

NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY GARDEN



NEWS



MARCH 2017



GARDEN NEWS

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

is coming up on Saturday, March 25, 10-noon, at the Northampton Recreation Dep't. (now in their new location at 100 Bridge Road on the JFK school grounds). If you know someone who would like to garden, encourage her/him to come to sign up for a plot.

A NEW GARDENER ORIENTATION MEETING

will be held on Wednesday, April 19, 7:00 p.m., in the Calvin Coolidge room at Forbes Library. Members of the Garden Committee will be there to talk about the Garden and to answer questions. Gardeners who come will acquire a 1/4-hour credit for community service — *and there will be door prizes!*

GARDEN COMMITTEE SEEKS ADDITIONAL MEMBERS

Some of the current members of your Garden Committee have helped manage the Garden for decades! They're eager to do more gardening and are hoping to involve more gardeners on the committee.

The Garden Committee is a congenial group; meetings are informal (no Robert's Rules of Order), and decisions are made by consensus. Meetings are on the third Monday of the month, 6:30-7:30 (no meetings in December or January).

Members contribute what they can to the care and guidance of

the Garden; there are no formal requirements. Contact Mimi at MTEX4.NCG@GMAIL.COM if you're interested in joining now.

GETTING STARTED WORKSHOP

The first-of-the-year Garden workshop, **GETTING YOUR GARDEN STARTED**, will be held on Saturday, April 22, 10:30-noon, at the Northampton Recreation Dep't., 100A Bridge Road (JFK School grounds). Start your gardening season right with help from Julie Abramson, Master Gardener and friendly person.

Topics discussed 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. Julie will also answer your questions. Registration is not required. If you have questions, e-mail Julie at JABRAMSON@ALBANY.EDU.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

The Garden Committee welcomes two new members: **Julie Abramson**, known to many of you as a Garden Neighbor (plots R/S 4), and **Larri Cochran**, who has worked with the Master Gardeners' project and is establishing a garden for monarch butterflies in N11.

We say goodbye this season to another long-time gardener: **Mary Cowhey** (M22) has been a Garden stalwart, and we will miss her. 🌿



2017 GARDEN CALENDAR

NEW GARDENER REGISTRATION

Saturday, March 25

NEW GARDENER ORIENTATION

Wednesday, April 19

WORKSHOP: GETTING YOUR GARDEN STARTED

Saturday, April 22

SPRING CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, April 29

IS-YOUR-PLOT-PLANTED? INSPECTION

Sunday, June 4

RAGWEED WALKTHROUGH

Sunday, July 16

FALL CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, October 7

FALL INSPECTION

Sunday, October 15

LAST-CHANCE INSPECTION

Sunday, October 29

GARDEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Third Monday each month @ 6:30 p.m. at the Rec. Dept. at JFK Middle School (or in the Garden during nice weather; call to confirm)

GARDEN TIPS

SEED STARTING FOR VEGETABLE GARDENS

by Julie Abramson

My father used to say that every tomato I grew probably cost more than the ones at the grocery. That may be true but saving money isn't the only reason to grow your own vegetables. Buying your own seeds allows you to choose from a much broader range of varieties than you will find in even the best garden centers; this is especially true for tomatoes, peppers, lettuce and eggplants. Each year I plant my favorites, but I also try some unfamiliar varieties, hoping to encounter new favorites. Growing your own vegetables is fun! I am sure that the produce tastes better. After all, what is more "local" than growing your own...and we pay a premium at restaurants that "buy local".

I also need the daily excitement of seeing plants grow in the winter. Your sense of pride in the garden is different when you have grown the plants, and each year you learn new things as growing conditions change. Of course, it is fun in winter to browse seed catalogues, imagine your garden and make

selections, although there are dangers in that as noted below in the doodle by Andre Jordan from the wonderful garden blog by Margaret Roach at www.awaytogarden.com.

If you have seed packets from prior years, some seeds will be still viable and some won't. Some guidelines re viability:

- 4-5 years: eggplant, tomatoes, greens, radishes, peppers, Brussels sprouts, spinach, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce
- 3 years: peas, beans & carrots
- 2 years: corn, okra & parsley
- New each year: onions and leeks

How many plants do you want of each vegetable? Such choices are particularly challenging when choosing tomato varieties. You will learn from experience after you plant too many of everything and probably plant them too closely together. Avoid too many cherry tomato plants since each one will flood you with tomatoes, unless your dog likes them or your kids eat them by the handful in the garden. Can you ever have too many sugar snap peas? I never seem to have enough, in part because most get eaten in the garden. I think of radishes as bonus plants that fit in anywhere

and finish up quickly so use as many as you want. I plant them around my squash seedlings as they are supposed to deter squash borers...I can always hope and I do get more radishes that way. Arugula also fits in very small spaces and is the zinnia of the vegetable world...easy is the word.

