

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



MARCH 2008



PLOT A CHANGE, SIGN YOUR PLOT

NO MORE new gardeners thinking your plot is theirs and digging up your choice perennials! No more notices mistakenly telling you that your lovingly-tended plot looks abandoned! This is going to happen, not by magic, but because **all Garden plots will be marked** with their letter/number

designations. As soon as possible this spring (by May 31 at the latest), gardeners are asked to post a sign in each of their plots with its letter/number.

**YOUR
PLOT
NUMBER
HERE**

The sign may be simple – for example, cardboard covered by a transparent plastic bag and nailed to a tomato stake – or it may be as elaborate and creative as you wish. You may use any materials. The only requirements are:

- 1) The sign should be easily seen from outside your plot.
 - 2) It should be sturdy enough to last through the gardening season.
- Side by side plots may share a sign. A four-square may have a single sign if it is visible from outside the plot and indicates which plot is which.

Don't know your plot number(s)? (Plots are lettered B to T, south to north and numbered 1 to 33, east to west.) You'll find your plot number on the address label on Garden mailings. If you've misplaced yours, you may send a query to info@nohogardens.org. 🍀



GARDEN CALENDAR

WHEAT PATCH PROJECT

March 12; 7 P.M.;
Northampton City Hall

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

March 29; 10–noon; Rec. Dep't.

"GETTING YOUR GARDEN STARTED" Workshop

April 12; 10:30–noon,
Garden or Rec. Dep't.

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETING

April 14; 6:30 P.M.; Rec. Dep't.

SPRING CLEANUP DAY

April 26; (9–4)

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETING

May 12; 6:30 P.M.; Rec. Dep't.

Julie Abramson, Master Gardener and friendly person, will be conducting a workshop for gardeners new to the community garden on getting your garden started; others are welcome, too. We'll be covering the topics noted below but will be sure to leave time for an extensive Q & A since people always have lots of questions. The workshop will be held at the picnic table near the shed at the Garden. If it rains we will meet at the Recreation Department.

Topics: clearing your plot • use of compost • fertilizing • mulching • deciding what to grow • cultural needs of various types of plants • selecting varieties • spacing of various vegetables, annuals, perennials • organic practices • growing "up" with fences, teepees and trellises • favorite tools.

If you have questions, email Julie at jabramson@albany.edu. See you there!

STARTING PEAS

From scientists at UMass comes the following discovery: You can **increase** the growth rate of **peas** by soaking them in a **Vitamin C** solution. Dissolve one-half of a 250 mg vitamin C tab in one quart of water. Soak your peas for 24 hours before planting them. Ten days later, these pea plants will be 40% higher than those from peas soaked in water only. (For more about peas and when and how to plant them, check out the March '07 issue of the Newsletter.)

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Garden Committee meets on the 2nd Monday of each month, at 6:30 P.M. at the Recreation Dep't.

GARDEN NEWS

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

NEW GARDENERS MAY

REGISTER for a plot on Saturday March 29, between 10 A.M. and noon. Registration will be held at the Northampton Recreation Dep't., 90 Locust St., behind Smith Vocational School. After that date, registrations will be accepted at the Recreation Dep't. during their regular hours, 8:30 A.M.–4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday. If you know someone who would like to garden, let her/him know about this opportunity.

2008 GARDEN WORKSHOPS

The first workshop of the season, **Getting Your Garden Started**, will be held on Saturday, April 12, 10:30–noon.

All gardeners are welcome to attend meetings or to suggest items for the agenda (send them to mtex@smith.edu). If you think you might like to join the Committee – new members are welcome – you should come to a meeting to see what goes on, then let us know of your interest.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

- ▶ Ed Hagelstein, who refurbishes our tools each winter. ▶
- ▶ Betsey Wolfson, who produces our elegantly-designed Newsletter four times a year.
- ▶ All the generous gardeners who waived discounts on plot fees or receiving the Newsletter on the Web as an additional contribution to the Garden. 🍀

WHEAT PATCH PROJECT



OUR BREAD FLOUR, as organically labeled as it might be, is road weary and carries a carbon-heavy burden. Grown in the Dakotas, milled in North Carolina, trucked to us in Massachusetts, it is high-quality but high-priced (in more ways than one). Displaced by ethanol-bound corn and soybean crops, the price of wheat is growing. Local cultivation, though historically significant, is presently negligible. We need new strategies to address this.

