



GROWING TIMES

WELCOME TO THE 2013 GROWING SEASON

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As we pass Memorial Day weekend and head into June, we can be confident that our gardens are safe from hard frost, but they still need plenty of help to survive a New England growing season.

At this time of year, your garden is filled with delicate seedlings; in order for them to survive fluctuating weather patterns and amidst competing weeds, they require your protection in the form of a few gardening best practices.

In our main feature, *In the Garden*, we highlight three practices we recommend you

focus on right now: consistent watering, vigilant weeding, and merciless (sniff...) thinning.

Now is also the time when pests begin to emerge. Our *Pest Report* this issue focuses on why you might want to pay attention to the presence of the common field ant.

We also hope you've begun harvesting those early cool crops. One of our longtime mentors, Donna, has shared her favorite kale recipe for those who, like me, have never grown it and don't quite know what to do with it yet.

And we encourage you, as



Lancaster Senior Center Community Garden visitors demonstrating the cozy seating on the newly installed accessible raised beds.

always, to contact your mentor, our perpetual problem-solvers, if you have any gardening questions or concerns.

YOUR FRIENDS AT GROWING PLACES

THE VEGGIE WRAP-UP:

- DEVELOPING ROOT SYSTEMS ARE VULNERABLE TO DROUGHT. WATER CONSISTENTLY.
- TO KEEP WEEDS IN CHECK, PULL THEM OR CULTIVATE THE SOIL WHEN WEEDS ARE SMALL.
- NOW IS THE TIME TO THIN BEETS, CARROTS, RADISHES, LETTUCE, AND SQUASH.
- THE PRESENCE OF HARMLESS FIELD ANTS MAY SIGNAL AN APHID INFESTATION.

GARDEN SPOTLIGHT: PRESCOTT MILLS COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Prescott Mills Community Garden is off to a wonderful start! A total of ten residents, some of whom are seasoned gardeners and others of whom are just starting out this year, have come together to enrich their lives with homegrown veggies, fresh air and sunshine. Cool early-season weather was equally perfect for growing broccoli and for enjoying a cup

of coffee on the garden bench overlooking the beds.

—Nominated by Donna M.

Know a GP garden or gardener you think should be featured in our Garden Spotlight? Send nominations to 500 Main St., Clinton, MA 01510 or email us at janel@growingplaces.org.



Container and raised bed gardens at Prescott Mills

IN THE GARDEN: WATERING, WEEDING AND THINNING



Untended weeds quickly go from this...

“THIS SPRING WAS LESS LIKE THE VICTORY GARDEN AND MORE LIKE AN EPISODE OF SURVIVOR.”



To thin, grasp seedlings at the base and pull.

This spring was less like *The Victory Garden* and more like an episode of *Survivor*. We had weeks without rain, prolonged cold, damaging winds, heavy downpours and consecutive days of excessive heat – all weather patterns that stress out seedlings and transplants. So, if your garden made it through without losses, pat yourself on the back. If it didn't, take a breath and start over by sowing some more warm-weather crops.

Watering

Your vegetable plants are concentrating on building their network of roots. Until a strong network develops, they are very vulnerable to drying out. Hot weather and wind cause them to lose moisture and you may find your plants wilted by the end of the day. The warm weather plants you are growing from seed are especially vulnerable and need watering at least once a day. Although the perfect time to water is in the cool of the early morning, a wilted plant needs water as soon as possible. Drying out completely will kill your plants, so check the weather forecast and plan ahead. Sometimes you may need to water morning and evening.

Weeding

Weeds are extremely adaptable and can thrive in adverse conditions much more readily than your vegetable plants. It's really important to keep up with weeding; try to get the weeds when they are small. In the photos top left and right you can see how quickly crab grass can spread and overtake their

vegetables resent disturbance, so protect them by thorough weeding when the weeds are tiny. Every minute you spend painstakingly pulling out tiny weed seedlings will save you an hour of heavy weeding later. It's important to get the whole weed, roots and all, and not just the green top. Grass can rejuvenate from the tiniest slip of root. Some weeds have long taproots, like a white carrot and can be difficult to pull. An old butter knife slipped down along the root will help you to remove it without damaging your vegetable plants.

Thinning

Now that the warm weather is here along with some days of soaking rain, seedlings should be popping up all over your vegetable garden. It's tempting to let them all grow, but the seedlings will compete for space and nutrients, and will soon crowd each other out like siblings on a sofa. To stop this from happening it's time to practice some selective weeding called thinning.

Some vegetables like carrots and radishes have tiny seeds and are difficult to sow sparingly. Others, like beets, have seed heads containing several plants. In order to give them the space they need to grow and thrive, begin thinning them out as soon as the tops are two inches long. Thin carrots and radishes by grasping excess seedlings at the base (see bottom-left photo) and pulling the entire plant from the soil. Thin beets by cutting off unwanted plants with scissors as it's difficult to pull out the surplus seedlings without damaging their



...to this!

neighbors. Aim to leave three inches between each remaining seedling for these three root vegetables.

