

# NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



## NEWS



MARCH 2009

### GARDEN NEWS

The Vernal Equinox falls on March 20 this year, and we can look forward to warming temperatures to melt the remaining snow cover. As soon as the soil temperature reaches 40° F, it's time to start planting peas and lettuce seed.

#### DATES TO NOTE

► **New Gardener Registration, March 28.** On Sat., March 28, 10–noon at the Recreation Dep't., volunteers will be registering new gardeners as long as plots hold out. We anticipate a big demand for plots this season, so prospective gardeners should come early and be prepared to stand in line.

► **"Getting Started" Workshop, Sat., April 18** at 10:30, near the Garden tool shed (rain date: April 19). Master Gardener Julie Abramson will present information for new gardeners about how to get your garden started. See the next column for details.

► **Spring Cleanup Day, April 25.** This is the Saturday when gardeners pitch in to get the Garden ready for the 2009 season. There will be plenty of work for volunteers. Those of you who are interested in **no-till gardening** should come for the workshop – time to be announced.

► **Weedless Gardening Workshop.** April 25 – part of Spring Cleanup Day. Lydia Rackenberg, long-time Community Gardener, will describe her own experiences with weedless

gardening techniques; she'll show participants how to move to no-till gardening and describe the benefits they can expect.

#### 2008 GARDEN WORKSHOPS

The first workshop of the season, **Getting Your Garden Started**, will be held on Sat., **April 18**, 10:30–noon. **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



### GARDEN CALENDAR

#### NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

Saturday., March 28; 10–noon

#### "GETTING STARTED" WORKSHOP

Saturday, April 18; 10:30

(rain date: April 19)

#### SPRING CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, April 25

#### NO-TILL WORKSHOP

Saturday, April 25

#### WEEDLESS GARDENING WORKSHOP

Saturday, April 25

#### GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Second Monday each month  
@ 6:30 p.m. at the Rec. Dep't.

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](mailto:jabramson@albany.edu). See you there! (Participants may want to bring chairs.)

#### MASTER GARDENER DEMONSTRATION PLOT

The Garden is working cooperatively with the Western Massachusetts Master Gardeners Association to establish a demonstration plot. We will build, as a collaborative enterprise, a new bed that will be accessible to gardeners who use wheelchairs. The Master Gardeners will give a monthly workshop, open to Community Gardeners and to the wider community, on timely topics.

#### MASTER GARDENERS SPRING GARDENING SYMPOSIUM

Gardeners will be interested in the Western Mass Master Gardeners' Spring Gardening Symposium, "Let Your Garden Shine...in 2009," on Sat., April 4 at William Dean Technical High School in Holyoke. Keynote speaker is C. L. Fornari, and you can select from

24 gardening workshops. For information about the program, go to [WWW.WMASSMASTERGARDENERS.ORG](http://WWW.WMASSMASTERGARDENERS.ORG).

### CONTEST WINNER

The winner of September's Small Footprint contest, with the best idea for reducing our energy expenditure, is Johanna Halbeisen. She suggests that we look for ways to reduce mowing around our plots: Mulch the edges, expand our plots to their full extent, eliminate grass paths within four-squares. Johanna wins a \$5 certificate to spend at a local farmers' market.

The grand winner of the Small Footprint contest – whose name was drawn at random from all who submitted ideas – is Kathryn Stout. Congratulations to Kathryn, who wins \$30 worth of Red Bag compost!

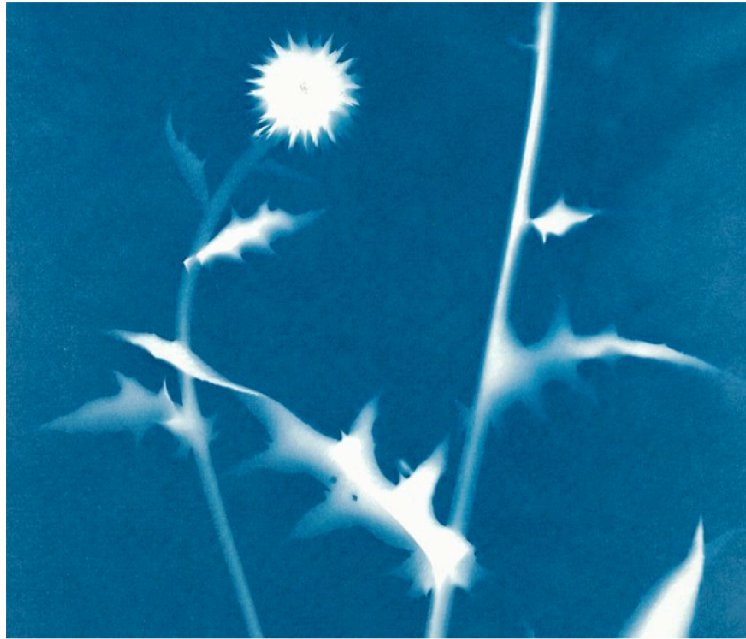


### GARDEN TIPS

#### ROTOTILL, HAND TILL, OR NO TILL?

Many gardeners are firmly wedded to tilling their vegetable gardens each spring. Some have, or rent, a rototiller – motor-driven blades that churn up the soil and whatever is growing there. Others grab the fork and spade and turn over their gardens each spring. Followed by raking, in each case the result is soil that is in good tilth and ready for seeds and sets.

