

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



OCTOBER 2009

GARDEN NEWS

The Garden is losing two long-time gardeners and members of the Garden Committee. We are sorry to say goodbye to **Mary**

Beth Averill and **Sylvia Michaels;**

we are in their debt for their many contributions to the Garden.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

► **Christopher Sparks,** who has ably taken on the job of Garden Web master.

► **Carole and Muriel Goulet,** who handle the formidable task of keeping Community Service records.

► **Ben Winter,** who has organized Survival Center deliveries this season.

► **Elaine Pourinski,** who supervises hoses and faucets at our water outlets.

► **Bob Carroll and Kate Collins,** and the group of volunteers they recruited to work on the Survival Center plot, and to **Lisa Andrews,** who coordinated the Garden's contributions.

► **Stan Gryszan, Jim Ferguson,** and **Art Larson,** who have the unenviable job of keeping the mowers running.

The **Master Gardeners** of Western Massachusetts have made

great progress on their demonstration plots at the east end of the Garden. Raised beds have been constructed and filled with soil and compost. One bed has been planted with unusual annuals – stop by to take a look. Plans for next year include a kitchen garden and workshops for Community Gardeners. 🌱

GARDEN TIPS

Most of our crops have been harvested, though a few far-sighted folks can look forward to Brussels sprouts and parsnips, best after a frost. But there is one crop that we plant in the fall – it's time to start thinking garlic!

Garlic prefers soil close to neutral in pH, 6.5-7.0, with good drainage. Those are probably the conditions that prevail in your plot. If you have tested and find the pH level below 6.5, you could add some lime about a month before planting, adding a regular garden fertilizer or compost at the same time.

You'll get the best results if you buy your seed garlic from a local source, since it will be adapted to local conditions. But many gardeners have purchased garlic by mail order with good results. It is said that garlic grown in the same place year after year will adapt itself to the prevailing conditions and produce larger cloves each year. I save the largest cloves from each year's harvest to serve as seed for next year's crop.

Plant your garlic after the first heavy frosts – from mid-October to early November. You want it to put down roots that will anchor it during freeze-thaw cycles; it may put out some green growth and that's OK.

Plant each clove, skin on, with the root end down, standing erect. Put the cloves about 4" apart and about 1" under the soil surface, not deeper. Mulch heavily (with straw, mulch hay, or chopped leaves), 4-6". Some gardeners recommend pulling aside the mulch in the spring to let the soil warm, then replacing it when the hot weather comes to moderate soil temperature and preserve moisture. I've had good luck (and saved time) by leaving the mulch in place. Meanwhile, you can pick your basil before the frost takes it and use this year's garlic harvest for a last pesto. Consume it with a sigh of contentment and be...

—The Happy Gardener 🌱



GARDEN CALENDAR

FALL PLOT INSPECTION

Sunday, October 18

FALL GARDEN CLEANUP

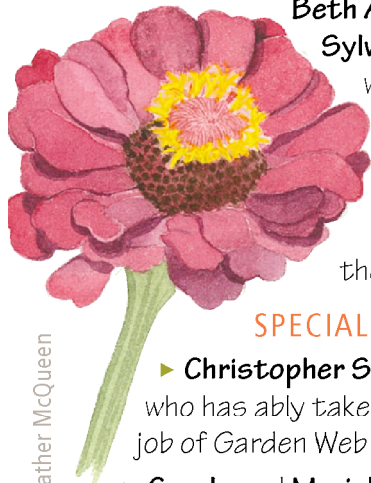
Saturday, October 24

SECOND INSPECTION

Sunday, November 1

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Second Monday each month
@ 6:30 P.M. at the Rec. Dep't.



Zinnia by Heather McQueen

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Registration for the 2009 season included a section for gardeners to indicate what community service task they wished to perform. This was an innovation, and some unforeseen problems arose in the course of the summer. Many gardeners expected to hear from the Garden Committee about their service opportunity. Unfortunately, more people signed up for some tasks than there were slots for them, but no one notified them of this.

If you were one of those who waited in vain for the call to service and still need to put in time, try to come to Fall Cleanup Day, Saturday, Oct. 24, at 10 A.M. If this doesn't work, contact Mimi at MTEx@SMITH.EDU or by mail to Community Garden, Recreation Dep't., 90 Locust St., 01060, for tasks that can be performed during the winter.

We are working to improve the system for signups in 2010. 🍀

FALL PLOT CLEANUP

You must clean up your plot(s) this fall in order to register for the 2010 season.

