

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



SEPTEMBER 2010

GARDEN NEWS

REGISTER FOR 2011 SEASON

Gardeners will have a chance to register their plots for 2011 by mail. In early December, registration forms will be mailed to all gardeners who have passed fall inspection (see story below) and fulfilled their community service requirements. On the form you may register for the same plot(s) you have now, as well as request an additional plot.

FALL CLEANUP DAY

Help get the Garden ready for winter on **Saturday, October 23**, 10-12 and 2-4. If you need community service hours, this is a great time to help out.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

► Ismael Diaz Beza, for donating a power mower to the Garden.



2010 GARDEN CALENDAR

FALL INSPECTION

Sunday, October 17

FALL CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, October 23

SECOND INSPECTION

Sunday, October 31

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

- Peter Payne, for making the Garden Neighbor signs.
- Devorah Levy, for coordinating Garden Neighbors.
- Cora Lee Drew, for giving the tool shed its new coat of paint
- Dawn & Charles Baker, for providing the article on the origins of our Community Garden (pages 4-6). 🍀

FALL PLOT CLEANUP

You must clean up your plot(s) this fall in order to register for the 2011 season. The deadline for cleaning your plot(s) and preparing for the winter is Sunday, Oct. 17.

FALL INSPECTION

Around 2 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 whether:

- 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. Do not leave old tomatoes, squashes, etc.; lying in your plot uncovered, as this attracts animals. Put diseased plant material in plastic bags and toss into the dumpster.
- You have cut down tall grasses and weeds around your plot, to no more than 6" tall. (This is important; if not cut, 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 become 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.
- You have a visible, legible sign(s) with your plot number(s).

There will be a second and last inspection on Sun., Oct. 31. You may request an automatic extension until that date, but no later; send your request by e-mail to MTEX@SMITH.EDU or by regular mail to the Recreation Dep't. (90 Locust St., 01060), by Fri. Oct. 8. If you do not meet the guidelines for cleanup noted above, you will

receive a written notice specifying what needs to be done by Oct. 31. 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. 🌿

TREES IN THE COMMUNITY GARDEN

As a general rule, trees are not appropriate in the Community Garden. It is recognized that they provide shelter and food for birds and are a CO₂ reservoir; however they compete for the sunlight, water, and nutrients that vegetables and flowers need to flourish and to be productive, and their roots interfere with tilling and planting. For this reason, Garden rules state that trees shading neighboring plots are not permitted.

Small trees rapidly become large and take correspondingly large shares of light, water, and nutrients.

The most common accidental trees in the Garden are mulberry and box elder which seed themselves vigorously and constitute a maintenance problem.

The Garden Committee proposes the following actions:

If a gardener complains about a tree shading her/his plot(s), the

Committee will ask for the tree to be pruned (if this will solve the problem) or removed (if it is small) or will arrange for it to be removed. These actions will be taken only after notification and consultation with the gardeners involved.

Small trees not in a plot will be slated for removal, after notification of those in nearby plots.

Small trees which shade only the plot(s) of a single gardener are permitted if they are kept pruned to avoid growth that produces shade beyond that plot (or those plots). Trees that are to the north of all plots are not objectionable unless their roots intrude on a cultivated plot. 🌿

ABUNDANCE!

Last year it was the blight, this year my frustration lay with the groundhog which made its home in the plot next door. Over a hundred square feet of brussels sprouts and broccoli gone!. Kale nibbled down to nubs! Tomatoes just shy of perfect ripeness gone without a trace! How frustrating it can be. I guess, over the years, I've come to expect a certain amount of loss of vegetables depending on the weather conditions or nature...but this article is about abundance.

Preserving food through methods such as drying, canning, and freezing can keep the wonderful abundance of our harvest for those cold winter months when all you want is a tomato that tastes like a tomato. For those who are curious to experience year-round abundance, here are a few ideas:

DRYING HERBS

Toward the end of the season those who have herbs in their

garden are often overwhelmed by their inability to use them all. When you're looking at your massive oregano plant, realizing that you're sick of eating it and so are your friends, there is another option.

Method #1: Herbs can be tied in a bunch and hung upside down; this is an easy way to start drying and can be a pretty decoration for the kitchen.

Method #2: Place herbs in a brown paper bag until they have dried.

Method #3: Many dehydrators have a low setting which can be used for herbs.

Hint: Prolonged exposure to air and light will lessen the flavor, so for best flavor place dried herbs in an airtight glass container.

Hint: Wash all herbs before drying – you can't rinse the dirt off once they have dried.

