

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



MARCH 2012

GARDEN NEWS

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION.

Northampton Community Garden (NCG) and Florence Organic Community Garden (FOG) will hold side-by-side registration for new gardeners on Saturday, March 31, 10 A.M.–noon, at Florence Community Center.

Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis. About 40 plots will be available at the Northampton Community Garden; a wait list is maintained for those who can't be accommodated on Saturday.

(This is the first season for the new Florence Organic Community Garden! The first 100 of their planned 400 plots will be offered for the 2012 season.)

The Garden Committee will hold a **MEETING FOR NEW GARDENERS** Wednesday, April 11, 7–8:30 P.M., at Forbes Library (downstairs, in the Community Room). We will review Garden rules and guidelines, give tips about making the most of your plot, and answer your questions. New Gardeners who attend will earn 1/2 hour of community service, will have a chance to win one of several great door prizes, and may choose from a selection of veggie and flower seeds!

The first **GARDEN WORKSHOP** of the season will be "**GETTING STARTED**," with Julie Abramson, Master Gardener and friendly person. Meet on Saturday, April

14, at 10:30, at the Recreation Dep't, 90 Locust St., behind Smith Vocational School. Julie will discuss: clearing your plot, use of compost, fertilizer, and mulch; deciding what plants to grow and how to space them in the garden; organic practices – and more. She'll also answer your questions. Registration is not required. If you have questions, e-mail Julie at JABRAMSON@ALBANY.EDU.



2012 GARDEN CALENDAR

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

March 31

MEETING FOR NEW GARDENERS

April 11

SPRING CLEANUP DAY

April 28

IS-YOUR-PLOT-PLANTED? INSPECTION

June 3

RAGWEED/WEED WALKTHROUGH

July 15

FALL CLEANUP DAY

October 20

FALL INSPECTION

October 21

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

SPRING CLEANUP DAY will be Saturday, April 28. Come between 10 A.M. and noon, and/or between 2 and 4 P.M. to meet fellow gardeners, help get the Garden ready for the 2012 season, and earn community service credit.

There will be a power mower workshop at 11. Ed McGlew will deliver his excellent **Red Bag compost** (order from Ed ahead of time at EMCGLEW@EHS.UMASS.EDU).

GARDEN NEWSLETTER.

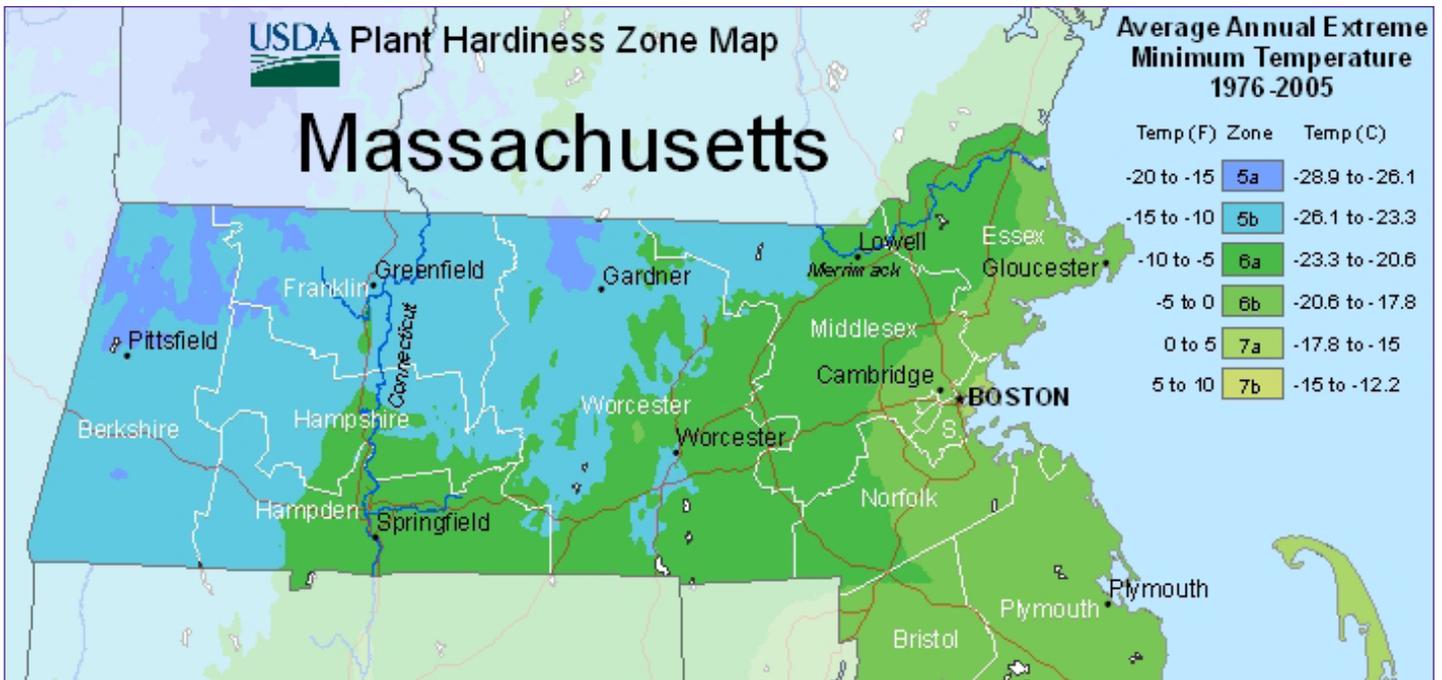
Are you interested in a particular plant? Have you found a wonderful trick for growing tomatoes?

Do you like to sketch in the garden? Submit garden articles, drawings, growing tips, or superb photographs to Betsey Wolfson, WOLFSON110@GMAIL.COM. 

GARDENING TIPS

Let's talk about temperatures in the garden.

The new USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map is on line (<http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZM-Web/>), and gardeners can discover what hardiness zone their gardens fall within. Northampton and Florence (but not Easthampton), which were previously in Zone 5b, are now in Zone 6a; that includes the Northampton Community Garden. And exactly what does that mean? The new maps are based on 30-year temperature records (from 1976 to 2005). For each area, the average of those



30 annual extreme winter temperatures determines the zone. Northampton had an average low temperature of -9.4° F. Classifications are based on 10° ranges; we fall in the range from 0 to -10°F, and that makes us Zone 6a. But don't rush out to buy all those tender plants you couldn't grow before. You should remember that -9.4° is an average, which means that, in about half of those 30 years, the minimum temperature was lower than that (and, of course, in the other half it was higher). So be cautious. It's reasonable to try plants that have been marginally hardy if you've always wanted them, but don't spend a bundle. An extreme winter could finish them off in a hurry.

Gardeners also need to consider the last frost date in planning when to plant. In the Garden, the last frost date is typically around May 7. But don't count on it: A couple of years ago there was a hard frost on May 15. If you plant frost-tender things early in May, you are gambling. A floating row cover will

provide 2-4 degrees of protection. The USDA considers air temperatures. But often, gardeners are equally interested in soil temperatures. A thermometer to measure these is inexpensive and will save you grief. If you are like me, you are eager to get seeds in the ground right now, so you can reap an early harvest. But put them in too soon, and they will rot rather than germinate. Each type of seed has an optimum temperature for germination – that is, nearly 100% of the seeds planted will germinate. But that temperature is surprisingly high – 70° F for peas, 80° F for beans, for example. So we need to know is what's a practical temperature, at which we can expect germination rates of around 70%. For the cool weather plants: peas, 40°; beets, carrots, lettuce, spinach, and radishes, 45°; turnips, 50°; cabbage, chard, and corn, 55°. Don't seed the warm weather crops until the temperature reaches around 70°.

Can you defeat nature? In small ways, yes. There are strategies to

provide warmth to your seedlings when Mother Nature does not cooperate. First, there are floating row covers (spun fabrics that let sunlight and water through, but keep out insect pests) that provide a few extra degrees of warmth for your plants (Pinetree Garden Seeds catalog is a good source, (www.superseeds.com)). And, if you haven't tried Walls o' Water, cylindrical tubes, open at top and bottom, made up of smaller tubes that you fill with water and place around tomato plants, you should. The water in the tubes absorbs heat from the sun during the day and releases it to your tomato plants at night. Pinetree is also a good source for these. You can expect to harvest the first tomatoes by the 4th of July. You can recycle the tubes for eggplant, draping row cover over them to keep out flea beetles. Rinse them out, store them inside, and use them again next year.