Summer squash, cucumbers and winter squash are planted in groups of 6-8 seeds per hill. When the seedlings are robust and have three sets of leaves, choose three of the strongest plants and pull out the extra seedlings.

If you find you have thick clusters of greens, pull every two out and use them whilst young and tender. If you overdid planting your peas and you're raising a jungle, don't worry. Cut some of the young pea plants at soil level and add the washed tendrils to salad greens.

Leaf lettuces don't need much thinning as long as you "cut and come again" and harvest some leaves regularly. For head lettuce, harvest every other plant as they fill out, to give the remaining lettuces space to spread. When you harvest greens and lettuce, plant another seed so that you have a continuous supply throughout the summer.

—Contributed by Gaynor B.

PEST REPORT: FIELD ANTS

Ants are among the most commonly encountered insects in any yard and garden and their effects on gardens can be highly variable. Most ants feed on other insects as at least part of their diet, and some are highly beneficial predators of plant pests. One of the most common ants in New England is the field ant.

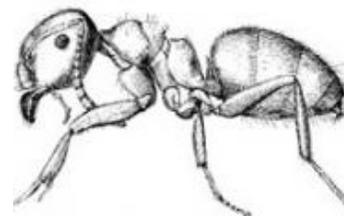
Field ants are moderately large, are most often black, but may be reddish brown or of variable color. They nest in soil, sometimes creating large

mounds mixed with plant debris. The primary food source of field ants is honeydew from plant-sucking insects such as aphids and mealy-bugs. While these ants do not directly harm the plants, their presence can be a tip-off that the garden may have an aphid infestation.

So what do you do about the ants you see in and around your garden? Check your plants regularly for aphids and mealy bugs – at least twice weekly when plants are

growing rapidly. Many species of aphids cause the greatest damage when temperatures are warm but not hot (65° to 80°F). Catch infestations early.

—Contributed by Donna M.



Field ants, *Formica subaenescens*

SPRING PRODUCE RECIPE: RAW KALE SALAD

- 1 bunch kale
- 1/2 cup sliced red onion
- 2 ripe Haas avocados, halved, peeled, and cubed
- 1 cup grated carrot
- 1/4 cup lemon or lime juice
- 2 tbsps extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 tsp salt

Shake kale under water. Shake again to remove as much water as possible. Roll up kale lengthwise and cut across into ribbons. Put kale and remaining ingredients in a bowl. Toss well. Marinate for at least an hour before serving.

Serves 4-5

From the kitchen of Donna M.

Have a great seasonal produce recipe you'd like to share? Send submissions to 500 Main St., Clinton, MA 01510 or email us at janet@growingplaces.org.

KALE WAS POPULAR IN WWII VICTORY GARDENS BECAUSE IT'S EASY TO GROW AND RICH IN BETA CAROTENE, VITAMINS K AND C, AND CALCIUM.

USING GARDEN TOOLS: THE CULTIVATOR

Like any plant, weeds have growing-condition preferences. Some can tolerate cool weather while others require warmer soil temperatures for germination. As a result, fresh weed crops will sprout in the garden throughout the season. Your best bet for keeping this continuous supply of weeds

under control is consistent maintenance. You could pull each tiny weed by hand, but they're often either too numerous or too small to make hand-pulling practical.

One of the most convenient ways to remove small weeds is to use a hand cultivator. This 3-tined fork mimics the shape of

your hand and allows you to uproot weeds without affecting nearby vegetables. Simply use the cultivator to disturb the top inch or two of soil surrounding your vegetable plants and let the uprooted weeds wither in the soil. No cultivator? Shape your hand like a claw and achieve the same result.

—Contributed by Janet O.



Fiberglass 3-tine hand cultivator

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FARMER'S MARKET SCHEDULES

For a complete listing of Worcester County's 2013 Farmer's Market schedules and other information, visit www.farmfresh.org.

FITCHBURG—RIVERFRONT PARK

40 Commercial St.

Open: July 4

Thursday: 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM

GARDNER — MONUMENT PARK

Park St. and Osgood St.

Open: May 9 to October 24

Thursday: 8:30 AM to 1:00 PM

FITCHBURG — HEALTH ALLIANCE HOSPITAL, BURBANK CAMPUS

275 Nichols Road

Open: July 8 to October 21

Monday: 10:00 AM—4:00 PM

Wednesday: 10:00 AM—4:00 PM

LEOMINSTER — SHOLAN FARMS

1125 Pleasant St.

Open: July 28 to October 27

Sunday: 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM

Saturday: 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM

FITCHBURG— WALLACE CIVIC CENTER PARKING LOT

1000 John Fitch Highway

Open: July 5—October 25

Friday: 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM