



## HELLO GARDENERS!

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Each issue, we encourage you to be on the lookout for pests and diseases, to weed regularly, to mulch and to keep your garden as neat and clean as possible, all with the goal of helping you grow beautiful vegetables. While these tasks continue (see *Weed Patrol* for weeding tips beyond the basics), the challenge at this time of the year isn't usually growing the vegetables — it's managing to eat them all!

Luckily, some vegetables like cherry tomatoes make a great snack right off the vine. But what do you do about those other, less convenient vegetables like eggplant,

onions, or squash?

This issue, we offer you three super recipes that will help you use up all those veggies prone to overabundance: classic ratatouille, a novel zucchini crisp, and a cool cucumber soup. *The Flavors of Summer* will also remind you of some harvesting best practices to ensure you get the most from your plants without causing damage. To prevent waste, store and consider preserving what you can't immediately prepare.

As always, talk to your mentor or call one of us in the office if you have questions about your harvest. We're here to help.



*Janet's harvest of parsley, Swiss chard, broccoli, summer squash, tomatoes, eggplant, and a lone beet!*

Happy Gardening!

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### VEGGIE WRAP-UP

- NOW IS THE TIME TO HARVEST, ENJOY AND STORE TOMATOES, EGGPLANT, PEPPERS, CARROTS, SQUASH, AND CUCUMBERS.
- KNOW YOUR WEED CONTROL: THERE ARE THREE STRATEGIES—MECHANICAL, CULTURAL AND CHEMICAL.
- WITH ZUKES AND CUKES IN ABUNDANCE, WHY NOT TRY SOMETHING NEW LIKE ZUCCHINI CRISP?

## GARDEN SPOTLIGHT: SHANNON

Shannon's beautifully tended garden is bursting at the seams with vegetables that she's been able to share with friends and neighbors. Her cucumbers, eggplants and peppers are well on their way, and her tomato plants are laden. We investigated some suspicious holes in her collards and found a colony of Cabbage White

caterpillars, which she removed with paper towels before they could do more damage. A more welcome garden inhabitant was a Black Swallowtail caterpillar, also known as a parsley worm, and whose beauty is worth giving up a few fronds of parsley.

—Nominated by her Mentor, Gaynor B.



*Black Swallowtail caterpillar—not to be confused with the unwanted Tomato Hornworm we showed in a previous issue!*

## THE FLAVORS OF SUMMER



*Don't wait for your Sun Gold tomatoes to turn red; they're ripe (and so sweet!) when they turn a rich orange hue.*

**"THERE IS NO MORE ICONIC FLAVOR OF SUMMER THAN A SUN-WARMED, JUICY, RIPE TOMATO."**



*Green peppers freshly harvested*

To those of us who grow our own vegetables, there is no more iconic flavor of summer than a sun-warmed, juicy, ripe tomato. But tomatoes are just one of the many vegetables ready for harvest right now.

### Tomatoes

It's tempting to pick tomatoes when they begin to turn red, but waiting until they have fully ripened will yield a decidedly more scrumptious tomato. You know a tomato is ripe when it has turned its final color on the vine, which may be red, yellow, or even pink depending on the variety. The color will also be even throughout the fruit and will be just a bit soft when squeezed. Some gardeners say "in between firm and soft." To harvest, grasp a ripened tomato gently and firmly. Twist it until it snaps off the vine.

### Eggplant

Harvest eggplant when the fruits are 6 to 8 inches long and still glossy. Use a knife or pruning shears rather than breaking or twisting the stems. Many eggplant varieties have small prickly thorns on the stem, so exercise caution or wear gloves when harvesting. When the fruits become dull or brown, they are too mature for culinary use and should be cut off and discarded. Over mature fruits are spongy and seedy and may be bitter. Even

properly harvested fruits do not store well and should be eaten soon after they are harvested. Eggplant does well with pickling, canning or freezing.

### Peppers

Peppers love the hot weather! They can be harvested as soon as they reach the desired size – small or large! The longer bell peppers stay on the plant, the sweeter they become and the greater their vitamin C content. Use a sharp knife or scissors to cut peppers clean off the plant for the least damage. They can be refrigerated in plastic bags for up to 10 days after harvesting. Peppers can also be pickled, frozen, canned or dried.

### Carrots

Look for the darkest green and bushiest leafy "tops" in the row. This usually indicates the most mature carrots. If in doubt, gently brush away the soil around the base of the greens to see how wide the head or "crown" of the carrot is. If it's at least the diameter of a quarter, you can pull the carrot. If not, cover the carrot crown with earth again to prevent it from greening. The best time to harvest is early evening as the carrots have been able to convert sugar all day and should be at their tastiest. Handle carrots carefully to avoid bruising. Keep them in the salad drawer in an

open plastic bag containing a dampened piece of paper towel for up to three days.