The deadline for cleaning your plot(s) and preparing for the winter is Sunday, October 18. Around 2:00 P.M., teams of volunteers will be checking plots to make sure the guidelines for fall cleanup have been met. They will be looking to see if:

- You have cut down all dead plant material and properly disposed of it. (Compost it in your own plot or in one of the community compost piles. This includes old tomatoes, squashes, etc.; leaving them lying

in your plot uncovered attracts animals. Put diseased plant material in plastic bags and toss into the dumpster; this year, include all tomatoes, potatoes, and eggplants – both vegetables and plants – to help control the late blight that devastated tomato crops this season.)

- You have cut down tall grasses and weeds around your plot, to no more than 6" tall. (This is important; uncut, they will send unwanted seeds into your plot and others' plots as well.)
- You have cut back perennials where appropriate. (Again, the point of this is to prevent unwanted seeds from invading others' plots.)
- You have disposed of all paper and plastic debris, paper and plastic bags, and plastic plant pots. (Left in your plot, they blow all over the Garden and across the street into our neighbors' yards.)
- You have removed all tools and watering cans if not in use; you have taken hoses home or coiled them and stored them flat; you have removed plastic furniture. (Some of these items will blow around the Garden and be lost to you and a nuisance to someone else. All will deteriorate from being exposed to the weather.)
- You have laid flat and anchored securely any stakes, tomato cages, etc., that you leave in your plot.
- You have firmly anchored any structures – arbors, trellises, birdhouses – that remain in your plot.

Kat Duncan



- You have a visible, legible sign (or signs) with your plot number(s) in place. There will be a second and last inspection on Sunday, Nov. 1. You may request an automatic extension until that date, but no

later; send your request by e-mail to JUSTINEBERTRAM@HOTMAIL.COM or by regular mail to the Recreation Dep't. (90 Locust St., 01060), by Friday, Oct. 9.

If you do not meet the guidelines for cleanup noted above, you will receive a written notice specifying what needs to be done by Nov. If your plot requires a 2nd inspection, there will be a \$10 fee payable with registration. If your plot requires a 2nd inspection only because there was no plot sign, there will be a \$5 fee payable with inspection.

The 2nd inspection crew will also be picking up paper and plastic debris and discarding it and removing tools, watering cans, etc., and storing them in a trash can in the tool shed. If they have to remove items from your plot, there will be a \$10 fee payable with registration. 🍀

LATE-BREAKING NEWS ON LATE BLIGHT

The late blight (*Phytophthora infestans*) devastated tomato and potato crops in the Garden – and throughout the Pioneer Valley – this year. What steps can we take to prevent the blight from surviv-

ing the winter? The good news is that the blight needs live tissue to survive. Therefore, if you wait until a hard frost, you can compost your dead tomato and potato plants. Infested tomatoes, too, can be composted after a freeze. No potatoes should be left in the ground: try to harvest all of them. Those you do not eat can be left above ground to freeze, then added to compost. For a more complete rundown on management of late blight, go to WWW.UMASSVEGETABLE.ORG/DOCUMENTS/LATEBLIGHTMANAGEMENTFORFALL.PDF 🌱

SOIL MICROBES

With the erratic growing season we had this year, I began to wonder, what can I do to protect my crops from disease, and how can I maximize plant health in a prolonged wet season? Since 80% of a plant's nutrients are derived from the atmosphere, the small soil window that remains is a key defense. Paul Sachs has called soil "part of the earth's crust in which roots can grow." That crust is comprised of not only nitrate-phosphate-potash, the three compounds often shown in growing mixes, but calcium, sodium, magnesium, humates, organic matter, many more trace elements, and microbes. Healthy soil starts with well fed and active microbial growth.

Microbes play an important role in crop health and the ability of plants to take up and absorb available nutrients. Most microbes feed on specific substrates within the soil. Any existing nutrients are divided among the microbes, the plant itself, and those who eat the plant. Since the microbes eat first and we eat last, if deficiencies persist at any point, the plant often suffers. It may be more susceptible to diseases and pest infestations, and harvesting yields may decrease.

Fortunately, microbes can be applied in many ways. They are found in fertilizers as "inoculants" or as "bio-stimulants" in many compost starters. They can also be used as a seed coating to promote germination and discourage unwanted fungal growth.

Next year, during heavy rains which leach soil nutrients, and as your crops start to fruit, don't forget to feed the soil. The nutrients you feed it depend on what you grow, so be sure to find out what those are. If you grow vegetables, check out WWW.NEVEGETABLE.ORG.