According to some records, Massachusetts was the site of the first wheat harvest in North America in 1602. Within living memory of Amherst resident Steven Puffer (age 93), farmers brought local wheat, rye, and corn to his family's mill on Old Montague Road (now Route 63).

Thanks to recent discussions and a local grain conference at Hampshire College last spring,

two local farmers now have seeds in the ground – rye and spelt – and plan to plant spring wheat next year. This is an encouraging though modest start and will necessitate the development of a local processing plant for cleaning, threshing, storing and milling the grain.

What we are proposing is a radical notion: that bread customers begin to grow a portion of the wheat they consume. That consumers truly become the “co-producers” that the Slow Food movement deems them to be. Imagine a bread enthusiast receiving a handful of berries with her Equinox loaf and going home to plant them in the backyard – or the front yard or the side yard or in a planter! With simple instructions and a helpful website, these new micro-farmers will be harvesting the fruit for a local flour in about six months.

Hungry Ghost Bread is proud to sponsor this project; we will distribute seed, help establish a virtual “grower’s hotline,” solicit and lend out hand scythes, and facilitate the eventual milling. Finally, we will bake this many-handed bread and serve it at our annual Bread Festival in late September.

The goal of the Wheat Patch Project is a radical approach to food production, economic participation and agricultural re-integration. In experimenting with numerous seed types, dozens of different conditions and soils, we can collectively discover which kinds of wheat (there are tens of thousands) may best be adapted to our region. In an update of the WW II “victory garden,” we encourage food consumers to be more than just that, more than checkbook activists. We must reclaim our connection to the “staff of life” in novel ways. Picture suburban lawns sprouting heritage

wheat – the silence of the lawn mowers alone will be stunning, not to mention the remarkable circle drawn between the hoe and the bread knife, the soil and the dough.

We plan to begin the Wheat Patch Project in the spring of 2008, with or without funding. We hope to collaborate with CISA, Hampshire College Farm Center, the newly formed Pioneer Valley chapter of Slow Food, the New England Small Farms Institute and anyone else who would like to participate (including the Mass. Dept. of Agricultural Resources?). We plan to coordinate with both White Oak Farm in Belchertown and White Moon Farm in Easthampton to maximize resources and to develop a small processing plant.

Please respond with constructive feedback, offers of money and participation, and anything resembling such.

Jonathan Stevens & Cheryl Maffei
Hungry Ghost Bread
 62 State Street
 Northampton, MA 01061
 413-582-9009
somehungryghost@yahoo.com

▶ On March 12, 2008, Stevens and Maffei will discuss the Wheat Patch Project at Northampton City Hall; 7 P.M. 🍀

GARDEN TIPS



SOONER THAN WE THINK, it will be time to start cultivating our gardens. (Remember the rule of thumb: Pick up a handful of soil and squeeze it. If what you have looks like mud pudding, it's not yet time to work the soil. If what you have is more like chocolate cake – moist but crumbly – you can start digging.) What about the tools you should use?

★ **Shovel** – That’s the one that comes to a point and is curved (cupped) inward. Use this for lifting and throwing – for instance, moving soil or compost from one place to another. The proper way to use it is to plant the blade straight down, so that the handle is tilted away from you, then to pull the handle toward you to lift the soil.

★ **Spade** – That’s the one with a flat, straight blade. Use this for cutting and turning, as in the initial cultivation of your plot – and for edging.

★ **Fork** – Use this for lifting and turning soil that is already broken up or for lifting and turning compost.

Neither shovel, spade, or fork should be used for prying out large rocks or other heavy objects; you run the risk of breaking it.

★ **Rake** – Use this for the final preparation of your plot. Drawing the teeth through the soil breaks up clumps of earth; turning the rake over and drawing the smooth top across the soil levels the planting bed.

★ **Hoe** – Use this for weeding. In particular, the stirrup hoe (also called a shuffle hoe), is pulled or pushed just under the surface of the soil to cut off weeds with minimal soil disturbance.

All of these tools are kept in the tool shed for general use. They will last longer and be in better shape for the next gardener if you clean them of soil before returning them.

Here are some **hand tools** you may find useful:

★ **Trowel** – The one hand tool that every gardener should have. Look for inexpensive plastic trowels: they are effective and nearly indestructible.

★ **Ho-mi** – A hand tool originating in Korea, it has a curved triangular metal blade attached to a wooden

handle. It can be used for making holes and furrows, for hilling, and for weeding. Oxo makes a Good Grips version that may be more durable.

★ **Bread knife** – Yup, a serrated bread knife! Look for one at tag sales. It’s perfect for cutting down grasses and perennials in the fall – just grab a handful of stems or blades and saw through them; perfect for deadheading daffodils; perfect for separating perennials when it’s necessary to cut through the roots; or perfect for roughing up rootballs of potbound plants.

★ **Soil thermometer** – helps you determine when you can plant seeds of different varieties. It’s 40°F for peas, 50° for beets, 60° for corn, and 70° for squash. Put the seeds in too soon and you’ll have a low (or even zero) germination rate.

Finally, enjoy this poem about a garden tool and laugh with . . .

—*The Happy Gardener*

THE OBJECTION TO BEING STEPPED ON

At the end of the row
I stepped on the toe
Of an unemployed hoe.

It rose in offense
And struck me a blow
In the seat of my sense.

It wasn’t to blame
But I called it a name.
And I must say it dealt

Me a blow that I felt
Like malice prepense.

You may call me a fool,
But was there a rule
The weapon should be

Turned into a tool?
And what do we see?

The first tool I step on
Turned into a weapon.

—*Robert Frost* 

LET’S SHARE FAVORITES!

—*Julie Abramson*

I AM INTERESTED in hearing others’ experiences of growing different varieties of tomatoes, vegetables, and flowers, so I collected suggestions from several wonderful community gardeners. Here are some of their favorites – in their own words where possible – as well as a few of my own.

▲ Preferred Eating Tomatoes ▼

MIMI TEGHTSOONIAN: year after year, the best-producing and best-tasting tomato is Dona, a French hybrid. Dependable and delicious. Second is Persimmon, which is hard to start from seed but worth it . . . productive and tasty. Mimi prefers tomatoes with significant acid flavor rather than overly sweet varieties. She is currently high on Polish Pastel and Dagma’s Perfection from Gary Ibsen’s Tomato Fest. Polish Pastel, technically a paste tomato, is extremely tasty, and she uses it uncooked for salads and pasta, as well as cooked for sauce. Dagma’s Perfection has large, yellow-flushed-red fruit and a wonderful taste.

ANNE LA FONTAINE agrees with Mimi about Persimmon; it would be her pick if she could have only one (Johnny’s & Pinetree Garden Seeds). Garden Peach is a small fuzzy peach-colored tomato which is productive, although an heirloom. To be sure of having enough tomatoes, her husband also plants some hybrids, including Big Boy, Early Girl and Jet Star. She likes tomatoes of different colors, arranged on a colorful plate, with fresh mozzarella, garnished with Johnny jump-ups and nasturtiums.

JUSTINE BERTRAM grows mostly heirloom/organic tomato seeds (Seeds of Change, Territorial Seeds); and selects varieties for flavor and color, including Garden Peach, her only repeat. New for this year: Pineapple and Peron Sprayless.

JULIE ABRAMSON (plots S & R 4) prefers medium size, sweet tasting tomatoes and after much trial & error, has found Bucks County (Burpee) outstanding; Rose de Berne is a pink tomato with wonderful flavor; good looking too (Totally Tomatoes). This year she will try a bunch of new heirlooms from Tomato Fest that sounded irresistible, including Azoucha, Cherokee Purple, Jade Pink Round, Beauty, Lahman Pink, Bulgarian Triumph and Pruden's Purple.

