



Hello Gardeners!

What a wonderful couple of weeks we have had – brilliant, sunny skies, drenching rain, and perfect temperatures for being outdoors. The very best of New England!!

The onset of cooler temperatures means that your warm weather crops will really slow down their production. Cool crops like this weather and your lettuce and spinach should be looking and tasting mighty fine. And new crops are probably starting to ripen in your garden – winter squash and pumpkins! See below for tips on ways to tell when they are just right for harvesting. Be sure to also check out this week's article called *Time to pinch the flowers* to learn how to help your garden transition from summer to fall and get the most out of the remaining produce that is there.

Keep picking those vegetables and, as always, please give us a call if you have questions, concerns, successes or funny stories. We are here to help you.

Your Friends at Growing Places

What's Happening...

- Keep harvesting those crops that are ready-kale, cabbage, cucumbers, peppers, summer squash, swiss chard, eggplant.
- Remove plants that are no longer producing – put into trash or compost.
- Do you have radishes that have gone to seed? Try adding the seed pods to salads – they are quite tasty and very mild.
- Too much of a good thing? Don't forget extra produce from your garden can be frozen for use in cooking after the end of the gardening season.
- Brussels sprouts love this time of year! Once your brussels sprout plant has matured, it will look like a tall green tower with knobs and leaves. The innate sweetness of the sprouts is brought out after a frost. The sprouts make 'antifreeze' to cope with the cold, and the antifreeze happens to be sugar! When harvesting brussels sprouts, work from the bottom of the plant up. The bottom sprouts will be ready first.
- Now is also a good time to make a plan of your garden beds so that you don't plant the same crop in the same place next year. Rotating your crops helps to prevent disease and is a good way to make sure that your soil does not get depleted of nutrients.

Tips for a Better Garden...

- Check to see if your carrots are ready to harvest-if the



top is peeking out of the soil they are likely to be big enough for harvesting. If you don't need them just yet, wait until after the first frost which will sweeten them up!

- Are you worried that all your tomatoes won't fully ripen before the frost arrives? One of our mentors suggests picking them as they are and placing them on a sunny windowsill until they are bright red. You can also place the tomatoes in a paper bag with a ripe apple. The apple gives off ethylene gas, which speeds up ripening. Check the bag daily.
If you want to try something new, see our recipe section for a scrumptious cake using green tomatoes!
- Does the underside of any of your butternut squash look rusty like this and feel scaly to the touch? If so, you may need to rotate it slightly every few days so that a different portion of it touches the ground. This discoloration should not affect the taste or texture of the squash. If, however, the spots are soft, harvest it, cut out the affected parts and eat immediately.



Winter Squash

The winter squashes – acorn, butternut, pumpkins, etc – are starting to ripen. These are great sources of nutrition that last into the winter and possibly spring. They often store very well in a cool dry location for several months. Acorn, delicata and spaghetti squash should be eaten first, since they do not store as long as butternut and buttercup squash. So how do you know when to harvest these squashes? There are two characteristic signs that indicate that winter squash is ready to harvest:

- The stem starts to shrivel up and dry;
- The skin is so hard that you can't cut it with your thumbnail. (Pumpkins are an exception as their skin tends to stay a bit soft even when ripe – the orange color is a good indicator, however.)

Cut squashes from vine with a sharp knife leaving 1-2 inches of stem. A little bit of stem keeps the squash from rotting. All winter squash *with the exception of acorn squash* will benefit from curing or drying, which toughens their skins and prolong their storage life. Cure harvested squash by letting them sit outside in the sun for 5-7 days. Store cured squash in a cool, dry location with good air circulation until ready to use. Acorn squash has the shortest storage time, so be sure to use them early (within a month or two). Other winter squashes can be stored for 3 or more months. Enjoy!



Time to pinch the flowers...

Since your garden is starting to slow down its production, you want to do whatever you can to finish ripening the fruits and vegetables that are currently in the process of growing in your garden. In order to do this, you can pinch off any blossoms that you might be seeing—use a sharp scissors or knife, or even your fingers to remove the blossom from the stem. Removing the blossom will direct the energy in the plant away from trying to create a new fruit or vegetable and instead focus it on trying to ripen what is currently growing.

If there is a fruit forming at the bottom of the blossom don't bother pinching off the blossom unless it's a pumpkin, winter squash or melon. These will not have enough time to develop a fruit to full ripeness at this point in the season so you might as well remove the blossom and the forming fruit.



Good candidates for blossom pinching are pumpkins, winter squashes, melons, tomatoes, peppers and eggplants.

