

# NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



## NEWS



MAY 2013

### GARDEN NEWS

Spring Cleanup Day dawned fair and provided fine weather for a large turnout of gardeners, who cleaned the tool shed, tested and distributed hoses, pulled quantities of invasive garlic mustard, and man- (and woman-) handled the compost piles into order, among other good deeds. (Those who helped should remember to log in their community service according to the instructions in the March Newsletter.)

The **JUNE 2 INSPECTION** is just a couple of weeks away. On that Sunday, teams of volunteer gardeners will be walking through the garden, checking that plots have been worked. That doesn't mean that every square foot must be planted.

Teams will look for evidence that plots have been tilled and/or weeded, and that seeds and sets are in place. (Two tomato plants in a sea of weeds is not sufficient!) Plots that have not been worked will be reassigned to people on the waiting list. The inspection teams will look for a clearly visible sign with the plot number, and also check for compost piles in plots that claimed the compost credit at registration.

**A PETITION TO DPW** to repair our access roads was circulated at Spring Cleanup and garnered 100 signatures. Copies are posted on the bulletin board on the tool shed. Please sign if you haven't

already — we aim to get at least 200 signatures before submitting the petition.

#### SPECIAL THANKS TO:

**JUDY CRANE**, for entering all the information you give us on your registration forms into our data base.

**PETER PAYNE**, once again. He not only made for us new doors for the tool shed but put them into place. They look terrific, too!

**JOHANNA HALBEISEN**, for organizing the sign-up lists for community service tasks.

**GLORIA SANTA ANNA**, for organizing the system for keeping records of community service, and for accepting all the log slips you submit.

#### SPECIAL NEEDS FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

**Chain-saw specialist.** If you have a chain saw and feel comfortable taking down small trees, please be in touch with Mimi at [MTEx@SMITH.EDU](mailto:MTEx@SMITH.EDU). Several gardeners have small trees grown larger that they would like removed.

**Coordinator for Survival Center pickup.** Many gardeners have expressed an interest in picking up donated produce and delivering it to the Survival Center. We need someone to develop a schedule and assign gardeners to specific slots. If you're interested, contact Mimi at [MTEx@SMITH.EDU](mailto:MTEx@SMITH.EDU).

**Compost mavens.** The compost sign-up sheets are posted on the

bulletin board, and there are lots of slots available. If you would like to work on either of the compost piles, please check the bulletin board and sign up.

Submissions for the Newsletter. We need your articles, photos, and drawings. Don't be shy. If you have something you think other gardeners would enjoy, send it to Betsey Wolfson, the Newsletter editor, at [WOLFSON110@GMAIL.COM](mailto:WOLFSON110@GMAIL.COM). 🍀



### 2013 GARDEN CALENDAR

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

June 2

#### RAGWEED / WEED WALKTHROUGH

July 14

#### FALL CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, October 12

#### FALL INSPECTION

Sunday, October 19

#### GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Second Monday each month @ 6:30 P.M. at the Rec. Dept. (or in the Garden during nice weather; call to confirm)



## GARDEN TIPS

**ROCK DUST?** Remineralization? What's the fuss? It's time to find out because the Garden received a truck load of rock dust on May 16, and gardeners may use it to improve the fertility of their plots. Is rock dust better fertilizer than the regular NPK (for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash) that many of us regularly apply, or better than compost, also widely used? Just as NPK fertilizers supply those nutrients to soils from which they have been depleted by the growing crops that require them to flourish, rock dust is intended to resupply other minerals, also necessary for crops and also depleted by their growth. A typical rock dust might contain iron, copper, chromium, zinc, cobalt, nickel, molybdenum, and boron, among other substances — a far greater variety than NPK fertilizer.

Sounds convincing, right? And there's a lot of anecdotal evidence that remineralization works to improve soil quality, crop productivity, and crop health. But is there science to back up the claims? Yes, there have been controlled studies showing that rock dust applications increase crop yields and provide protection from certain plant diseases. There is also evidence that nutritional value and flavor of fruits and vegetables is enhanced by remineralization.

In short, remineralizing the soil in your plots sounds like a good bet. And it's easy. The rock dust will be in a pile beside the wood chips (north of the tool shed, across the road). **Every gardener is entitled to one 5-gallon pail of**

**dust for each plot** (1 pail for 1 plot, 4 pails for 4 plots). Once you've carted it to your garden, you may 1) till it into the soil, 2) scratch it into the soil, or 3) just sprinkle it on and water it in. In a given year, only one application is necessary, and at least several years can go by before the application is repeated.

Gardeners are also — now and always — worried about weeds. Back issues of the Newsletter can be consulted for useful information — March 2011 for “Weeds are Always with Us” and May 2012 in “Garden Tips.” If you are wondering what's the purple-flowered plant that is everywhere this spring, that's where you'll find it identified.

