

# NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



## NEWS



MARCH 2015



### GARDEN NEWS

#### UPCOMING GARDEN EVENTS

##### NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

will be held on Saturday, March 28, from 10 to noon, at the Northampton Recreation Dep't. (90 Locust St., behind Smith Vocational High School). If you know someone who would like to garden, pass on the word that plots are available.

##### NEW GARDENER ORIENTATION

For new gardeners who register for 2015, we'll offer an orientation meeting on Wednesday, April 8, at 7 P.M., in the Community Room at Forbes Library. Garden Committee members will introduce themselves, outline important things to know about the Garden and gardening, and answer your questions. If you attend, you'll receive 1/2-hour community service credit (25% of what you owe). Besides all that — there will be door prizes!

##### GETTING STARTED WORKSHOP

The first workshop of the season will be given by Julie Abramson, Master Gardener and friendly person. The date is Saturday, May 2; the time, 10:30–noon; the place, Recreation Dep't. Topics covered will be: 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](mailto:JABRAMSON@ALBANY.EDU).

#### SPRING CLEANUP DAY

On Saturday, April 25, gardeners will help get the garden ready for the gardening season (cleaning out the tool shed, testing and setting out hoses, working on the compost piles, weeding invasive plants, and more). Hours are 10–noon and 2–4 P.M. There will be bales of straw (for mulch) for sale from Pine Brook Farm; and Ed McGlew will deliver his Red Bag compost. Master Gardeners (from the Western Massachusetts Master Gardeners) will be on hand to test for soil pH and answer your gardening questions. This is a good way to meet other gardeners, help the Garden, and earn community service hours. (Rain date: Saturday, April 4)



#### COMINGS AND GOINGS AT THE GARDEN

**Linda Gaudreau**, whose immaculate garden in R7 has given pleasure to many, is leaving the Garden this season.

**Sylvia Michaels**, who has been a mainstay of the Garden for many years (as a Garden Committee member, a contributor to the Newsletter, and a wise and friendly presence) is giving up her plots (F12 and G13). We will miss her.

**Mary Jo Stanley** will no longer be gardening in C8. Mary Jo has kept a knowledgeable and loving eye on the Mosaic Sign garden; her contribution will be hard to replace.



### 2015 GARDEN CALENDAR

#### NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

Saturday, March 28  
(10 A.M.–noon, Rec. Dep't)

#### ORIENTATION FOR NEW GARDENERS

Wednesday, April 8  
(7–8:30 P.M., Forbes Library)

#### GETTING STARTED WORKSHOP

with Julie Abramson  
May 2, 10:30 A.M., Rec. Dept.

#### SPRING CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, April 25

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

Sunday, May 31

#### RAGWEED/WEED WALKTHROUGH

Sunday, July 12

#### FALL CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, October 10

#### FALL INSPECTION

Sunday, October 18

#### 2ND INSPECTION

Sunday, November 1

#### GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

**Amy Woolf** is giving up her plots I 5/6 and J 5/6. Amy has been a Garden Neighbor and a Garden Committee member; her wisdom and *joie de vivre* have enlivened her corner of the Garden as well as Committee meetings.

Returning to the Garden after a year's absence is **Becca Merrill**. She will be reclaiming her plots K/L 12, which always excited admiration and a little envy in other gardeners.

### SPECIAL THANKS TO

**Heather McQueen**, who, for issue after issue of the Newsletter, has added beauty with her exquisite drawings of botanical subjects.

**The Master Gardeners** who maintain the demonstration plots behind the east-end compost pile and the Survival Center plots, and provide soil testing and garden expertise on Cleanup Days.

### HOW TO REPLACE YOUR SHED KEY

If you have lost your shed key, you can get another one after March 28 at the Recreation Dep't. (open weekdays 8:30 – 4:30) with a deposit of \$2.

Also, shed keys will be available at Spring Cleanup (\$2 deposit).

If your shed key doesn't work both for the shed and the garden carts at the side of the shed (both locks are keyed the same, but some keys are slightly defective), you can get a replacement as detailed above, but you won't need to make a new deposit.

### ROCK DUST

Don't forget that rock dust is available (from the tarp-covered pile beside the wood chips, on the back road behind the tool shed).

