow some lettuces and some bunching onions alongside your peas, you can cook the following dish.

(It's adapted from *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, by Julia Child and her co-authors Beck and Berthollet.)

### PEAS BRAISED WITH LETTUCE AND ONIONS

2 C shelled garden peas	4 T (or less) of butter
1 large head of lettuce, or 2 smaller ones, cut into quarters	2 T water 1/2 tsp. (or less) salt pepper to taste
8 green onion bulbs	

Combine butter, water, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil in a saucepan, and add peas, tossing to distribute seasonings. Cover with lettuce quarters, then embed onion bulbs among them. Cover tightly and cook over low heat, at a simmer. Check in about 5 minutes to see if peas are done. If not, toss peas and vegetables, add a little water if necessary, and continue cooking covered, checking every few minutes to see if the peas are ready.

Caution: Because peas are really steamed, you want to keep the amount of water to a minimum, but you must also be careful not to burn them. Use low heat and a heavy saucepan. SERVES: 4 people (or 3 greedy ones)

Try this recipe, and you too will be: A Happy Gardener 🍀

### NEW ENGLAND NEOPHYTE NO MORE OR... WHAT I'LL DO DIFFERENTLY IN THE GARDEN THIS YEAR

► Plant seedlings, not seeds. I moved here from California, where you can pretty much flick a seed over your shoulder and in three weeks you'll be eating tomatoes. Even when Martha Stewart, the doyenne of domesticity, told her TV audience that she'd already begun the seedling process, I pooh-poohed. I planted seeds. And then the rains came three days later, and they drowned. FOOTNOTE: This year, grow seedlings, or build an ark.

► Attend the first potluck and seed-swap. Baby was sick, so I stayed home. I should have left him with daddy instead and gotten to know my garden neighbors. Besides, I make a wicked enchilada casserole with homemade tortillas, which would have made me some new friends, for sure.

► Plan the plot more succinctly. The illustrious Sylvia had tended my plot before me – in fact, on the first work day it took me 30 minutes to find my garden, because it was already ringed by beautiful tulips, and I figured that meant it belonged to someone else. The way people spoke

about her – think hushed, reverent tones – I was hesitant to pull up anything, for fear I'd be disturbing grand beauty. Of course, after all my seeds drowned and I had emergency gum surgery, I wasn't back to the garden for three weeks and it was a bower of tall...plants...none of which I could identify. I was tempted to just let 'em grow and see what resulted, but the Committee didn't think that was such a good idea, and besides, I wanted to be eating tomatoes by summer's end. This year, I'm going to keep up with the weeding, and possibly tear out two or three larger bushes that didn't really do anything this year.

▶ Buy a New England garden guide and use it. I'm ashamed to admit I still don't know the names of the wildflowers Sylvia left behind. And it would have spared me some embarrassment when I caged the one cherry-tomato seedling that survived the aforementioned flood, and then someone came by, scoped out the survivor, and told me, "Nice ragweed."

▶ Plant tomatillos...because I missed the week they were for sale the farmers market, and everyone at church is blown away by my *salsa verde*, the main ingredient of which is tomatillos.

▶ Attend to my garden at more consistent times. I got to know three people in neighboring plots – one of whom was planting a memorial garden for her late husband, the other who was planting as gung-ho as possible to get it all in before her imposed deadline of a back-surgery date. The memorial garden woman told me she'd be having a memorial for her late spouse the next month, told me the date and invited me. Four weeks later I'd not seen her again, but dressed up myself and baby and went to the garden. Local plot-owners looked at me as if I were crazy when I asked if I'd missed the memorial service. And I saw my other friend twice after her surgery, but never since. I'd like to know whether my prayers for her swift recuperation helped. They're nice ladies. This year, I'll plan my trips more consistently (baby allowing) so I can get to know them, and others, even better. And, finally:

▶ Complete my volunteer hours on the first work day, so that I'm not frantic at the end of the summer and have to lay bare my embarrassing foibles with the garden community in the name of obligation completion. ...Does this count?

See you this summer. I'll be the one pulling up ragweed sproutlets, not putting tomato cages around them. 🍀

— Lynn Johnson, J-26

## JOIN NORTHAMPTON'S CLEAN ENERGY CAMPAIGN



Sign up now to take action on climate change and earn state renewable energy funding for your community. Go to [WWW.GREENSTART.NET](http://WWW.GREENSTART.NET) to enroll by March 31, and you'll be entered in a raffle to win gift certificates from local businesses (see the list below). Through the Clean Energy Choice program, New England GreenStart members in Northampton earned enough in state matching funds and bonuses to make possible the installation of a 10 KW solar array on the JFK Middle School in September, 2006!

If just 100 more Northampton residents enroll in the GreenStart program by March 31st, the City will earn a bonus of \$11,000 for another renewable energy project! The Mayor announced at the March City Council meeting that Clean Energy Choice matching and bonus funds would be used to hire an Energy Officer for the City, to find ways to make our municipality more energy efficient, build greener facilities, and use renewable energy.

— Tomasin Whitaker, Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator  
Center for Ecological Technology | (413) 586-7350

Eight names will be drawn from new members who enroll between February 1 and March 31. Winners will be announced on Earth Day, April 22, 2007. CET thanks the following businesses:

■ **True Directions Business/Personal Coaching (\$150)** One hour of personal or business coaching by Mary Hulbert of True Directions, full of powerful questions, creative brainstorming, and support to help you discover new insights and move forward. ■ **Pinch Pottery (\$100)** A gift certificate to use toward a wide selection of fine handmade artisan ceramics, artwork, tableware, jewelry, gifts and elegant accessories. ■ **Yoga for Well-Being (\$85)** A 90-minute session with Structural Yoga Therapist Arden Sundari Pierce. Includes assessment and a customized yoga practice for your self-development and healing. ■ **Northampton Brewery (\$50)** Fine ales, lagers and outstanding food – served by the friendliest staff around – at the Northeast's oldest operating brewpub. ■ **Don Gleason Camping Supplies (\$50)** Specializing in family camping, backpacking, hiking, trekking, and adventuring equipment, outdoor clothing, socks and boots, Don Gleason's has been owned and operated by the Gleason family since 1958. ■ **Broadside Bookshop (\$25)** Books and gifts at downtown Northampton's independent bookstore, where knowledgeable staff are happy to help you. ■ **Herrell's Ice Cream (\$20)** 145 flavors of high quality ice cream, made fresh on the premises. Nationally acclaimed as pioneers in premium ice cream, as well as famous hot fudge, "smoosh-ins" chocolate whipped cream, custom ice cream cakes, frozen yogurt and sorbet. ■ **Acadia Herbals (\$20)** Highest quality organic herbs and spices, organic teas, coffees, essential oils, soaps, gifts, herbal classes, and more. 🍀