FREEZING KALE, SWISS CHARD AND SPINACH

Tomato sauces, applesauce, soups, berries, and most fruits and vegetables can be frozen for use in the winter and, unlike with canning, you can use your own recipes. For example take one of my late fall favorites, kale.

1) Wash the kale (or other green), remove the rib (for kale and collards), and cut the leaves into usable pieces. As in the supermarket where you can get chopped or whole leaf spinach, the decision here is what will be useful to you when you cook, and only you can answer that. I typically lay all the leaves together flat on the cutting board and chop every 1/2"-1".

2) Quickly sauté the damp leaves in a pan until they wilt slightly. Work in batches until finished.

3) Place the wilted greens in a freezer bag, label with the contents and date, and place flat in the freezer.

CANNING

Some think that the easiest things to can are pickles and tomatoes because of their high acidity. In addition, many jellies are quite easy.

It's important to remember that canning is a science, and recipes are precisely designed for certain levels of acidity. Unless you are extremely experienced, do not use your own recipes or alter recipes that you have found. Never change processing times. Canning recipes found on the internet are like reading news on conspiracy theory sites; they *might* be good, but are you going to take that chance? Be careful and smart – no direction is flexible if you want something you're sure is safe to eat.

Instead of providing a lengthy recipe/science experiment here, I encourage you to learn more about putting food by and the many additional methods of keeping your abundance around all year.

I recommend *Preserve it!* from DK Publishing and the *Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving* by Judi Kingry. Ask your local library to carry these and other books, and then the rest of the community can benefit from them as well. I also offer lessons and refreshers on canning for beginners and small groups; walking through a recipe with someone who has been doing it for years is a great way to gain confidence. Happy Harvesting! 🍀

— Kirsten Bonanza

LAUNCHING THE NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY FARM

A great deal of progress has been made in the effort to purchase all or part of the Bean and Allard farmland in Florence to create a Northampton Community Farm. Under the stewardship of Grow Food Northampton (GFN), the land will be forever farmed using organic practices, and the food produced will be reserved for local consumption.

GFN is committed to creating educational opportunities for people all ages, and hosting public celebrations on the land. A portion of the food grown will be donated to area food banks, and subsidized CSA shares will be available for low-income families.

Grow Good Northampton, with the help of an expert panel of organic farmers and farm educators, recently selected experienced farmers Nate Frigard and Jen Smith, currently of the Athol area, to run a CSA operation on the Bean land.

What we are able to do with the land depends on the success of our fundraising efforts, which will determine how much of the property we are able to purchase and how much we can devote to community gardens. Over the summer, GFN has been busy raising funds, and we have nearly one third of the money needed to purchase all 117 acres! – more than \$205,000 of the needed \$670,500, at the time of this writing. The public fundraising campaign has begun, and now is a great time for you to get involved.

The launch event for the Northampton Community Farm will take place on October 2, from 4 PM to 8 PM, at the historic Ross Barn at 123 Meadow Street, Florence. Come meet your farmers, and join in the celebration! Check out our new web site at GROWFOODNORTHAMPTON.COM, and donate your time and money. Tell your friends and family. If we all give generously, we can make this farm a reality – to serve our community now and for the generations to come. 🍀

— Adele Franks

IN THE GREENHOUSE

for Nonny

In the seeds in her
hands

all memory of life and growth
and death

is held in whirling motion –

and now

as her cupped hands move
she begins to feel the canopy
of heaven turn above her shoulder

while slowly she tucks her tiny
stars of remembrance

back into the earth from whence
they have come –

feeling their burnished thoughts
bloom in her head

—David Kherdian 🍀

COMMUNITY GARDEN ORIGINS

THE PLOTS TO BEAT SUPER PRICES

by KERRY MELLO

Hampshire County Illustrated/September, 1975

...let this seed

blossom into something orange,

or bright red during the harvest moon,

but please god, don't let it be

another pumpkin!

—John Monk, in Poetry Amherst

Gardeners' prayers are being oft repeated this summer as more people go back to the land in efforts to ward off climbing food prices. Hampshire County is no exception where many residents have planted gardens reminiscent of the World War Two victory gardens. For some the prayers have been answered manyfold.

Run by the county, the gardens are on State Hospital land in Northampton less than a half mile from the old victory gardens. And this plan is putting to use fertile land that had lain fallow but that at one time raised crops for hospital use. These community gardens were conceived by County Commission Chairman David B. Musante Jr. whose own high food prices, and boyhood memories, prompted the idea back in the spring. He had grown up on a farm near the hospital and "the idea of gardens just popped into my head," he said. "I thought it would be a good way to save money."

