

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



MAY 2008

GREEN OUR GARDEN!



GLOBAL WARMING is happening!

What can we gardeners do about it? Each of us has only a small voice nationally, but we can have a larger voice at the local level. We need to consider how, in our daily lives and daily actions, we can work to counteract the effects of global warming.

This is a call to community gardeners to think about how we can reduce the carbon footprint of the Community Garden and make it not only a green garden... but a *Green Garden*.

We already contribute by maintaining our nine acres as garden or woods – that means it's not paved over or turned into a big-box store. We contribute by growing some of the food we eat. And we contribute when we cultivate by hand rather than machine. But we could do *more*.

Here are **four goals** for the Community Garden in 2008:

- ▶ **Cut** our **water use** below last year's level
- ▶ **Increase** our use of **compost** and **organic fertilizers** in place of chemical fertilizers
- ▶ **Reduce** our reliance on **gasoline-powered** mowers
- ▶ **Become more of a community** as we remain a garden

Here are things **each gardener can do** to help reach these goals:

WATER USE

- Don't use leaky hoses
- Water mindfully – just enough, no more!
- Mulch, mulch, mulch – you'll need a lot less water

CHALLENGE:

Consider watering your own plot with soaker hoses, a more efficient way to deliver water where it's needed

GARDENING ORGANICALLY

- Use compost and organic fertilizer

CHALLENGE:

Sign up to work on compost crews

POWER MOWERS

- Use a push mower if you can

CHALLENGE:

Investigate the possibility of replacing the grass in our paths with **slow-growing** grass; it needs only 2–3 mowings per season!

COMMUNITY

- Share seeds, plants, produce with other gardeners
- Help with community projects
- Become a Garden Neighbor
- Join the Garden Committee

CHALLENGE:

Organize a seed-sharing event, a potluck, a garden get-together, or an open house.

Here's what **the Garden Committee will do** to reach these goals:

WATER USE

- Replace defective hoses
- Arrange for the periodic delivery of mulch hay and straw
- Help organize a trial run with soaker hoses
- Publish Newsletter articles on efficient watering

COMPOST

- Provide a yard cart and compost fork for each pile to make it easier to use the pile and to manage it
- Organize workshops on improving garden soil
- Arrange for the periodic delivery of organic compost and fertilizer

POWER MOWERS

- Buy a new push mower
- Keep push mowers sharpened

COMMUNITY

- Organize Garden Neighbors
- Keep gardeners posted on community projects
- Solicit and implement gardeners' suggestions

We invite gardeners to submit ideas for reducing our carbon footprint. The best idea each month will win a \$5 credit with a local organic farmer for plants or produce. All submissions will be entered in an end-of-season lottery, with a prize of \$25 worth of Red Bag organic compost. 🍀

GARDEN NEWS

★ Spring Cleanup Day was blessed by fine sunny weather, and gardeners responded in force. Both compost piles were turned by a hard-working, devoted crew. The tool shed is now clean and well-organized; non-working wheelbarrows have been discarded and working ones have inflated tires. Hoses were tested and distributed to spigots. The Survival Center plot was weeded, spaded up, and reworked into planting beds and paths.

Sandy Jaescke from Pine Brook Farm brought straw and Mainely Mulch for sale; Ed McGlew brought compost. Terry Sprecker and Helen Marusek from Master Gardeners tested soil for pH levels and answered questions from gardeners. The day was a terrific start to what should be a wonderful gardening season.

★ Next Garden Date-to-Remember: Gardeners should begin to cultivate their plots by **Sunday, June 1**. Plots that have *not* been worked by that date will be reassigned to gardeners on our waiting list. As always, a gardener may request an extension of the deadline, stating when she/he will begin working on the plot. Send your request to MTEX@SMITH.EDU or in writing to the Northampton Recreation Dep't., 90 Locust St., 01060.

