



# GROWING TIMES

## HELLO GARDENERS!

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Are you feeling overwhelmed by your garden? Late summer tends to have that effect on us because we, like our plants, are starting to run low on energy. As the evening temperatures begin to dip and leaves blush in the sun, we can take some comfort in the fact that the time for a rest is almost here.

Almost. But not just yet! As you'll read in our *Focus* piece, this is the home stretch, so don't give up! In fact, some late crops, like our *Winter Squash: Garden Divas* need extra care from us right at this stage.

If you're like us, though, your

mind will still drift to autumn thoughts while you work. Do you have any old sheets you can use to cover your garden during *Fall's First Frost*? Have you thought about how you'll dispose of your garden debris? *Easy Composting* can reduce the amount you'll have to trash. Consider giving the age-old tradition of garden journaling a go. *And Next Year* poses some great questions to help you evaluate your garden and plan for spring 2014.

Your mentor will be in touch soon to explain how to put your garden to bed, but, as always, let them or one of us in



*The children at Hosmer Head Start in Fitchburg have their hearts set on pumpkin pie!*

the office know if you have questions. We're here to help!

Happy Gardening

**YOUR FRIENDS AT GROWING PLACES**

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### VEGGIE WRAP-UP

- WE'RE IN THE HOME STRETCH, BUT STILL KEEP AN EYE ON PESTS AND DISEASES!
- PAMPER YOUR WINTER SQUASH NOW FOR THE BEST FRUIT AT HARVEST.
- CONSIDER STARTING A COMPOST PILE THIS FALL.
- PROTECT YOUR CROPS FROM FROST WITH AN EVENING WATERING AND AN OLD SHEET.
- GIVE A GARDEN JOURNAL A TRY

## GARDEN POLLINATORS

Pollinators are important to gardens; without them plants would not set seed or produce vegetables. Butterflies are the second largest group of pollinators in the world, after bees. Is it any wonder we encourage butterflies to our garden? To attract butterflies and native bees, including the bumble bee, we can plant flowers with dazzling colors.

At The Sundial Community Garden, Niki, Pam and I planted purple clematis, zinnias and sunflowers. Niki has seen a black swallowtail butterfly on the zinnias and in the morning, bumblebees are often found sleeping on the sunflowers. Thanks to pollinators, our gardens produced an abundance of vegetables this year. — *Contributed by Mary Ellen R.*



*Remember last issue's caterpillar? This is the beautiful Black Swallowtail butterfly it becomes. This one is in Mary Ellen's garden.*

## FOCUS: MAINTENANCE AND HARVESTING



*Gaynor's brassica doily, mandible-crafted by Japanese beetles near you.*

This August has really tested our gardening mettle—gardeners and mentors alike. Very little rainfall, coupled with long periods of hot, humid weather has created the perfect conditions for plant stress, pest attacks and disease. Here are some of the problems we've been faced with this summer and some solutions to help you reclaim your garden.

**Yellowing leaves and blossoms dropping** on beans, eggplant and tomatoes can be caused by two things, firstly a lack of water, and secondly lack of nutrients. We know we keep telling you to provide your vegetables with a long, slow soak so that the water reaches several inches of

root. Plants that swing between drought and soak produce tough vegetables and we really want you to enjoy them at their best.

If the soil is moist, but you are experiencing blossom drop, try adding a little organic fertilizer, such as seaweed or fish fertilizers or a sparing amount of composted animal manure, to give your plants a little pick-me-up for the home stretch.

The **Cabbage White butterfly, grasshoppers, Japanese beetles and cabbage aphids** have been busy this year and some of us have kale, collards, broccoli and Brussels sprouts that look more like doilies than leaves. It's so

frustrating after all that work! Check your green plants regularly and hand pick any caterpillars, or beetles. If you have clusters of aphids, remove them by drawing damp paper towels across the leaves.

**Powdery mildew** particularly affects summer and winter squash plants, giving them an unpleasant white coating. It's caused by humid weather and we recommend using a home made spray of 1 tbsp. of baking soda dissolved in 1 quart of water. Spray the leaves just once a week. Baking soda can build up in the soil, upsetting the balance of nutrients you've worked so hard to develop.  
—Contributed by Gaynor B.

**YELLOWJACKETS AND WASPS GET A BAD RAP, BUT KEEP IN MIND THEY ARE BENEFICIAL INSECTS AND HELP CONTROL PEST INSECTS.**

## WINTER SQUASH: GARDEN DIVAS

By now, you should have some winter squash forming on those billowing vines. Unlike summer squash, Winter squash need to ripen for a long time on the vine, so leave them as long as you can. Generally, they won't be ready much before mid-to-late September and they are definitely high maintenance! The squash fruits like to bask in sunshine so trim off any leaves that shade them.