▲ Paste Tomatoes ▼

MIMI favors Amish Paste; JULIE likes Opalka.

▲ Cherry Tomatoes ▼

JULIE is trying out Sungold this year; it won her over at the Farmers' market last year; she usually does not like gold or orange tomatoes which often seem either fuzzy or bland. ANNE's favorite cherry is Sungold with its fantastic, big tomato taste; it produced early and kept on until late frost. JUSTINE is trying out Chocolate Cherry.

▲ Other Vegetables ▼

MIMI: for peppers, her best luck recently has been with Piquillo Pimento from John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds. For pole beans, a vigorous, tasty, and extremely productive variety is Rattlesnake (lots of seed companies carry it, including Pinetree).

ANNE loves Mammoth Melting sugar peas. Green Envy soybeans (Johnny's; she saves seeds); she eats them

fresh as edamame – delicious! She has given up on bush beans lately because of bean beetles. Best bush bean is Dragon's Tongue; pole bean: Rattlesnake. She grows lemon & lime basil which adds a whole different taste to tomato salad. She plants bronze fennel to eat, to visually savor, and to use in bouquets; it comes in a 6-pack at farmers' markets, but it's easy to grow from seed.

JUSTINE started with 3 heads of garlic and now has 3 varieties and expects to harvest 100 heads. She roasts it and stores it in a tight container with olive oil; it keeps very well and the garlic flavored oil is useful, too. She's also growing a miniature white cucumber (Pinetree Garden Seeds). As a hot pepper lover she prefers Serrano peppers to Jalapeños and enjoys papaya pear summer squash from John Scheepers. She grows carrot Yellow Stone and Jicama, which she's trying for first time to grow from seed. She's growing Hansel hybrid eggplant from Territorial Seed, along with a true red carrot, Samurai. She and Gloria Santa Anna collaborate on vegetables, so see below for others they are growing.

JULIE: Ichiban Japanese eggplant will make anyone a convert; County Fair pickling cuke does not have curcurbit, so is less appealing to cucumber beetle which means the vines don't die off so quickly; a fabulous taste too (Park Seeds); sugar snaps, of course – they never even make into the house.

GLORIA SANTA ANNA (plots R, T & S 5): the only turnip she will eat is Hakurei from Johnny's; it is so sweet and crisp that she adds it raw to salads; she had some for Thanksgiving after freezing it (cut in quarters) in Ziploc bags. Eggplant Mini

Fairy Tales is striped purple and white from Territorial Seed; it kept coming steadily until late frost. She adds a little bit of olive oil, tomatoes, onions, and garlic, with parsley & basil at the end, roasted at 350° for a half hour and served over pasta. Wild Kale mix from Cook's Garden – order early! Scatter seeds in August, and it grows into December. There were some left at Christmas under row cover; it's cut-and-come-again. Gloria likes Mesclun Mix (for dummies); Hadley Garden Center carries it from High Mowing Seeds. Mesclun grows in spring and holds quite well but is excellent for fall and will continue into winter with a row cover.

BILL GRIFFITHS has had great success with sweet potatoes, not often planted by gardeners in our area. He also plants regular potatoes, using trenches. He freezes cooked mashed sweet potato to eat all winter, as well as zucchini which he uses in double chocolate zucchini muffins. (See his article below.)

▲ Flowers ▼

ANNE has many favorites, including Nasturtiums, Pinwheel Marigolds, Persian carpet zinnias, Tithonia, Verbena bonariensis (good for butterflies). She keeps dahlias from year to year for cutting and enjoys a border of daylilies, alternating with Iris to give extended color

JULIE (plots S & R 4) has a cutting garden in one of her plots, including perennial Salvias, Delphinium (raised as annuals... if they come back, all the better), Lupines, Knautia, Larkspur, tall Zinnias (Benary Giants are excellent), Black Prince & Rocket Mix Snapdragons, Penstemons, garlic chives and sunflowers – preferably the pollenless ones for cutting but there are always so many volunteers from the compost

pile that it never quite works out that way. Sweet William and Painted Daisy are great for early bouquets.