Before you plant is a good time to spread rock dust; you may leave it on the surface, or — if you till your plot — work it in. It supplies a variety of trace minerals to your soil, and there is evidence that it improves soil fertility and increases yields. Figure one 5-gallon bucket for a single 20' x 20' plot.

Since we have a substantial supply, you may take some for use in your garden at home. 🌿

## GARDEN GUIDE-LINES AND RULES REVIEW

For the next few issues of the Newsletter, we'll review one, or a few, of the guidelines and rules. This will serve to remind you about them, and we'll provide a rationale when it's not apparent.

In this issue, let's consider the first four rules. Basically, they're about being sensitive to the needs and concerns of your fellow gardeners. We're all here to enjoy the beauty of the garden, so please take these to heart.

#### ● 1. NO SMOKING.

Whether to smoke is your choice, but your Garden neighbors should not have to inhale your smoke. Second-hand smoke is not only unpleasant but also dangerous to health. If you smoke, please step well outside the Garden and ensure that no smoke wafts back in.

#### ● 2. NO DOGS EXCEPT ON LEASH.

First of all, Northampton law requires dogs on city property (that includes the Garden) to be on a leash at all times. Second, consider-

ation for your neighbors requires that your dog not be permitted to enter others' plots. Third, remember that not everyone loves dogs (hard as that is for dog lovers to understand) and may be disconcerted or frightened by a dog who barks or jumps up on them; please control your dog if you must bring it to the Garden.

● 3. **NO PARKING (or driving into the garden).** Please don't park your car on the grass roads within the Garden. Cars on grass paths hinder free movement and the placement of hoses; many people find they make the Garden far less beautiful. (If you're working in your plot, you don't want to be looking at someone else's automobile rather than someone else's garden.) If you use your car to deliver material to your plot, that's OK, but remove it after you unload. There is adequate parking along the roads bordering the Garden.

● 4. **NO LOUD NOISE.** Each year on the Garden questionnaire that each gardener fills out as part of



by Frankie Dack

registration, we find that one of the most frequent answers to the question “What do you like most about the Garden?” is “Peace and quiet.” Loud conversations, loud cell-phone calls, radios playing — all disturb that quiet. So, out of consideration for your neighbors, please keep phone calls short and quiet, converse at low volume, and don’t play radios. Use headphones instead. 🍀



## GARDEN TIPS

Let us talk of lettuce. Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*, from the Latin words for “milk” and “sown” or “cultivated”) was grown by the ancient Egyptians for oil from the seeds. It came to Europe as a food through Rome, and by the 16th century was well-established on the Continent and in England. Here is a recipe for Compound Sallet from a 16th century work on food, which one would be hard to better today:

Your compound Sallets, are first the young Buds and Knots of all manner of wholesome Herbs at the first springing: as red Sage, Mint, Lettuce, Violets, Marigolds, Spinage, and many other mixed together and then served up to the Table with Vinegar, Sallet-Oyl, and Sugar.

And Shakespeare has Cleopatra say “...My salad days, when I was green in judgment and cold of blood.”

Three kinds of lettuce are distinguished — head, leaf, and romaine.

**Head lettuce** has a compact spherical form: Iceberg lettuce is the main exemplar. **Leaf lettuce** grows as loosely bunched leaves. (Boston or Bibb lettuce is intermediate between head and leaf types.) **Romaine** has long, upright

heads. Lettuce hybridizes readily and there are at least hundreds of different varieties. Its color is various shades of green, red, or a mixture.

Like peas, lettuce seeds can be planted as soon as the soil can be worked, when soil temperature has reached 40°F; germination will take more than a week at that temperature. Plant seeds about 1/8” deep. Standard instructions are to sow seed every 1” and thin to 12” apart when the seedling has 4 leaves. That seems to me wasteful of seed and time. I plant two seeds at the spacing I want; since the germination rate for lettuce is 80%, at least one of the seeds is going to sprout. Standard instructions are to have rows 18” or more apart, but I prefer to space rows at 12” — it saves space and gives weeds less chance to grow.

You may also broadcast the seed over an area, cover it with a little soil or compost, and use the thinnings for salad, ending up with one plant in each 12” square. This looks especially nice when you use a mixture of seed and get a patchwork of colors and textures.

