



HELLO GARDENERS!

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We hope you enjoyed a wonderful Fourth of July holiday and maybe even came out to see us march in Fitchburg’s Civic Days Parade. We had a blast, but was it ever hot!

Speaking of the weather, we wanted to reassure you that every growing season has its own unique challenges that have everything to do with our unpredictable New England weather. With this year’s heat and ongoing rain, we’ve heard about and struggled ourselves with rapid weed growth (see *Unwelcome Houseguests*), with keeping new seeds from drying out, and with finding a dry, but

not too hot moment even to work in the garden.

As we all keep an eye on the forecast and do our best to cope with the particulars of this season, it’s good to remember some of the basic skills that apply regardless of the weather. This issue, we highlight intensive planting so that you can fill in squares now empty from harvested cool crops. Our Focus piece explains bolting, a common concern in extreme heat. We also continue our instruction on the care of tomatoes, our most popular crop, with attention to pruning side shoots, or suckers.



Growing Places at the Fourth of July Parade

If you have questions or problems, as always, give your mentor or one of us in the office a call.

Happy Gardening!

YOUR FRIENDS AT GROWING PLACES

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VEGGIE WRAP-UP

- YOU CAN PRACTICE SUCCESSION PLANTING IN JULY BY SOWING PEAS OR BEANS IN EMPTY SQUARES.
- BOLTING, USUALLY CAUSED BY EXTREME HEAT, IS WHEN A PLANT FOCUSES ITS ENERGY ON SEED PRODUCTION.
- WHEN WEEDING, LOOK FOR CHICKWEED, PURSLANE AND LAMB’S QUARTERS, ALL COMMON IN NEW ENGLAND.

SUMMER TIPS AND TRICKS

- Pinch back the top stem and leaves of herb plants to encourage fuller, bushier leaf production. Also, always pinch off any blossoms!
- In the heat, you may see some whitefly, aphids or spider mites on beans, cukes, and eggplant. Mix 1 tbsp. dish liquid with 1 gallon of water and spray the leaves early in the morning or in the shade. Make sure to spray under the leaves as well as on the tops.
- If you see powdery mildew (a whitish powder on the leaves of plants) try this: Mix 3 tbsps. baking soda and 1 tsp. dish liquid with 1 gallon of water and spray. Repeat in a couple of days.

- Contributed by Donna M.



Powdery mildew on summer squash

MIDSUMMER PLANTING



A few weed-free, empty squares are ready for succession planting in a bed at Prichard Street Community Garden in Fitchburg.

TO SAVE PEA SEEDS, ALLOW A FEW PEA PODS TO DRY OUT COMPLETELY ON THE VINE. ONCE DRIED, STORE THE PODS IN A GLASS JAR IN THE REFRIGERATOR UNTIL PLANTING.

Many of you have been happily harvesting greens, peas and broccoli for a few weeks now and are starting to have vacant spots in your raised beds. Filling in those spaces with a midsummer seed sowing is an intensive gardening technique called succession planting. This technique has two benefits; you get a higher yield of vegetables, and your beds don't get overrun with weeds. Best of all, planting bush beans and peas actually helps to feed the soil and provide you with tender vegetables at the same time.

As soon as your lettuce, spinach, broccoli and peas have gone past their best, pull out the plants and put them on a compost pile. Use the hand rake to gently aerate the soil. Sow your seeds twice as deep as the instructions on the packet, and water well. Growing seeds in the summer requires a watchful eye and

the willingness to water twice a day. The seed bed must be kept moist, because, once the seed has sprouted, it cannot survive drying out.

Cool weather vegetables, like lettuce, need a low temperature to germinate. Planting more deeply, keeping the soil moist and shady is the ideal way to keep the temperature down. Leaf lettuces are less likely to bolt and you can protect your crop by planting them in the shade of your summer squash or collard greens. Harvest them when they are still small and keep planting more every two weeks throughout the summer heat.

Beets, chard, carrots and cabbage are other vegetables well suited to filling in the gaps. Soaking the beet and chard seeds overnight will help them to sprout more quickly. Pouring your carrot seeds into a dish of dry

coffee grounds before sowing this mixture will help you to space them more effectively and reduce the amount of thinning you need to do.

Broccoli, lettuce, peas, spinach, kale, cilantro and arugula can be planted in late July and early August for harvest from September through November.

Remember: three small sowings two weeks apart until the last week of August is better than sowing everything all at once. One sunny weekend away from your garden is all it takes to dry out your new seedlings, and staggering planting times will give you the best chance of success – which is what Growing Places is all about after all!

- Contributed by Gaynor B.

FOCUS: BOLTING



Bolted lettuce

You may have been reading an article that said to watch out for a plant bolting. But, if you are unfamiliar with the term, bolting may seem like an odd term. After all, plants don't generally run away, which is the typical definition of bolt outside the gardening world.