Fall's First Frost

This is the time of the year where the word “frost” starts to appear in the forecast. Frost occurs at the temperature where water turns into ice, 32 degrees Fahrenheit or 0 degrees Celsius. The warning signs of a potential frost are nights where the air is very still, there is no cloud cover, the humidity is low, and the evening temperatures are 45 degrees or less.

Often you can avoid damage caused by frost by covering your beds with old bed sheets, shower curtains, or row cover fabric. Try to create a tent so that the fabric does not touch the leaves of the plants. If the next day is warm, remove the cover so your plants don't cook.

Since frost damage occurs because the plant can not replace the moisture that has left its leaves, water the garden thoroughly just before nightfall when a frost is expected. Moist soil holds and releases more heat than dry soil creating a more humid environment around the plant. The plant will suffer less water loss when the frost pulls the moisture from the plant's leaves.

Plants that have suffered damage from the frost are often dark green to black and wilted. The plants and the fruits or vegetables also look and feel like they are full of water. At that point, there is nothing you can do about them and they should be removed from the garden. Some crops actually taste better after a frost. These plants often survive a hard frost (see list below) and will continue to grow (slowly) into the late fall and early winter.

So when you hear about a frost coming to your area, consider what to do with the crops still in your garden. Protect them as best you can. Highly susceptible crops (see list below) should probably be harvested and brought inside so that all the produce is not lost.

Cold Temperature Tolerance of Vegetables and Herbs

(Courtesy of www.hort.perdu.edu)

Tender (Damaged by light frost)	Semi-hardy (Tolerate light frost)	Hardy (Tolerate hard frost)
Beans	Beets	Broccoli
Cucumber	Carrot	Brussels Sprouts
Eggplant	Cauliflower	Cabbage
Melon	Chard	Collards
Pepper	Lettuce	Kale
Pumpkin		Kohlrabi
Tomato		Parsley, Oregano, Thyme
Basil		Peas
		Radish
		Spinach

Recipes...

Spicy Pepper Jelly

Recipe courtesy of Paula Deen

3/4 cup chopped green bell pepper
1 1/2 cups apple cider vinegar
1/4 cup chopped fresh hot green pepper, such as jalapeno or serrano
6 cups sugar
4 ounces pectin

Process bell pepper and hot pepper in a food processor until finely minced. Combine pepper mixture, vinegar, and sugar in a saucepan and bring to a rolling boil. Remove from heat and add pectin. Pour into jars and eat within one week or process in a boiling water bath to seal.*

**Note: Follow USDA guidelines for proper sterilization and canning procedures.*



Green Tomato Cake

2 1/4 C sugar
1 C vegetable oil
3 eggs
2 tsp vanilla
3 C flour
1 tsp salt
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp nutmeg
1 C pecans or walnuts
1 C raisins
2 1/2 C diced green tomatoes

Preheat oven to 350°.

In mixing bowl, beat sugar, vegetable oil, eggs and vanilla until smooth and creamy. Sift together the flour, salt, baking powder, cinnamon and nutmeg; slowly beat into egg mixture. Blend well. Stir in pecans, raisins and tomatoes. Pour into greased 9x13-inch pan. Top with coconut if desired. Bake for one hour, or until a wooden pick or cake tester inserted in center comes out clean.



Serves 12

Garden Spotlight

This Bolton gardener has found a way to extend his gardening day-with solar lights!



..and he keeps his tools right where he needs them so he's ready to go.

He excels at growing cucurbits!



Giant bell peppers ready for stuffing, snacks or salads!



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Growing Places Garden Project, Inc.

P.O. Box 17

Clinton, MA 01510

(978) 598-3723

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P.O. Box 17
Clinton, MA 01510



Things to Remember

Compost

First and second year gardeners will be receiving bags of compost by their gardens around the middle of October. Instructions for using the compost will be included in the bags. This will provide necessary food for your soil to absorb over the winter months so it is ready to go next spring.

Farmer's Markets:

Name	Address	Hours
Fitchburg-Burbank Campus Farmers Market	275 Nichols Rd	Mon. and Wed. 11:00—4:00 07/11—10/26
Fitchburg Farmers Market at Riverfront Park	Riverfront Park, 40 Commercial	Thu. 3:00—7:00 07/7—10/28
Sterling Farmers Market	Town Hall, 1 Park Street, Rte 12, Sterling Common	Fri. 3:00—6:30 05/27-10/30
Gardner Farmers Market	Monument Park along Park St.	Thu. 8:30 - 12:00 Fri. 3:00-6:00 05/05-10/28
Lancaster Farmers Market	Lancaster Town Green	Thu. 3:00-6:00 07/07-09/29