★ Special thanks to

- **Ann Wetherbee**, for repainting the tool shed doors.
- **Brit Albritton** for making our dog signs and Sarah Metcalf for the delightful verses. May they convince dog walkers to keep their pets leashed!
- **Jason Woofenden**, who has retired as our Web master after several years of service, and to **E. Michael Brandt**, who has taken over the job. 🍀

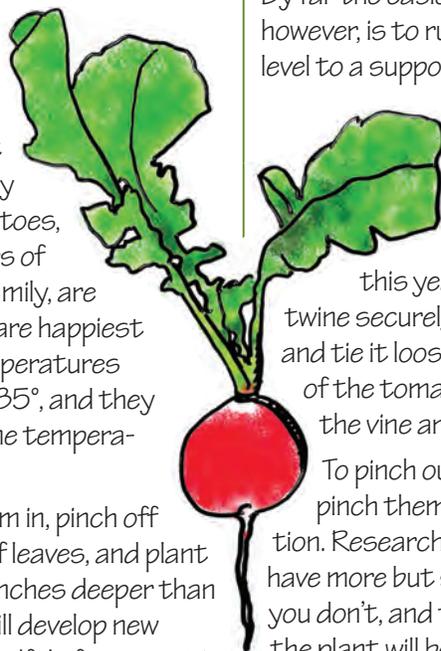
GARDEN TIPS

It's tomato time – *almost*. Memorial Day is the traditional tomato-planting date in New England. If you are a risk-taker, you can put out your tomatoes sooner, but you take the risk that they will be killed by a late frost. Tomatoes, like other members of the nightshade family, are heat lovers: they are happiest with daytime temperatures between 70° and 85°, and they won't like nighttime temperatures below 55°.

When you put them in, pinch off the bottom set of leaves, and plant them a couple of inches deeper than they were: They will develop new roots. Throw a handful of compost in the planting hole. Calcium is said to prevent blossom-end rot – that nasty black stuff that starts eating your tomato before you do; I'm planning to experiment with watering plants with milk and will report on the results. I haven't been able to find out whether the calcium is in a form available to the tomato plant – if you know, let us in on the secret.

Water deeply once a week.

Your choices of tomato support are many. You could elect to have no support at all and let the vines sprawl on the ground: that's messy, takes a lot of space, and sets a dinner table for marauding animals. The tomato stakes sold in stores are 4–5' tall, which – unless your tomatoes are pretty puny – is not tall enough. A stake needs to go about 1' deep, and you need about 6' above ground for most tomatoes; you will need to tie the tomato at intervals to the stake. I've experimented with such stakes and also



with supporting the vines by weaving twine back and forth between end stakes, making a kind of tomato fabric.

By far the *easiest* form of support, however, is to run twine from ground level to a support 6' above and to

wind the tomato vine around the string as it grows. A further refinement, which I'll try this year, is to fasten the twine securely to a support above and tie it loosely around the base of the tomato plant; you wind the vine around the twine.

To pinch out suckers or not to pinch them – that is the question. Research shows that you will have more but smaller tomatoes if you don't, and the total output of the plant will be about the same either way. It's easier to support a vine that is pinched back to one or two stems, and that's usually my choice. If you don't recognize where to pinch, ask a fellow gardener – you don't want to pinch off the growing tip of the vine.

The bane of tomato gardeners is early blight: dark spots with concentric rings develop on older leaves first. The surrounding leaf area turns yellow, and affected leaves die prematurely, exposing the fruits to sun scald. The fungus overwinters in plant residue and is soil-borne, so mulching may help prevent its spread, and so may rotation of nightshade crops (potato, tomato, eggplant) to different locations on a three-year schedule. Copper and/or sulfur sprays may prevent further development of the fungus.

And, when you harvest the first ripe tomato, with that incomparable smell and taste, you will be, like me . . .

... *The Happy Gardener* 🍀



▲ TIME TO INSTALL PLOT MARKERS!