JUSTINE: from *Select Seeds* – cosmos polidor (a shorter variety) and vega mix, zinnia red spider, nigella (love in a mist), nasturtium with marbled leaves (Alaska); from *Pinetree Garden Seeds* – short sunflower, Music Box, purple bells cerinthe
GLORIA's garden is "no fuss, no muss" and drought tolerant; she added lots of Asiatic lilies for new cutting garden. Perennial flowers that are happy in her rock garden include *Sedum spurium* "tri-color" with leaves that are red, white and green, changing with the season; it also grows quickly as a ground cover. Another favorite is *Sedum* "aizoon" which has deep yellow blooms and tolerates some shade. It grows more slowly. Seek out Gloria to check out rock gardening; she will share her experience and possibly a cutting or two.

Burpee – www.burpee.com

The Cook's Garden –
www.cooksgarden.com

Gary Ibsen's Tomato Fest –
www.tomatofest.com

High Mowing Organic Seeds –
www.highmowingseeds.com

Johnny's Selected Seeds –
www.johnnyseeds.com

Park Seed Co. – www.parkseed.com

Pinetree Garden Seeds –
www.superseeds.com

John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds –
www.kitchengardenseeds.com

Seed Savers Exchange –
www.seed savers.org

Seeds of Change –
www.seedsofchange.com

Select Seeds – www.selectseeds.com

Territorial Seed Company –
www.territorialseed.com

Totally Tomatoes –
www.totallytomato.com 

GROWING SWEET POTATOES

SWEET POTATOES originated in tropical America and require a warm growing season. They are grown from rooted sprouts planted about 2–3 weeks after the average last frost date. The most demanding part of growing them is soil and bed preparation. They do well in rows 3' apart mounded to about 10"–12".

To prepare the bed lightly apply an organic granular fertilizer, dig the soil to remove lumps or rocks which might interfere with the tubers and mound the rows. Make a small 3" deep furrow along the top of the mound and cover the mound with black plastic. The plastic should be 3' wide and about 3' longer than the length of the row. Stones or wood strips in the furrow will help keep the plastic temporarily in place.

Along the sides and ends of the mound remove some soil and bury the edges of the plastic. Install the plastic 2–3 weeks before planting to warm the soil. Make x-shaped slits in the plastic every 16".

To plant make a peg-hole in each slit, fill the hole with water fortified lightly with fish emulsion, set the plants in the liquid, and firm the dampened soil around the roots.

Good results have been obtained for the last few years planting "Georgia Jet" sets. Visit Plots 1-13,14 to see them grow.

An excellent source for plants has been: Steele Plant Co., 202 Collins Street, Gleason, TN 38229; 731-648- 5476.

— Bill Griffiths

DOUBLE CHOCOLATE CHIP ZUCCHINI MUFFINS or BREAD

—from Ann and Bill Griffiths

WHAT SHALL I DO with all this zucchini? Perhaps this recipe will help with at least a partial answer to this often asked question.

★ Sift the following ingredients into a large bowl; then mix well together.

3 C all-purpose flour
4 T + 1 tsp. cocoa
2 cups sugar
2 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg

Add to the above mix:

1 C mini semi-sweet
chocolate chips or carob chips
1 C coarsley chopped walnuts

Beat together in a separate bowl:

3 eggs, beaten
1/2 C canola oil
2 tsp. vanilla
one 8 1/4 oz. can
crushed pineapple, well drained
1 banana, mashed

Now add to wet ingredients:

2 C shredded zucchini (unpeeled)

Mix well.

Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients, and mix until all is moistened.

Spread batter into two greased 9" x 5" x 3" loaf pans or greased muffin pans (filling to about 1/2 full).

Bake at 350°

Bake loaves for 1 hour. Makes two loaves.

Bake muffins for 20–30 min.

Makes approx. 3 dozen muffins. 