Your microbes will thank you! 🌱

—Cathleen O'Keefe

FOR THE FIRST COOL NIGHTS OF AUTUMN: SQUASH

It's a sure sign the seasons are changing: I start longing for butternut squash. After spending the summer in the thrall of tomatoes – especially when they're as rare as they were in this blight-ridden year – and strategizing ways to avoid the actual cooking of ingredients in August's heat, the appearance of the bell-shaped

Elsa Vitols



butternut in my culinary fantasies must mean the nights are getting colder, the days shorter. This is the time of year to reacquaint yourself with your neglected oven and to celebrate the coziness of autumnal evenings with roasted squash. It's tempting to just halve a butternut, scoop out its seeds, slick it with some oil, and throw it in a hot oven until it softens and browns. But a butternut squash can easily become the foundation for an entire meal when approached slightly differently – and in these recessionary times, an economic approach holds an added appeal! With little labor, roasted butternut squash makes a rich pasta sauce, marrying the comfort of squash soup with the added heft of a pasta dinner.

Here's what to do: peel the squash, remove its seeds, and dice it into chunks – not too small; you want to retain some pieces of butternut in your final dish. Toss with some olive oil, salt and pepper, and – if you have it – some fresh sage, chopped or just torn up by hand. Throw the squash into a 400° oven until it is soft and caramelizing, giving it an occasional toss or stir to make sure it browns evenly.

Meanwhile, put your pasta water on. Dice a large onion and sauté it in some olive oil until it is translucent, adding more of that fresh sage, perhaps a little garlic. If you're a vegetarian, open up a can of can-

Joanna Wellman



nellini beans, and toss those in (or, if you're lucky enough to have some fresh ones on hand, use those, after the requisite soaking and cooking... canned is a bit more expeditious!). Or, for those who look for any excuse to work sausage into a recipe (of which I am one), brown some sweet Italian sausage, removed from its casing and broken up into crumbles with your spatula as it cooks. When the water is boiling, cook your pasta; I prefer the nuttiness of whole wheat pasta in this dish, which complements the sweetness of the squash. Use fusilli or penne – something chunky that can match the size of the chunks of butternut squash in your oven. When your squash gives nicely to a fork and has started to get golden brown around the edges, pull it from the oven and slide the whole pan's worth into your onion-bean-or-sausage mixture, and stir. If it seems a bit dry – or if you're feeling indulgent – moisten it with a bit of cream or milk. Add the cooked and drained pasta to the pot and toss it so that the butternut squash breaks apart and coats the pasta. I recommend eating this dish from a bowl to enhance the coziness factor, preferably on a cool fall evening. The perfect bite of sweet roasted squash, salty sausage, and nutty pasta is enough to make the specter of the cold months ahead almost appealing. 🍀

—Tina Antolini

AMARANTH

Gardening is like life – an ongoing experiment with continual revision. Last year I tried to grow wheat – which was a complete failure. So this year I decided to experiment with growing Amaranth, since it is

said to be adaptable, carefree, beautiful, easy to harvest, and extremely nutritious. This experiment has resulted in a glorious stand of bronze seed heads on 7' stalks that has served as a backdrop for photos and many questions from passersby.

There are varieties of Amaranth grown primarily for the edible and nutritious leaves (e.g. callaloo), and some primarily for ornamental value. I planted the type grown primarily for its grain – *Amaranth cruentus* – that has been cultivated for well over 5,000 years. It is highly nutritious – containing amino acids that are deficient in most grains – and higher in total protein (16%). It's low in gluten and can be cooked, popped, or ground into flour. What really intrigued me, however, was the description of the ease of processing – threshing by rubbing the seed heads between gloved hands and winnowing in the wind.

I am happy to report that thus far it has lived up to its description as easy to grow (even in this cold wet summer), carefree, and utterly gorgeous to behold. I am currently experimenting with harvest – some now and the rest after frost. The batch I have in my basement is drying, and soon I will attempt the gloved hand threshing process.

Although I hope to be able to enjoy



Amaranth in Adele's garden

hot Amaranth porridge this winter, I know for certain that I will be warmed by visions of gorgeous bronze seed heads growing into the blue sky. 🍀

—Adele Franks, I-19

RED AS A HUNDRED POMEGRANATE SEEDS

Falling through earth, Persephone grabbed at roots – a red one fell with her, shattered on stone floor.

The beet's savor has captured the sun. Oh sunset root, so red and cold, fed by sunlight yet tied to darkness!

My heart, too, has growth rings. My heart, too, is lopsided. My heart, too, has dirty roots.

Are we really allowed to be so deeply hued? So crisp, so crossing of the sweet threshold? 🍀

—Kathryn Good-Schiff

Northampton Recreation Dep't.
90 Locust Street
Northampton, MA 01060