But, while plants do not "run away" physically, their growth may run away rapidly, and this is basically what the phrase means in the gardening world. Plants, mostly vegetable or herbs, are said to bolt when their growth goes rapidly from being mostly leaf based to

being mostly flower and seed based.

Why do plants bolt?

Bolting is a survival mechanism and is primarily due to hot weather. When the ground temperature reaches a certain high, this flips a switch in the plant to

FOCUS: BOLTING (CONT'D)

produce flowers and seeds very rapidly and to abandon leaf growth almost completely. The plant is simply trying to produce the next generation (seeds) as quickly as possible. Some plants that are known for bolting are broccoli, cilantro, basil, cabbage and lettuce.

Can you eat a plant after it bolts?

Once a plant has fully

bolted, the plant is normally inedible. The plant's entire energy reserve is focused on producing the seeds, so the rest of the plant tends to become tough and woody as well as tasteless or even bitter.

Preventing bolting

Planting some crops late in the summer so that they do most of their growing during the cool, early fall helps prevent bolting. This

works especially well with lettuce and spinach. You can also add mulch and ground cover to the ground, as well as watering regularly, in order to keep the soil temperature down.

- Contributed by Donna M.,
Excerpted from
www.gardeningknowhow.com



Broccoli is very prone to bolting—harvest before the flower buds swell.

PESTO IN A BLENDER

2 cups fresh basil

1/2 cup olive oil

2 tbsps. walnut pieces

2 cloves garlic, crushed

1 tsp. salt

1/2 cup parmesan cheese

3 tbsps. softened butter

Put basil, oil, nuts, garlic and salt in blender; blend until smooth. When blended, beat in the grated cheese and then the softened butter by hand. Before spooning over pasta, add about 1 tbsp. of the hot water in which the pasta was boiled.

—From the kitchen of
Mary D.

PRUNING TOMATOES

In the last issue of our newsletter we talked about the importance of staking and tying your tomato plants to save space and keep the plants healthier and cleaner.

Now that you have that taken care of, it is time to prune your tomato plants.

There are a few basic rules to keep in mind as you prune:

Rule 1 – Keep the plants off the ground.

Rule 2 – Give the plants room.

Rule 3 – Never prune or tie plants when the leaves are wet.

Why do we prune?

Pruning keeps plants healthy and increases fruit production (i.e. more tomatoes). The leaves of a pruned and supported plant dry off faster, so bacteria and fungus have less opportunity to spread. Soil is less liable to splash up onto staked plants.

What to do about suckers

As a tomato grows, side shoots, or *suckers*, form in the corners, or axils, between the leaves and the main stem (photo, right). Suckers grow very quickly during the hot summer months. If left alone, these suckers will grow just like the main stem, producing flowers and fruit. However, don't be fooled! The fruit produced from the stems grown from unchecked suckers will be smaller and less tasty.

Check your plants every week for suckers. You must be careful and sure to snip them all! When the sucker is still small, using your thumb and forefinger, pinch it off entirely at its base. To reduce the risk of disease, avoid pinching off suckers when the plant is wet.

It is also a good idea to keep tomato plants free of side stems that are growing just below the first flower cluster.

- Contributed by Donna M.

“IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO KEEP TOMATO PLANTS FREE OF SIDE STEMS JUST BELOW THE FIRST FLOWER CLUSTER.”



Tomato sucker

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UNWELCOME HOUSEGUESTS

Some plants just don't play well with others. Weeds compete with your vegetable plants for nutrients, water and light. If left unchecked, they will quickly outgrow your seedlings and become an unwelcome presence in your raised beds. This warm moist weather has produced a bumper crop of some New England weeds this year and pictured here are some of the worst offenders.



Chickweed

Take your time when weeding and be thorough. Make certain you pull out the whole plant. Pulling off the greens without getting the root is about as ineffectual as putting on sunscreen after you've been outside all day. Little and often is the secret to successful weeding.

Chickweed is a low grower that forms a spreading mat across the surface of the raised bed. Luckily, it's easy to pull, roots and all.

Purslane, with its plump waxy leaves and reddish stem, is

often seen growing along with chickweed. Unlike chickweed, it is edible and relatively harmless in the garden. It tastes a little like lettuce and can be harvested for inclusion in salads. You can weed it out by hand or cultivate it according to your preference.



Purslane

Lamb's Quarters

Another weed that is considered edible, but we don't recommend cultivating, is Lamb's Quarters. It can grow to be 4 feet tall and produces hundreds of seeds. It can be hand pulled when small or dug out if over 1 foot high.

- Contributed by Gaynor B.



Lamb's Quarters