Pay attention to temperature, and you will be, like me,

—The Happy Gardener 🌱

RIP, COMMUNITY GARDEN MULBERRY TREE

“Live fast, die young” describes the typical mulberry tree’s life cycle; although it is not clear how young it was, the Community Garden’s own majestic mulberry, located along the back road near the Demonstration Gardens, was abruptly felled by the heavy snowstorm in October 2011. A Community Gardener did some initial chain sawing, with the City of Northampton DPW doing the rest of the cutting down and removal work.

This particular mulberry had a trifurcated trunk, which certified arborist Jim McSweeney of Hilltown Tree and Garden says most likely contributed to its demise. “Any bifurcated or trifurcated tree will have weak crotches, and thus be more vulnerable to damage from a bad storm,” McSweeney says. Arborists know the mulberry as a tree with a fragile structure because, as a fast-growing tree, it is weak-wooded. Most likely this tree was untended and its multiple main branches were never cabled or braced, techniques used to mitigate problems in otherwise healthy trees with poor structure.

Mulberry trees planted several miles from the Community Garden were important in 19th century Florence industrial history, when their leaves were used to feed the worms providing silk to area mills. This particular tree has no traceable connection to local silk manufacturing as the Corticelli thread mill closed in 1930, and was importing its silk for years before that date.

“Most mulberries live only 50 years,” according to McSweeney. While generally considered a “weed” tree that will even emerge through concrete, some highly value the mulberry’s fruit. The Community Garden mulberry produced a bumper crop of tasty berries as recently as 2010.

The tree abutted plots X, Y and Z, which now enjoy full sun after having always been partly shaded by the mulberry. With the demise of the mulberry, the Community Garden lost its largest tree in or near member garden plots. There are no plans at present by the Garden committee to replace or replant trees in that location.

—Julie Zuckman 

16TH ANNUAL SOS PLANT SALE

The Northampton Support Our Schools (SOS) Plant and Garden Sale – a sure sign that summer is on its way – will take place on **Saturday, May 12, 9 A.M. to 1 P.M.** Last year’s Plant Sale raised over \$10,000 for books for the public schools. The Northampton community can support our schools by donating plants, volunteering, and attending the event.

The Plant Sale includes a wide range of plants, including annuals and perennials, vegetable starters, herbs, hanging plants, trees, and shrubs, as well as organic lawn and garden products and compost. Additionally, shoppers can buy treasures from local artisans including handcrafted garden furniture donated by local woodworkers. The event also includes a raffle to win a handmade quilt and garden furniture made by Smith Vocational woodworking students.

Plant Donations Needed: Plant Sale organizers are looking for plant donations from local gardeners. Any local gardeners who have perennials to divide or plants they are removing from their gardens can pot them up and bring them to Smith Vocational School (80 Locust Street, Northampton) on Friday May 11, from 4 to 7 P.M. Volunteers are available to provide pots, help with digging, dividing and potting, and for picking up potted plants. Any contributions are greatly appreciated. Plants should be potted early and well watered so that they look great on the day of the sale. Plants may also be dropped off at 12 Forbes Ave. from April 25 to May 10.

Volunteers Needed: SOS needs volunteers to collect and organize donated plants on Friday, May 11 and to work at the event on May 12. **For information**, community members should contact Judy Leeds (537-4437 jdleeds@gmail.com) or Sue Breines (586-7476 suebreines@gmail.com).

SOS, a part of the Northampton Education Foundation, raises funds for the Northampton public schools to purchase books for libraries and classrooms. Last year, the Book Fund disbursed just over \$17,000 to Northampton’s schools, and since its inception, it has distributed approximately \$200,000

Date: Saturday, May 12, 2012

Time: 9 A.M. – 1 P.M.

Location: Smith Vocational High School, 80 Locust Street, Northampton, MA

www.northampton-edfoundation.org/sosbookfund/index.htm

– Robin Freedenfeld 