If you start seeds indoors and transplant, allow 3-4 weeks after seeds sprout to move them outdoors. Don’t heat the flats — lettuce germinates best at temperatures below 70°F. Three days before you transplant, gradually reduce temperature and moisture, what’s called hardening off. Lettuce transplants can survive a light frost.

Lettuce prefers a pH level between 6.0 and 6.8 and nitrogen-rich soil. It needs an inch of water a week. Mulching helps keep in moisture

and keep out weeds. To avoid getting mulch onto the plant (where it’s almost impossible to get out, and you really don’t want mulch in your salad), put down a board over a row of seeds, or cover plants with plastic pot, before you distribute the mulch.

Lettuce doesn’t like hot summer weather. You may plant summer-crisp lettuce, which resists bolting and is more tolerant of heat. Or you can provide shade for your lettuces, either by shade cloth or shade from a trellis or nearby tall plants.

Since there are so many varieties, you can experiment with different combinations of colors and textures. This year I plan to intermix a chartreuse lettuce, “Italianischer,” with a dark red one, “Lollo Rosso.” So let your imagination run wild, and go for a knockout display.

Since peas and lettuce mature at the same time, if you also plant some scallions with them, you can make a wonderful dish from those three ingredients. See the March Newsletter 2007 (available at [NOHOGARDEN.ORG](http://NOHOGARDEN.ORG)) for info on planting peas and for the recipe.

## TILL OR NO-TILL YOUR PLOT?

Should you use a rototiller on your plot? Should you till it by hand? Or should you not till it at all? Consult the article in the March 2009 Newsletter (at [NOHOGARDEN.ORG](http://NOHOGARDEN.ORG)) for the pros and cons. An article in the May/June 2014 issue of *Horticulture* by Peter Garnham argues for the no-till method. Here is a quote:

No matter which kind of soil life a gardener wants, the first and by far the most important step

is to stop behaving like a mass murderer. This requires at least one radical change: no more rototilling. None, ever. A single pass with a rototiller kills quadrillions of bacteria and chops and destroys thousands of miles of fungal mycelia. No more double digging, either, because that does the same amount of harm, or maybe more.

—The Happy Gardener 🍀



## COMPOST HAPPENS!

Many gardening books, gardening magazine articles and long-time gardeners will tell you that working compost into the soil of your veggie and flower beds is the best way to “feed” them. Some gardeners use ONLY compost and no other fertilizers. So, what makes compost, a.k.a. “black gold,” such a wonderful soil amendment, and how can you make this magical concoction for your garden, for FREE?

Let’s start with why compost is so beneficial. Compost is highly recommended because it’s home to countless microorganisms that play many beneficial roles in the soil. It provides your soil with a fresh infusion of nutrient-rich organic matter, improving the structure and texture of the soil so it can better retain nutrients, water, and air. Crumbly soil helps air to penetrate and holds moisture well; it also allows excess water to drain away. It helps produce plants with fewer pest problems, helps to control diseases and insects that might otherwise overrun more sterile soil lacking natural checks against their spread, and leaf-based compost is showing promise in suppressing nematodes. Compost-

amended soil also makes it much easier for tender young roots of transplants and other young plants, to stabilize in the soil.

Though the list of benefits is quite lengthy, for our purposes, the final reason compost is such a healthy addition to your garden soil is that it will not burn your plants, provided that the compost is “finished” or ready to use. Some unhappy gardeners have used animal manure that hasn’t been “aged” and have been dismayed to return to their garden to find yellowed or “burned” foliage.

Now for the good stuff — HOW to make this “black gold”! First, it’s good to know the basics; they are:

**What goes into the compost pile?**

**What DOESN’T go into the compost pile?**

**How do I maintain my compost pile?**

**When is my compost ready to use?**

● **What goes into the compost pile?**

A balance of carbon-rich (“**browns**”) and nitrogen-rich (“**greens**”) plant material. Here are some examples...

**Greens:** Weeds (that HAVEN’T gone to seed), fresh grass clippings, spent flowers and their foliage, bolted lettuce

**Browns:** Straw, hay, leaves, dried legume plants, papery garlic skins dried potato and tomato vines

If you use the organic matter from your garden plot(s), you can make your own compost for FREE!



by Frankie Dack

● **What DOESN’T go into the compost pile?** DISEASED PLANTS, brambles (anything with thorns), thick or long pieces of sunflower stalks, tree branches, or kitchen scraps from home. Brambles and DISEASED PLANTS should go right into the dumpster so as not to spread the disease (such as blight on tomatoes) through the compost. Thick organic matter that will take a long time to decompose, can be put into the brush pile, and kitchen scraps from home should not be brought to the garden, as they tend to draw rodents and animals.