Radishes and peas are popping up all over the Garden, and so are signs telling passers-by the number of each plot. Please remember that each plot must have a sign by June 1. The sign may be as simple or as elaborate as you wish; the only requirement is that it be clearly visible from outside the plot. 🌿

“GREEN OUR GARDEN” WINS GRANT

The Cooley Dickinson Healthy Communities Grant Program has funded our Community Garden “Green Our Garden” initiative with a grant of \$960. We plan to use this money to help reduce the Garden’s carbon footprint. (SEE PAGE 1.)

The first step – encouraging gardeners to use compost and organic fertilizer instead of chemical fertilizers – has been taken by offering a \$2 rebate for the first bag of either compost or organic fertilizer purchased by each gardener. Fifteen gardeners took advantage of the offer on Spring Cleanup Day, and the offer remains in force all season. If you buy compost from Ed McGlew, he has voucher slips. If you buy compost or organic fertilizer from another source, save the receipt and put it in

the labeled manila envelope on the bulletin board with your name, plot number, and address; we’ll send you the reimbursement.

The second step challenges each gardener to come up with her/his own ideas for reducing energy use at the Garden. Submit your ideas to MTEX@SMITH.EDU or put them in the manila envelope on the bulletin board – be sure to include your name, plot number, and address. Each month, the most energy-saving idea wins a \$5 voucher to use at an organic farm stand at the Northampton Farmers’ Market. At the end of the season, all ideas will be entered in a lottery: the winner receives \$25 worth of McGlew’s Red Bag compost. 🌿

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF MULCH

Mulching garden beds can often make the difference between success and failure, especially when gardening on dry sites or with newly planted perennials, shrubs or trees. Some plants that are marginal for your climate zone may thrive in your garden with winter protection through mulching. Mulching is one of the simplest and most beneficial of gardening practices.

Q: What is mulch?

A: A protective layer of material, often organic in nature:

- grass clippings ● straw ● bark chips ● newspaper ● cardboard
- shredded bark ● compost
- leaf mold or decomposing leaves
- cocoa or buckwheat hulls
- shredded leaves ● pine needles
- christmas tree boughs

Mulch material is laid on exposed soil in the garden and spread to a depth

GARDEN CALENDAR

WORK YOUR PLOT BEFORE

Sunday, June 1

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

May 12; 6:30 P.M.; Rec. Dep’t.

June 9; 6:30 P.M. in the garden

of 2”–4”. (Mulch can also be inorganic, such as stones, stone dust, landscape fabric or plastic sheeting.)

Q: Why should I mulch?

A: Because organic mulch:

- enriches and protects the soil from erosion
- reduces compaction from the impact of heavy rains
- conserves moisture
- prevents weed growth
- keeps soil cooler in summer and frozen in winter (see “when to mulch” below for explanation of why it is important to keep the soil frozen in the winter)
- keeps fruits and vegetables clean and keeps soil borne disease from splashing on to plants
- sets plants off visually and gives garden a finished look
- improves the condition of the soil by providing organic matter from decomposing mulch
- improves root growth and the infiltration and water-holding capacity of the soil
- provides a source of plant nutrients and encourages earthworms and other beneficial soil organisms

Inorganic mulches can do some of the same things that organic mulches do, such as keeping weeds down and protecting soil and plants; however, they do not enhance the soil, provide nutrients to plants or improve the look of the garden with the exception of stone mulches. Stone mulches can be very effective in rock gardens both

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visually and as a protection from rot for sedum, cacti and other rock garden plants. Plastic mulches offer some advantages for the vegetable garden as they warm the soil and keep warmth-loving plants such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplants happier in our northern climate. Recent research has shown that red plastic mulch improves the productivity of tomatoes.

Salt marsh hay and straw work well in the vegetable garden while other types of hay may harbor weed seeds. Shredded leaves are an excellent mulch for perennial beds as is shredded bark while bark chips and shredded bark are effective in foundation plantings or around bushes or trees.

Q: When should I mulch?