### Summer and Zucchini Squash

Luckily, it's a cinch to harvest zucchini and summer squash. Unless you are going for the "Best in Show" ribbon, harvest these summer squash when they are about 4 to 5 inches long. They have a much better flavor and texture when small. Cut them off the vine with a knife or scissors so that you don't tear the vine or pull it up by accident. Summer squash are very high in water, so try to use them within a day of harvesting as they don't keep well. You can freeze them, but they will become somewhat mushy.

### Cucumbers

Check your vines every day because cucumbers grow fast! Again, it's better to harvest when they are slightly immature. If you want to pickle them, you can harvest them as soon as they are 3 inches long. If you want them for salad, pick them around 5 inches in length. Overripe cucumbers are bitter and pithy, and as soon as just one cucumber sets seed, the whole vine dies. So, if you discover a bristly, tough cucumber, harvest it and discard it, don't leave it to set seed. — *Contributed by Donna M. & Gaynor B.*

## RATATOUILLE (SAY: RA-TA-TOO-EE)

Ratatouille uses a plethora of veggies from the garden, freezes beautifully and is fun to say!

2 tbsps olive oil

2 cups chopped onions

1 large green bell pepper, seeded and chopped

1 small zucchini, cut into cubes

One small (about 3/4 lb.) or half a large eggplant, peeled and cut into cubes

2 large garlic cloves, minced

2 ripe tomatoes, diced small

1/2 tsp fennel seeds

1/2 cup water

1/2 tsp salt

Pepper to taste

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat.

Add the chopped onions, and sauté for 5 minutes or until they have softened.

Add the bell pepper, zucchini, eggplant, garlic, tomatoes, fennel seeds and water and stir well. Cover the stew, turn the heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring gently once or twice to make sure the vegetables don't stick to the bottom. Season with salt and pepper. Serves 4

- From the kitchen of Donna M.



Mo's happy farmers market haul

## WEED PATROL

Weeds got you down? Do you wish, to quote a friend, "that crabgrass was a cash crop"? What is a weed, anyway? Quite simply, a weed can be defined as "a plant out of place" – something growing where it is not wanted.

The biggest problem with weeds is that they compete with our vegetable plants for water, nutrients and light – all essential for plant growth and development. Where plant species grow together (like onions and lamb's quarters), the strongest one usually wins out. Different species often have contrasting growth habits and a plant with many large leaves or a rapidly growing root system has an advantage over one with fewer, narrow leaves or a slow growth habit.

So what can you do? There are three basic weed control strategies – mechanical control, cultural control, and chemical control.

**Mechanical weed control** is the most common, including hand weeding, tilling and hoeing. Although often considered the most burdensome part of gardening – who likes to pull weeds? – mechanical control is highly effective.

Numerous techniques fall into the category of **cultural control**. They include mulching, planting early and planting competitive crops. For details about mulching, refer to the article *Heat, Weeds and Mulch, Mulch More*, in Volume 10, Issue 5 of *Growing Times*.

Some vegetable crops and specific varieties are much

better adapted to compete with weeds than are others. Plants that emerge quickly, like peas, or have dense foliage, like beans, have a competitive advantage over weeds. Vegetables that outgrow and shade surrounding weeds also have a major advantage. These are called competitive crops.

**Chemical control**, while an option, should always be considered a last resort. The use of herbicides in the home garden has few advantages and many disadvantages including being expensive and difficult to apply accurately.

- Contributed by Donna M.

"THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH WEEDS IS THAT THEY COMPETE WITH OUR VEGETABLE PLANTS FOR WATER, NUTRIENTS AND LIGHT."



Maritza watering her mulched Prichard Street garden

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## WHAT TO DO WITH ZUCCHINI AND CUCUMBERS

If your garden is overflowing with zukes and cukes this year, here are some recipes to help. The Zucchini Crisp is almost indistinguishable from apple crisp, believe it or not, and is best served freshly made. Cold Cucumber Soup makes a cool lunch on a hot summer's day! —From Lynda K.'s kitchen

### ZUCCHINI CRISP

#### Ingredients:

5 cups zucchini, peeled, seeded, and sliced

1/3 cup sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon

1/4 cup lemon juice

3/4 cup water

#### Topping

6 tablespoons butter

1 cup flour

1/2 cup brown sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

#### Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350° F.

In a large pot, cook together zucchini, 1/3 cup sugar, cinnamon, lemon juice, and water about 10 minutes, until zucchini is just tender. Place in a 9-inch square ungreased baking pan.

Combine topping ingredients with pasty blender until crumbly and butter is evenly distributed. Sprinkle over zucchini mixture and bake about 45 minutes, until top is golden. Serve immediately.

### COLD CUCUMBER SOUP

#### Ingredients:

1 medium onion, chopped

1 medium cucumber, peeled and cubed

3/4 cup chicken broth

1 can cream of chicken soup

1 cup sour cream

6 dashes Tabasco sauce

6 dashes Worcestershire sauce

1/4 teaspoon celery salt

1/4 teaspoon curry powder

#### Preparation:

Place all ingredients except seasonings in blender; blend until smooth. Add seasonings and blend to mix. Chill 2 hours or more before serving. Garnish with chopped chives.



*Kristen's prolific zucchini squash*