Squash are water hogs and, since the majority of the fruits lay on the ground, this

can cause problems with slugs and molds. To avoid this, slide a piece of cardboard or a wad of straw underneath each fruit. Several times a week, with a soapy paper towel at the ready, check underneath this pad for pale grey squash bugs. Be quick and squish them all! Check the underside of the leaves for fugitive bugs and clusters of orange eggs. Tear off that section of the leaf, crush and put it in the trash.

If you have any fruits on the part of the plant climbing

up your trellis or fence, then your plant has solved the rot problem for you but it's a good idea to create a support or "sling" out of cloth, recycled onion mesh bags or old pantyhose. Loop the sling under the squash and tie it to the support. Adjust as the squash grows.

They will repay all this love and care with wonderful flavor and colors.

- Contributed by Gaynor B.



*Butternut squash is ready to harvest when the rind hardens and the stems shrivel and dry.*

## EASY COMPOSTING

Finished compost is the best thing in the world for anything that grows. When you add it to your soil, it improves drainage and makes a perfect home for earthworms and beneficial bacteria. And, if the pile is tended properly, it won't develop any unpleasant odors.

**To get started**, choose or create a container that's made of wire, wood or some other sturdy material and no smaller than three by three feet. Place it in your yard in a sunny spot with

good drainage. Start adding waste in a ratio of three "browns" to one "green." Browns are carbon-rich materials like wood chips, straw, branches, and leaves. Greens provide nitrogen and include plant material from your garden and fruit and vegetable scraps from your kitchen. When you're adding new material, dig a hole in the pile and stir the new stuff in so it gets coated with the old mixture.

**To maintain the pile**, mix its contents periodically with a pitchfork or shovel,

moving what was on the outside of the pile to the inside, and vice versa. If you notice a smell, make sure you have enough browns in the pile. Check the moisture level, too; it should feel like a wrung-out sponge. If it's too dry, sprinkle it with water. If it's too wet, add a few more browns.

**The compost is ready** when it looks and smells like very dark soil.

- Contributed by Donna M.



*A compost bin can be as simple as a round of wire fencing.*

## FALL'S FIRST FROST

This is the time of the year when 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 when the air is very still, there is no cloud cover, the humidity is low, and the evening temperatures are 45 degrees or less. Frost damage occurs because ice crystals form on the leaves and stem of the plant and it cannot replace that moisture.

Some crops do not tolerate cold temperatures well. Produce from those plants

should probably be harvested and brought inside so that all of it is not lost. This includes beans, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, peppers, tomatoes and basil.

Other crops such as beets, carrots, cauliflower, kale, collards, cabbage, broccoli and chard can tolerate a light frost. Still others, like Brussels sprouts, actually taste better after a frost!

To help minimize the potential damage from frost, 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. Cover the plants with an old sheet, towel, blanket, tarp or the like to help trap the heat from the surrounding, sun-warmed soil. To recharge for the next night, remove the covering during the daytime.

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!

-Contributed by Donna M.

**IS YOUR COMPOST READY? SEAL A SCOOP IN A PLASTIC BAG FOR A FEW DAYS. IF IT SMELLS WORSE THAN IT DID BEFORE, IT NEEDS MORE TIME TO DECOMPOSE. IF IT SMELLS THE SAME, IT'S READY!**



*Not ready yet! Watermelon slowly ripening at Prichard Street Community Garden*

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## AND NEXT YEAR...

As the growing season comes to a close and you're busier than ever harvesting and weeding, you might start giving some thought to *next year's* garden. Now is the perfect time to do it—with lessons from this year's garden still fresh in your mind. And the perfect tool to help is a garden journal, a place to reflect on how your garden grew.

Here are some things to consider about this year's garden:

- Which vegetables did you plant that you loved and want to be sure to plant again?
- Was there anything you planted that your family didn't really like to eat? Are there things they really like to eat that you *didn't* plant?
- Were there plants that took up too much garden real estate for what they gave you in return?
- Did you find your garden overflowing with a vegetable without any way to use it all?
- Were you able to preserve some of your harvest?
- How well did you do at managing weeds?
- What pests were a problem?
- What pest solutions did you use? How well did

they work?

- How did your garden fare in the worst of summer's heat?

Armed with notes from your garden journal, you can spend time this winter researching things like strategies for watering and weed-management, pest controls for next year, and recipes and preservation ideas for your overabundant crops.

A garden journal will not only give you the makings of a "to-do" list for next year's garden, but will also help you understand over time how your garden grows.

—Contributed by Lynda K.

## SEED-SAVING PROGRAM AT BOLTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

SEPTEMBER 19, 2013

7:00–8:30 P.M.

563 MAIN STREET, BOLTON, MA

LANCASTER GARDENING GURU  
GENE CHRISTOPH WILL BE ON  
HAND AT THE BOLTON PUBLIC  
LIBRARY TO TALK AND ANSWER  
QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW YOU CAN  
SAVE YOUR OWN SEEDS FROM  
THIS YEAR'S GARDEN AS IT COMES  
TO A CLOSE—AND USE THEM TO  
START NEXT YEAR'S!

ANYONE CAN DO IT—COME FIND  
OUT HOW!