Pinetree Garden Seeds is my go to catalogue because the packets are cheaper and directed to the home gardener. However, I buy from several other catalogues as well, such as those that specialize in tomatoes.

Starting times for particular seeds varies; most greens, beets, carrots and peas should be direct seeded in the garden in early Spring as can herbs such as dill and cilantro but wait until the soil is warm to direct seed beans, cucumbers and squash. Tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, onions, leeks and broccoli need to be started indoors, usually in April although take guidance from specific seed packets. Eggplants and peppers seem to need two weeks longer than tomatoes which grow more quickly. Sometimes seeds need special treatment to germinate such as parsley; a soak overnight speeds germination.

A simple set up in your basement or an unused room works very effectively for starting seeds. First, set up 4 foot shop lights on chains above a table or shelf; the chains need to be longer than the ones that come with the lights so that you can raise and lower the lights to just 3-4 inches above the seedlings as they grow. All you need is an eye hook or cup hook to hold the light fixtures; decide on how many lights you need based on how many trays of seedlings (a tray holds six 6 packs) you wish to plant. One light covers 2 trays. Use one warm and one cool fluorescent bulb for each light fixture to replicate the full light spectrum and plug the light into a timer set for 16 hours; special grow lights are not necessary. Even a Southern window exposure does not



provide adequate light for seedlings as effectively as shop lights. I use a germination tray for starting seeds; each of its 20 channels is planted with one type of seed and covered with a clear dome top; the germination tray (or whatever container you use) is filled with a sterilized growing mix such as Pro-Mix; seed starting mixtures are available at garden centers. Since I use quite a bit, I buy a bale of Pro-Mix and moisten the mix by pouring water into the bale so it is ready to use in the 6 packs. I transplant seedlings from the germination tray into 6 packs (I prefer open 6 packs) or larger pots when the seedlings have their first true leaves or when they reach the dome top. You can remove the dome top after germination if the trays stay too damp. You can also plant directly into 6 packs or into other containers such as yogurt cups if preferred; however, every container must have drainage holes. If you are re-using containers, they should be washed with a 1 to 10 bleach/water solution. See seed packets for information on length of time to germination and for information about any light exposure requirements for germination. Most vegetables seeds need to be covered; I use milled sphagnum moss to lightly cover the seeds. It also serves to reduce damping off of seedlings. Seedlings should be checked daily for dryness. A moisture meter can be useful in determining when to water as can observing soil color. Label each column of the germination tray or each container so you know what you are growing where. My basement is warm so I don't need an additional source of heat to

germinate seeds; you may need a special seedling heat mat or put tray on top of refrigerator until germination. Keep seedlings moist with a spray bottle until they are large enough to withstand water from a watering can. I fertilize with fish emulsion weekly.

Finally, in April, lettuce and other seedlings that like it cool such as parsley (soak overnight to speed germination), chard, kale and other greens (if you have started them indoors instead of direct seeding them), will be ready to "harden off" gradually outside before being planted in the garden. Depending on weather, you can move them in and out of the garage or other shelter daily for a week or more or you can make a crude cold frame with old windows and benches or cement blocks; there are also many products on line. I have a wonderful pop up cold frame that allows me to unzip a window so that the seedlings don't get too hot in the sun. This is the link:

www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00012D015/ref=s9_acsd_al_bw_c_x_1_w

After the hardening off period, in April or early May, you can plant those vegetables that don't mind cold soil while holding tomatoes, peppers, basil and eggplant until the soil warms, around Memorial Day in western MA. 🍀

SOS PLANT SALE

The 21st annual **Support our Schools (SOS)** Plant and Garden Market will be held 9:00-1:00 on Saturday, May 13. Organizers are looking for plant donations from local gardeners. Community members who have perennials to

divide or plants they are removing from their gardens, are asked to please pot them up and take them to Smith Vocational School on Friday, May 12, 4-7 p.m. Plants may also be delivered between April 25 and May 10 to 12 Forbes Ave. If you're donating plants, please pot them up early and water them, so that they look happy on the day of the sale. Should 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 May 12, and to work at the event on May 13. On the day of the sale, we will offer treasures from local gardeners as well as local artisans. There will be bags of compost for sale; a raffle for a handmade quilt; handcrafted garden furniture donated by local woodworkers; and garden furniture made by Smith Vocational students. Last year this event raised more than \$12,000 for Northampton Public School libraries.

Help support our public schools by donating plants, volunteering, or attending the event. Any way you can contribute to SOS will be greatly appreciated. For information: Robin Freedenfeld at rfstudios@aol.com; or Jason Berg at jasond413@comcast.net, 413-563-0125.

— Robin Freedenfeld 🍀