Subsequently he and fellow Commissioners John H. Breguet and Paul R. Dineen leased land at the State Hospital, set up plots and rules for the land use, and advertised their plans.

The response deluged county offices with requests for land from residents of Northampton Amherst, many of the surrounding ...*

...some Springfield College students clamoring for the land.

Concern over the high cost of food and a yearning for communion with nature wasn't unique to the Commissioners. By the beginning of May the available plots were completely claimed as residents streamed into the County Planning Office to apply

for their homesteads. A long waiting list was diminished only when more garden plots sprouted in the Northampton Industrial Park. The city, after the organizing efforts of councilor Edward P. Gross, and the urging of Mrs. Vicki Phillips, who is chairman of the county garden committee, agreed to turn some unused land into garden space.

Many of the county gardeners are city dwellers whose limited living space prevents them from...*

...so much you can do in an apartment," Tibby Chase, a Northampton resident and UMass graduate student, said. Plunging a pitchfork into the soil she commented, "It's nice to have a piece of land to come to."

Like many a novice gardener, Miss Chase learned gardening rules the hard way – by making mistakes. Probably her most expensive lesson, she said, came with buying tools. "Believe me, buy good tools," she advised ruefully as she surveyed a broken rake. The best indication of a superior piece of equipment, according to Miss Chase is whether it has a wooden handle.

Others less cramped for space at home than Miss Chase said they took county plots because their own land was either too shaded or too sandy. "All we can grow at home are tomatoes," Mrs. Arthur Colepaugh, a nurse at Cooley Dickinson Hospital, and Florence resident, said. "Here we've set out beans, squash, onions, radishes – as much as we can fit in the garden," she said while surveying the close rows of vegetables.

For one dollar, gardeners received at least a 20 x 10 ft. plot of plowed and harrowed land. The gardeners' responsibilities were to plant, fertilize and tend the gardens, and then, watch the fruits of their labors push through the soil and grow.

The plots were plowed and harrowed by employees of the state hospital, who were hired for the job by the county commissioners. The process of watching plants as they emerged from the seed stage and developed was a source of amazement for many of the gardeners. Some said that besides promoting a feeling of reverence for life, the growth process made them introspective about themselves. "I never comprehended the sensitivity of a pea plant," said Ace Marchant, a resident of Northampton. "In watching them grow, I've noticed how they send out tiny tendrils to grasp for support." Vera Fisher, who has

gardened in Europe and Israel, and who cultivates a 20 x 40 ft. plot on the county land, said she worried about her plants and assiduously looked after their well being. "I wouldn't do anything to hurt my plants," Mrs. Fisher said, spreading branches to screen her pea vines from too harsh sunlight. "It just kills me to see them parched or freezing or broken," she said.

Inner-city youths, who belong to Threshold not only enjoy watching their plants grow, they also are amazed that they could initiate the process. Each Thursday, a Threshold group goes up to the gardens to weed and cultivate plants.

Money was the main impetus for many of the gardeners. "I just got a freezer for Christmas," Mrs. Gertrude Stanley said, "and I plan to fill it with all the vegetables I grow." Mrs. Stanley's husband, John, is the chaplain at the state hospital and heard about the gardens while at work. Mrs. Stanley learned of the plots at the Senior Citizen Center in Northampton. Together the elderly couple filled their 20 x 40 ft. plot with lettuce, radishes, onions, broccoli, tomatoes, beans, carrots and corn. "The exercise is good, and I love fresh vegetables," Mrs. Stanley said.

Mrs. Colepaugh also plans to fill her freezer with produce from her garden. "The county did a tremendous thing in getting this land," she said.

Rows of beans, radishes, peas, cress, carrots, onions and squash hills crisscross the brown furrows of the gardens. The first seeds were planted at the end of April, and many were ready for harvest by mid-June. Radish and lettuce crops were the first for many gardeners because they grow quickly and are not threatened so much by frost. Some have planted more lettuce for a fall harvest. Small, roundish radish leaves were visible in many gardens as early as the second week in May. The early crop was harvested when the round fruit could be felt under the soil. Beans, squash, corn and tomato plants were put in by the end of May, when the chance of a frost was pretty well passed. This year, there was much debate over whether the frost season was passed by mid-May, and many gardeners took chances by putting their seedlings out early.

"You have to take some risks in gardening," a few argued, pointing out that one old timer already had corn plants a few inches high. Luckily, for those who took the risk the warm weather did not break.