A: The time of application varies with your goal in mulching. Mulch provides an insulating barrier between the soil and the air and moderate the soil temperature. Therefore, a mulched soil in the winter may not freeze as deeply as one that is not mulched. Yet mulch also will cause soil to stay frozen when warm spells occur in the

winter, thus protecting your plant roots from exposure due to the frost heaving that results from freeze and thaw cycles; this can be a major cause of plant loss.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive, when you mulch to protect plants from the impact of winter, you are actually trying to keep them consistently cold rather than warming them with the mulch. Therefore, it is essential to wait to mulch plants for the winter until the ground is fully frozen. In our area, that may vary with the weather but often coincides with the post-Christmas disposal of Christmas trees whose boughs serve as an excellent mulch for the perennial garden.

Since mulch insulates, mulched soils warm up more slowly in the spring than soils which are not. Therefore, you should not apply mulch in the vegetable garden until the soil has warmed. In fact, you can use plastic mulch to hasten the warming of the soil for those vegetables that appreciate warmth but not for those such as peas or lettuce that need cooler soils. Wait to add mulch to existing perennial beds until the soil has warmed fully.

Q: How do I mulch?

- Remove weeds first.
- Keep mulch at least 6" away from the trunk of a tree or shrub to avoid build-up of moisture or cover for rodents.
- Don't let mulch come in contact with the crowns of plants.
- Add no more than 2"-4" of mulch.
- Avoid mulch build-up beyond 2"-4", especially around trees; build-up can reduce oxygen available to plants and trees.
- Put down several layers of newspaper or a layer of cardboard when starting new beds; this suppresses weeds and adds organic matter to the soil as it rots.

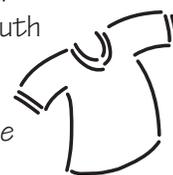
- Purchase mulch by the yard if you have a large area or by the bag if your area is small. 🌿

—Julie Abramson

This article appeared in November, '06: WWW.WMASSMASTERGARDENERS.ORG
Supplementary source: Natural Resources Conservation Service: WWW.NRCS.USDA.GOV

SEND A T-SHIRT TO SOUTH AFRICA

Last year gardener Norma Sandowski traveled to South Africa to help women in Hornlee Township develop their garden. Whenever she wore her Northampton Community Garden t-shirt, the women admired it.



Buy one (or more!) of our teal Garden t-shirts – by mailing your check (\$12 each) to Nancy First, 77 Hawthorn Lane, Northampton, MA 01060 – and we will ship them to grateful gardeners in South Africa. 🌿

WORKSHOPS HELP REDUCE YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

- **Low Carbon Living for Your Community** based on the Low Carbon Diet, a carbon reduction program by David Gershon, will help you organize and lead low-carbon living groups in your community. ● Sat., May 10 | 11 AM – 1 PM | Hitchcock Center for the Environment | 525 S. Pleasant St., Amherst | Free.
- **Solar Workshop for Residents and Small Businesses.** Learn about solar electricity and hot water, siting and sizing of systems, costs, pay-backs and benefits, rebates and incentives, local installers and energy efficiency. ● Wed., May 21 | Amherst Town Hall | 7–9 PM | donation: \$10 | Register: tomasin@cetonline.org or 413-586-7350 x 25 | Presented by Town of Amherst Energy Task Force and (CET) Center for Ecological Technology. WWW.CETONLINE.ORG 🌿



FAUCET AND HOSE ETIQUETTE

- ▶ Please coil your hose after each use, and hang it on the hose rack.
- ▶ Watering cans take precedence at the faucet.
- ▶ Soaker hoses should not be left unattended.
- ▶ Sprinklers are not allowed.
- ▶ If a community hose needs a new washer or has other leaks, please follow up. Washers are usually available in the Garden Shed.
- ▶ Questions? Elaine Pourinski, our volunteer water manager, helps us keep our water fees reasonable. Reach her at AZULHERON@AOL.COM