

# NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



## NEWS



MARCH 2010

### GARDEN NEWS

#### ► New Gardener Registration

New gardeners may register for a plot on Saturday, March 27, between 10 AM 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 AM – 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. If you know someone who would like to garden, let her/him know about this opportunity.

#### ► Garden Workshop

The first workshop of the season, **Getting Your Garden Started**, will be held on Saturday, April 17, 10:30 – noon, at the Recreation Dep't. **JULIE ABRAMSON**, Master Gardener and friendly person, will be conducting this session, for gardeners new to the Community Garden, on getting your garden started; others are welcome too. Topics covered will include: Clearing your plot; using 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, compost enclosures, and trellises; favorite tools. There will also be ample time for questions and answers. If you have questions, e-mail Julie at [JABRAMSON@ALBANY.EDU](mailto:JABRAMSON@ALBANY.EDU).

#### ► Spring Cleanup Day

Cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, April 24, 10 AM – 1 PM, and 2 PM – 4 PM. Mark your calendar, and plan to help get the Garden ready for the 2010 season. Mulch hay will be available for purchase, as will wire mesh for making compost enclosures. We'll have a take-it-or-leave-it seed and plant swap. There will also be a workshop on composting and one on weedless gardening, as well as soil testing and garden advice by the Master Gardeners of Western Mass.



### 2010 GARDEN CALENDAR

#### NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

March 27

#### SPRING CLEANUP DAY

April 24

#### IS-YOUR-PLOT-PLANTED? INSPECTION

June 5

#### RAGWEED/WEED WALKTHROUGH

July 17

#### FALL INSPECTION

October 16

#### FALL CLEANUP DAY

October 23

#### SECOND INSPECTION

October 30

#### GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

#### ► A New Garden Guideline

We are instituting a new guideline: **Gardeners may not monopolize** shared equipment, hoses, carts, tools, etc. If you're not actively using a piece of equipment, another gardener should be able to use it. With some 250 gardeners and only 2 wheelbarrows, 4 garden carts, 4 spades... no piece of equipment should be sitting in someone's plot on the off chance that it will be needed in the next hour. Plan your use to minimize a tool's time out of the tool shed or your use of a hose. For instance, cut down everything that is going to the compost pile *before* you take a cart; do all your watering *before* you weed.

#### SPECIAL THANKS TO

► **Hadley Garden Center**, for their donation of seeds for school gardens. 🌱

### GARDEN TIPS

#### Let's talk about starting seeds.

What do you need? Well, obviously, **seeds**. You can find seeds locally: See the article on the next page about sources. You can order them by mail: Of particular interest to community gardeners are Seeds of Change ([SEEDSOFCCHANGE.COM](http://SEEDSOFCCHANGE.COM)) as a source for organic seeds and Pinetree Garden Seeds ([SUPERSEEDS.COM](http://SUPERSEEDS.COM)), which has a wide selection of seeds in numbers suited for the home garden and prices guaranteed to please.

You then need a **medium** for germinating seeds. Digging up soil from your garden doesn't work too well. A better choice is a special mix designed for seed starting and rooting cuttings. These mixes feature sphagnum moss, vermiculite or perlite, and a wetting agent. The Happy Gardener is made unhappy by perlite – large white particles that look like shredded polyfoam coffee cups and which do not biodegrade – and looks for mixes made with vermiculite, a tan color that does not stand out in the garden and which biodegrades. Of readily available mixes, Fafard produces an excellent one; Gardener's Supply also has a reliable mix for sale. (**GARDENERS.COM**)

Next, you need **containers** for the germinating mix. Here, your imagination is your guide. Traditionally, the bottoms of juice containers serve well for tomatoes. The plastic clamshells that much garden produce comes in these days make excellent seed starters: The holes in the bottom provide drainage and the cover maintains humidity until the seeds germinate. You can recycle plastic pots from last year. You can use plastic drink cups. Peat pots are ecologically friendly, but tend to

dry out so need close attention. The latest are Cow Pots, made from manure; they are not only ecologically friendly but don't dry out like peat, although they are a little pricey. Seed packets will tell you the optimum temperature for germination and the depth at which the seeds should be placed.

Finally, you need **light**. A sunny south window will do in a pinch, but better is artificial light. A fluorescent light tube mounted above your seedlings will provide even light. Current wisdom is that you should leave the lights on 24 hours a day, as the light from the fluorescents is far less bright than sunlight.

Once your seedling have 2–4 real leaves, you can pot them up into larger containers, using a potting (not a germinating) mix, and keep them under fluorescent lights until you are ready to harden them off (move them outdoors during the day).