Still others practice no-till gardening. Each fall, they add a layer of organic matter, like chopped



Thistles by Heather McQueen; one of a series of cyanotypes (aka sunprints/blueprints) using plants in her garden

estimated that it will take about 7 years of tilling, then weeding, to reduce the buried weed seeds to close to zero. Another drawback is that tilling puts oxygen into the soil, which facilitates the rapid breakdown of organic matter, such as the compost you have dug into the soil.

Also, remember that rototilling should never (that's NEVER) be used in a plot that's infested with witch grass. The blades will cut up the long rhizomes of the grass, and new plants will sprout from each tiny piece – a gardener's nightmare!

leaves or compost. In the spring, seeds are planted or sets put in place by making the smallest hole possible.

What are the pros and cons of each method?

#### TILLING

**Plus.** Rototilling is the method of choice if you are starting a garden from scratch, have to break up turf or densely-growing weeds, and don't have time to lay down heavy mulch for a season to kill the vegetation. It would also make sense to rototill where the soil has been heavily compacted, by machinery or foot traffic. Hand tilling is more ecologically friendly and better exercise, and in an already established garden, works just fine.

**Minus.** One drawback to either method of tilling is that it exposes weed seeds that have been lying below the surface and gives them the light they need to germinate. The gardener then has to deal with those weeds; it's been

blades will cut up the long rhizomes of the grass, and new plants will sprout from each tiny piece – a gardener's nightmare!

#### NO-TILLING

**What Is It?** No-till gardening also involves some up-front preparation time. To prepare a bed for no-till, the gardener distributes fertilizer (and lime if needed), lays down layers of newspaper, wets them, then covers them with a mulch of some sort. The newspaper prevents the germination of existing weed seeds, and the mulch starts the process of building the soil from the top down. If seeds are to be planted, a 3-inch layer of compost would be required; if plants are to be set in place (right through the newspaper), 1 inch is enough. Avoid soil compaction by not walking on planted beds. Use some sort of protection for the soil surface, like a light mulch, to protect seedlings from heat and heavy rain and to minimize weeds sprouting. In

theory, once the garden is established by this method, the newspaper layers don't need to be repeated.

**Plus.** The labor of tilling is avoided, and planting can begin as soon as the soil is warm enough. Weeding is cut to a minimum – one proponent claims he spends just 5 minutes a week for a 2000-square-foot garden. The soil steadily improves in structure and fertility.

**Minus.** The drawbacks are few. Keeping the edges of the garden weed-free can be a problem. The major concern for the no-till gardener is finding enough mulch to add a layer every fall.

Successful no-till gardening is basically weedless gardening. Unless you really enjoy weeding, join the no-tillers and become

—A Happy Gardener

(For more information about weeds, witch or quack grass [*Agropyron repens*], and weedless gardening, consult the Happy Gardener in the March 2006 Garden Newsletter).

## AREA GARDENING RESOURCES

▶ **River Valley Market Parking Lot Plant Sale.** Sat., April 25, 9–12 @ River Valley Market. A pre-Farmers' Market plant sale with bedding plants, flowers, food, and fun!

▶ **SOS Plant and Garden Sale.** Sat., May 9 at Smith Vocational School. This sale raises money for the Save our Schools Book Fund.

▶ **Tulip Mania: Five Centuries of Mystery and Madness;** March 6–June 2, 2009; Lyman Plant House, Smith College. The story of the tulip from its humble origins in

central Asia to the mania surrounding its dazzling rise to popularity in the 17th century.

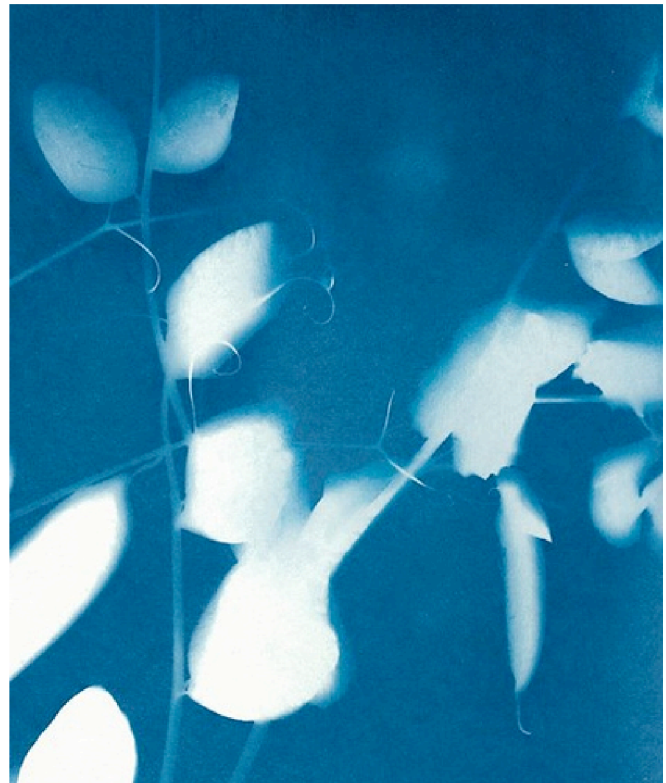
▶ **Master Gardener Hot Line.** There's lots of information at [WWW.WMASSMASTERGARDENERS.ORG](http://WWW.WMASSMASTERGARDENERS.ORG), but if you can't find the answer to your question at their website, you can e-mail a question to [WMMGA10@YAHOO.COM](mailto:WMMGA10@YAHOO.COM) (for gardeners in Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire counties).