So — pull your weeds and apply rock dust, and you too should be, by the end of the season,

— *The Very Happy Gardener* 🍀

## SPINACH: GENDER, SEED SAVING, AND EXTENDING THE HARVEST

[I wrote this article thinking people would read it when their spinach is in mid-growth. If you read this before you have planted spinach, the information may inform your choice of crop location.]

**Hold it!** Don't pull all your spinach because you think it's bolting.

First of all, spinach leaves don't get bitter late in their season like lettuces do.

Now, before the main course, a little story about my research on saving spinach seeds. I own the book *Seed to Seed: Seed Saving and Growing Techniques for Vegetable*

*Gardeners* by Suzanne Ashworth, and I decided to get tips. On page 72 begins the section on spinach. The second paragraph starts: “Spinach is a unique annual vegetable, because its plants produce either all male flowers or all female flowers.” This meant to me that the male spinach plants have pollen-spreading structures, and the female ones don't. Wouldn't it make sense to pull the male plants once they identify themselves by bolting and leave the female plants for further eating and possibly seed forming?

The next summer I pulled half of my spinach — gradually, as the guys raised their heads — leaving some to pollinate the lush females. Meanwhile I kept harvesting good leaves from both genders. I didn't know how long into the summer to let the seeds mature. The first year I pulled out the crop too early, attempting to separate and dry the seeds before they were fully formed and had to postpone planting trials for a year.

The next year I got it right. I know because during seed harvest I dropped some seeds, and I found them germinating that fall and the next spring.

The female flowers are located where leaf stems meet the main stem. That geometry allows the pollen to fall to its destination, perhaps without much help from insects. Anyway, while plucking the bolters you will shake around plenty of pollen. Hey, wouldn't that provide some nitrogen and other nutrients for your next crop? Happily the narrow straight roots of spinach plants allow the thinning out of mature plants without disturbing the neighbors.

**Summer harvesting of early spinach crop.** The large lower leaves of the females are perfect much later in the season than you would expect. Besides those, you can take the top few inches as a cluster for light steaming, salad or garnish. I also never did mind steaming and eating the younger of the bolting male plants. Just remove the root and maybe some of the lower stem. If they are too fibrous for you, at least you can use the water for stock.

**Plan for a long spinach harvest!** 🍀

— David Lovler; G28/29  
(cell) 617 733-7577

from **"WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOOR-YARD BLOOM'D"**

*Leaves of Grass*; 1900

(Walt Whitman's elegiac poem on Lincoln's death)

In the door-yard fronting an old farm-house, near the white-wash'd palings,

Stands the lilac bush, tall-growing, with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,

With many a pointed blossom, rising, delicate, with the perfume strong I love,

With every leaf a miracle.....and from this bush in the door-yard,

With delicate-color'd blossoms, and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,

A sprig, with its flower, I break. ...



**\*Don't forget to make a sign that clearly displays your plot number.**

Speaking of which...

**STEEL MARKERS FOR YOUR GARDEN**

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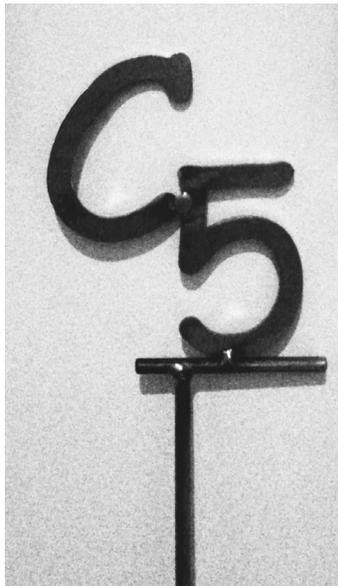
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— Piper Foreso

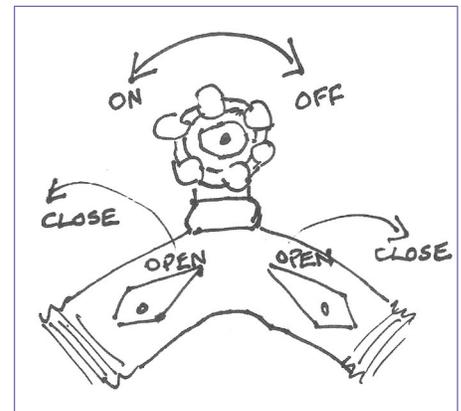


**FIND THE GARDEN ON FACEBOOK**

[HTTP://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/18372379531/](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/18372379531/)

**HELP US CONSERVE WATER**

Please remember to turn off the handle of the faucet as well as both little on/off toggles.



Betsey Wolfson

**NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN**

Northampton Recreation Department  
90 Locust Street  
Northampton, MA 01060