In a few weeks, when your pansies are ready to flower, your broccoli can be moved into the Garden, and your tomato plants are growing like crazy, you will be

—The Happy Gardener 🍀

## SHOP LOCALLY

Many community gardeners support the locavore principal – to eat locally-raised food as much as possible. We should also consider supporting local sources for what we need to raise our own vegetables. Recently, a Home Depot joined Wal-Mart on Rt. 9 between Northampton and Amherst; and a Lowe's is now open nearby. But also on Rt. 9 is the **Hadley Garden Center**, a locally-



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owned business, with which the garden sections of the three big-box stores are in direct competition. Anyone who has visited the Hadley Garden Center is struck by the amazing variety of garden supplies and plants, and by the friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable folks who work there. They carry the best selection of seeds – vegetables, herbs, and flowers – and a vast array of seed starting supplies. Later in the season, they offer a good selection of sets (plant seedlings). Before you spend your dollars at the big boxes, see if the local source can't provide you with better variety, better quality, and better service. (And remember that the late blight that did such harm to tomatoes in the Valley last summer is thought to have been introduced on plants from a big-box store.)

Other local sources of seeds, supplies, and sets are **Annie's Garden** in Sunderland and **Andrew's Greenhouse** in South Amherst. Seedlings will be available at **farmers' markets** in Northampton, Greenfield, and Amherst, and **Laurenitis** in Sunderland carries many varieties of veggies and flowers. 🍀



Tim Sheldon

## COMPOST

Compost proved to be too much of a good thing in the 2009 gardening season, at least at the Community Garden. Our two compost piles turned rogue, taking more space than was allotted to them and spilling out of their boundaries. Clearly, gardeners were adding more material to those piles than they were designed to accommodate.

To avoid a repeat of this problem in 2010, the Garden Committee is strongly encouraging each gardener to establish a compost pile in her/his plot(s). The advantages are many, both to you and to the Garden as a whole.

- You would no longer have to walk to the tool shed to acquire a cart, wheel it back to your garden, load it with compostable material, wheel it to a compost pile, toss or fork the material onto the pile, return the cart, and go back to your own plot. The time and effort saved could be devoted to improving your garden.
- You would (not immediately, but certainly by the next season) have a source of compost at hand, rather than having to wheel a cart to a compost pile, sieve the compost to get rid of sticks, half-rotted stalks, and plastic debris, and wheel it to your plot. Yet more time for your own garden!
- You could control what goes into your own compost – no noxious weed seeds, for instance.

### ARE THERE DISADVANTAGES TO ESTABLISHING YOUR OWN COMPOST PILE?

- You might object that a compost pile would take up too much room.

But a pile of 4 x 4 feet would require 16 square feet, only 4% of the 400 ft<sup>2</sup> in a 20 x 20 ft. plot, and correspondingly less if you have several plots.

- You may think that compost piles must look at best utilitarian and at worst ugly. But there are many examples in the Garden of handsome compost enclosures, which can also serve as a support for flowering vines or backdrops for tall plants.
- You may have heard that it's difficult to establish a compost pile. It's true that a state-of-the-art pile requires a lot of knowledge and a bit of fussing. But even the simplest of piles will provide usable compost in a season.

### WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR A COMPOST PILE?

- The simplest is just to establish an area in your plot where pulled-up weeds and over-the-hill veggies are tossed. Every once in a while, you can throw on a little soil and toss the pile with a garden fork.
- You can buy a composter (a plastic container with a lid and a hole at the bottom for removing compost). This is perhaps not the best solution for the Garden, as it makes providing air to the composting material difficult.
- You could dig a trench in one section of your garden, throw compostable material into the trench until it is full, then return the soil on top.
- You can use wooden or plastic stakes, tree branches, or wire mesh to enclose an area in which your compostable material will go. Keep it watered during the season, and turn it in the fall or next spring.



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- You could go whole-hog and construct a hot-composting pile (which would kill weed seeds) in your plot. You'd need to read up on how to do this.

### WHAT WILL THE GARDEN DO TO HELP ME ESTABLISH A PERSONAL COMPOST PILE?

- We'll sponsor workshops about how to compost.
- We'll have wire for compost enclosures, plus instructions for starting your pile, available at Spring Cleanup Day (April 24). 🍀

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Are you interested in a particular plant? Have you found a wonderful trick for growing tomatoes? Do you like to sketch in the garden?

Submit your garden articles or drawings for the newsletter to [MTEX@SMITH.EDU](mailto:MTEX@SMITH.EDU) or [BWOLFSON@BIKHER.ORG](mailto:BWOLFSON@BIKHER.ORG). 🍀



## PLANTING 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. Jim Crockett (of the Victory Garden) suggests this tip for 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.

—The Happy Gardener 🍀

Please do not  
turn your car  
around in our  
neighbors'  
driveways on  
Burt's Pit Road.



Drive down to the ball field to turn.

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