● **How do I maintain my compost pile?** Maintaining a compost pile CAN BE easy if a few guidelines are followed. Once you’ve heaped your greens and browns, in alternating layers, into a pile, make sure it has moisture and that you aerate your pile. You can check the moisture using a garden fork and

lifting up a section of the pile near the center. If it's dry, you can water it as you would plants in your plot. Periodically poking the pile with your garden fork, handle of a garden tool, or an aerator intended specifically for this purpose, in several different areas, will bring much needed oxygen to your pile. Just make sure to poke the pile all the way to the center.

● **When is compost ready to use?**

Whether you are maintaining a "hot" or "cold" compost pile, the compost is ready to use when it's dark brown and crumbly and has an "earthy odor". If it's a bit "fluffy" and you can no longer recognize the materials you put into the pile originally and it's about the same temperature as the air, it's probably ready! IF, however, you can still recognize much of the original material that went into the pile, it smells like ammonia, or is still hot, it's best to maintain it for another 2-3 weeks and check it again.

Here again, our focus is on composting at the community gardens. Whether in your own plot, or one of the massive community garden compost piles, the only ingredients going into the compost piles should come from your community garden plot.

**IMPORTANT UPDATE: THE EAST-END COMPOST PILE IS CLOSED FOR THE TIME BEING!** As you can imagine, 400+ garden plots generate a huge amount of garden debris and we will be working on trying to get this pile organized this spring. If you contribute plant material to either of the community garden compost piles, PLEASE be considerate of the vast amount of effort that goes into maintaining a pile of this

magnitude. By simply placing new organic matter in the correct portion of the pile, you are helping to greatly reduce the back-breaking labor necessary to maintain the piles. **THE GARDEN COMMITTEE WILL SEND OUT ANOTHER UPDATE WHEN THE PILE IS RE-OPENED.**

**AWESOME REMINDER!!** If you maintain a compost pile in your own plot, you get to claim the credit on your registration form! Not exactly "black gold" but a nice perk nonetheless!

Happy Composting!!!!

—Steph Vasiliades 🍀

**19TH ANNUAL SOS PLANT SALE**

**NORTHAMPTON SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS (SOS) PLANT AND GARDEN SALE – SATURDAY, MAY 9, 9 AM – 1 PM**

Organizers are looking for plant donations from local gardeners. Community members who have perennials to divide or plants they are removing from their gardens, may pot them up and take them to Smith Vocational School on Friday, May 8, 4 – 7 P.M. (Plants may also be delivered, between April 25 and May 7, to 12 Forbes Avenue.)

If you need pots, helpers for digging, dividing, and potting, or picking up potted plants, there are volunteers available. We need donations as well as people to attend the sale. We also need volunteers to collect and organize donated plants on Friday, May 8 and to work at the event on May 9. Any way that you can contribute to SOS will be greatly appreciated.

This annual garden sale features treasures from local gardens as well as from local artisans. There will be handcrafted garden furniture donated by local woodworkers; garden furniture made by Smith Vocational woodworking students; bags of compost; and raffles for a handmade quilt with a botanical theme. Last year the event raised \$10,000 for the book fund. Come help support our public schools by donating plants, volunteering, or attending the event.

For information contact:  
Judy Leeds: 413 537-4437 / [LEEDSJUDY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:LEEDSJUDY@GMAIL.COM)

PR contact: Robin Freedenfeld  
[RFSTUDIOS@AOL.COM](mailto:RFSTUDIOS@AOL.COM)

For plant donations – please try to pot them up early, and water them, so they look happy on the day of the sale.

**WHAT WILL BE FOR SALE:**

- Vegetable starter plants
- Shrubs
- Trees
- Hanging plants
- Houseplants
- Annuals
- Herbs
- Garden furniture, made by local woodworkers

— Robin Freedenfeld 🍀



**NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN**

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Northampton, MA 01060

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