A trick to growing seedlings that many newcomers

discovered by watching their plants die, is that they should be "weathered." Seedlings are begun inside; the jump from a warm, somewhat humid atmosphere to the harsh sun and outdoor temperatures can kill them. Most veteran gardeners advised that the seedlings be weathered simply by putting them on a sun porch or in an open window for a few days before planting outside.

Since the lease for the gardens lasts only until November, late crops can not remain after that time even if they have not matured. Winter parsnips, usually harvested even after snow has covered the ground, must be removed with the last harvest. Also, all plants at the garden must be annuals since the plots will be unbound in November, plowed and re-plotted next spring. The chance of getting the same garden next year is slim. The system excludes planting of perennials like strawberries and some kinds of melons. Although the one-year garden is an official rule, many gardeners have expressed a desire to keep their own plots, saying they would re-plow on their own next spring.

In the short time the gardeners have been tending their plots, the gardens have developed as uniquely as each individual. The gardening techniques vary greatly and include the use of bean "poles", teepee-type structures and even snow fences. Some have built elaborate systems of string and sticks to support bean and pea vines, while others have resorted to three-foot strips of chicken wire.

Three-poled teepee frames offer support to some clinging plants, and in an "Old West scene," one family has corralled its plants, crisscrossing long poles to enclose the garden with a makeshift fence.

The plots are grouped according to organic or inorganic gardening methods. In organic gardens, only animal manure is used as fertilizer and the plants are never sprayed. Insects such as lady bugs and praying mantises are used to control pests like aphids. Any mulching (covering the soil around the plants to warm or cool it and prevent the growth of weeds) is done with straw or some other type of organic material.

In the inorganic section, sprays are used to kill insects that may harm the plants. These plots are located a distance from the organic garden plots so that spraying will affect only the surrounding gardens.

Although gardening methods differ people at the community plots seemed eager to share advice and information with neighboring gardeners. Many commented on the feeling of community and cooperation that make the gardens such a pleasant place to spend time. "I have a lot of friends here, both old and new," Mrs. Fisher said. She has been the source of many gardening tips, since her extensive experience in growing plants has made her a virtual gardening encyclopedia. She attended agricultural school in Israel last summer and grew 1,000 lettuce heads and tomato plants in a camp garden near Conway, N.H. She also teaches organic gardening at the UMass Everywoman's Center and many of her students tend neighboring plots at the county gardens.

"Whenever we have a question, we ask Vera," Ace Marchant, her plot neighbor said. "She seems to know just about everything."

Another source of sound gardening advice is Wilfred Remillard, affectionately known at the gardens as "Gramps." Remillard lives just across the street from the gardens and has spent most of his 86 years growing things.

He recently moved to Florence from his Belchertown farm, and boasts of his "potato lawn" – a front yard, formerly of grass, that he dug up and planted with potatoes. "What good is it doing if it's not growing things?" he asked. "Gramps" has made use of every available inch on his small piece of property, saying, "working on my garden keeps me limber." His white cottage is completely surrounded by beans, onions, potatoes and a number of other vegetables and flowers.

A more formal means of exchanging gardening information is the garden committee meeting. These get-togethers are held at the plots and announced on a community bulletin board, constructed by some gardeners at the request of Mrs. Phillips. The committee was formed in the spring and is made up of all those leasing plots.

"We supervised the operation at the beginning," Musante said, "but the gardeners have taken over the operation now."

The committee meetings are often the scenes of lively debate

over which gardening methods produce the best results. At the beginning of the season, fertilizer was the big issue, and many discussions centered on the virtues of horse and cow manure. Some gardeners used horse manure, supplied free of charge by the nearby Smith riding stables.

This year, plowing was difficult because the field had been unfilled for several years. Huge pieces of sod had to be removed from the soil before anything could be planted. Although many didn't relish digging the clods out, they recognized that this was a first-year problem and that next season's plowing would be easier. Some went so far as to rent rototillers to re-plow their plots, turning the clods deeper into the soil to form compost. "Cooperation has been great thus far," Mrs. Phillips said. "People have been staying within their boundaries and obeying the garden rules."

Information on what to do with the harvests is supplied by the Hampshire County Extension Service, which also offers classes in home canning and freezing. Many gardeners expressed a desire to learn about canning so they could preserve their fruits and vegetables for the winter months.

Of this first-year attempt, Mrs. Phillips said, "Of course we've had a few bugs to iron out, but for the most part, the gardens have turned out to be quite a good thing."

Considering the increased number of Hampshire County residents who are enjoying fresh, home-grown vegetables. This year as a result of the gardens, Mrs. Phillips' assessment appears to be right on target. 🍀

from *Hampshire County Illustrated*/September, 1975

*(several lines missing from photocopy)

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