▶ **UMass Extension's** site for the home gardener: [WWW.UMASS-GREENINFO.ORG/RESOURCES/GARDENER \\_ INFO.HTML](http://WWW.UMASS-GREENINFO.ORG/RESOURCES/GARDENER_INFO.HTML)

▶ **New England Wildflower Society.** Nasami Farm Nursery opens April 16! This former farm in Whately has gorgeous views (and lots of native plants for sale). And if you've never been to Garden in the Woods in Framingham, take a carload of gardening friend to visit in May or June. [WWW.NEWFs.ORG](http://WWW.NEWFs.ORG)

## BOOK REPORT

I recently read *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle; a Year of Food Life* by Barbara Kingsolver. There is much here to recommend to my fellow gardeners. First of all, the book tells the story of a family committed to living for a year only on what they can grow or find locally. Many funny stories, much good gardening information and a view of our country and the world by people committed to sustainable food future has made this a page-turner for me. I've decided to



Peas by Heather McQueen

try growing potatoes this year, and I long to find a large field of fire flies to see if I can make them blink all together.

The book has led me to many more sources of information. I'll tell of two. First is the web site of the book, [WWW.ANIMALVEGETABLEMIRACLE.COM](http://WWW.ANIMALVEGETABLEMIRACLE.COM). Its blurb says "Welcome to the secret hideaway of a long-forgotten goat, the flowers of a peanut plant nosing their way into the dirt, the lost art of turkey sex." The site contains recipes for goodies mentioned in the book, web resources, ideas for finding local foods (Northampton Community Gardeners don't need this one!), and sort of a blog called "Share your local food adventures".

—Johanna Halbeisen





## A QUOTE FOR SPRING

“Now it is April and we can hope again. Never mind the forecasts, which are no more than hopes distorted by a primitive science. Let us base our hopes instead on the reality of our experience. There will be some rain, there will be some drought, but we can hope for three perfect days when the sun blazes from the moment we open our eyes, and a balm of warm air cossets us as we sit outdoors late into the evening, and a gentle rain falls discretely while we are in bed.

“April will be cruel, one way or another. May will be a delight, no matter what the weather is. Then, in what we choose to call the summer, we will get a month or rain somewhere along the way, which we will bear with a sense of injustice....The first week of September will be fine, because it always is, regardless of science....

“Of course, there is a slim possibility [that this year will be even worse than last] but, even so, we will get our three perfect days. Look out for them, and make the most of them.”

—from *The Writer's Plot*, by Frank Ronan, in *Gardens Illustrated* 2008.

## RECOMMENDED SITE

City Farmer, Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture, ([WWW.CITY-FARMER.ORG](http://WWW.CITY-FARMER.ORG)) has been on the web since 1994 and is rich with articles and information. Its sister site, City Farmer News ([WWW.CITY-FARMER.INFO](http://WWW.CITY-FARMER.INFO)) carries news about urban farming and some great links: Horticulture Therapy, Meetings, Mushrooms, Nepal and Nutrition.” This gives you just an idea of the scope of this site.

—Johanna Halbeisen

## CHECK OUT MOBOT

This is one of the best places I've found to discover loads of information on thousands of plants:

Missouri Botanical Garden

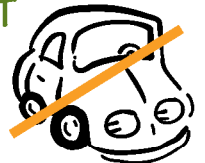
[WWW.MOBOT.ORG/GARDENINGHELP/PLANTFINDER/ALPHA.ASP](http://WWW.MOBOT.ORG/GARDENINGHELP/PLANTFINDER/ALPHA.ASP)

—Betsey Wolfson



“Please put things in the dumpster only if absolutely necessary. Take home paper and plastic that can be recycled. Bring plastic pots back to the place they came from: many nurseries and farmers' market stands will take back their own. Hadley Garden Center on Route 9 has a box for them. If you MUST place something in the dumpster, compact it by breaking it up or stepping on it; sometimes large items get “hung up” and we end up with a lot of space filled with nothing but air.”

PLEASE DO NOT  
DRIVE YOUR  
CAR INTO THE  
GARDEN AREA.



PARK ON THE STREET OR ON THE BACK ROAD, AND USE A WHEELBARROW TO CARRY TOOLS AND SUPPLIES.