



Hello Gardeners!

Happy Fourth of July! Summer is in full swing in New England, with hot weather, thunderstorms and drenching rains. Lots of good things should be happening in your gardens. Read below to find out how to harvest and easily clean your crisp, fresh heads of broccoli. Also in this issue are some secrets to increasing the yield from your garden of everything from tomatoes to root vegetables!

Be sure to give your mentor or one of us at the office a call if you have any questions or problems.

Your Friends at Growing Places

What's Happening...

- Warm days followed by cool nights are the perfect growing season for a disease called powdery mildew. Powdery mildew is identified as a white or gray powderlike coating on the surface of plant foliage. It appears as small, discolored patches on leaves, which soon grow and spread to cover the entire surface. Eventually, the leaf will either curl and yellow or turn brown and die. Plants most susceptible to powdery mildew are beans, peas, zucchini, squash, pumpkin, and zinnia, to name a few.

To prevent and control mildew:

1. Water in the morning instead of evening which allows plant foliage to dry.
 2. Do not overcrowd plants to allow for good air circulation.
 3. Keep the area under the plants clean and free from weeds.
 4. Mix a solution of 1 teaspoon baking soda in 1 quart of warm water in a small plastic spray bottle. Add 1/2 teaspoon of either liquid dish soap or insecticidal soap to help the solution cling to the foliage. Spray infected plants thoroughly on both sides of the leaves every 5 to 10 days.
- Keep pulling up those weeds to help keep your garden
 - Slugs! These snails without shells love dampness. Put on gloves, pick them off and crush them.

Tips for a Better Garden...

Get a Jump on A Great Tomato Yield Now.

Remove the Bottom Leaves

Once the tomato plants are about 3' tall, remove the leaves from the bottom 1' of stem.

These are usually the first leaves to develop fungus problems. They get the least amount of sun and soil borne pathogens can be unintentionally splashed up onto them.



Pinch & Prune for More Tomatoes

Pinch and remove suckers that develop in the crotch joint of two branches. They won't bear fruit and will take energy away from the rest of the plant. But go easy on pruning the rest of the plant. You can thin leaves to allow the sun to reach the ripening fruit, but it's the leaves that are photosynthesizing and creating the sugars that give flavor to your tomatoes.

Water the Tomato Plants Regularly

Water deeply and regularly while the plants are developing. Irregular watering, (missing a week and trying to make up for it), leads to blossom end rot and cracked fruit. Once the fruit begins to ripen, lessening the water will coax the plant into concentrating its sugars. Don't withhold water so much that the plants wilt and become stressed or they will drop their blossoms and possibly their fruit.

Harvesting Broccoli

Harvesting broccoli is best done while the main head is young, and at its most tender. Once the broccoli plant begins to form a head, it should be watched daily. Sometimes the broccoli will form nice 7-8 inch heads like you see in the grocery store, but some will only be 2-3 inches wide when they will need to be harvested, so you have to check them frequently.

If the head starts to turn yellow or begins to loosen, then you need to harvest the broccoli immediately. If you wait too long, the plant will go to flower and the main head will be inedible.



Harvest the main head by using a sharp knife to cut the main stem on an angle about 4-6 inches below the main head. Make sure to cut on an angle, otherwise water will pool in the stem and rot the plant.

After harvesting broccoli, allow the plant to continue growing and within a week or two the plant will begin sending out small heads from the leaf axils. These heads will be small, roughly 1-4 inches in size, but can continue growing for up to 6 weeks.

Cleaning Your Broccoli Heads

Those tender broccoli heads are also enjoyed by caterpillars and worms, so we recommend that you clean it thoroughly after it is harvested. We suggest that when you bring your broccoli indoors, you soak it in a water bath that is 1 part salt to 5 parts water, using cold or warm water. Soak the broccoli in this salty solution for approximately 25 minutes and then rinse it under fast moving water.

It is best to cut the broccoli into small florets before soaking it in the water. This allows any caterpillars to fall entirely out of the broccoli and to the bottom of the sink. If you choose to leave your broccoli in large heads, made sure to check that all the worms have fallen out of the head before you cook with it.

If not cooking with it immediately, then dry the broccoli and put it in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week. It can also be [blanched](#) in boiling water for three minutes or in steam for 5 minutes and then frozen for up to 10 months.



Thinning Vegetable Seedlings

Why do I need to thin?

Vegetables need space to grow, but many times it's just not practical to start seeds off with the desired final spacing. Plants started in pots are usually not a problem. You can separate them when it's time to transplant outdoors. Plants that are direct seeded in the ground and especially seeds of root vegetables, are another matter. These plants will need to be thinned out.

Thinning seedlings produces healthier plants and higher yields by:

1. Allowing room for proper growth
2. Reducing competition for water and nutrients from nearby plants
3. Allowing for good air circulation between plants

When should I thin the seedlings?

- Seedlings are usually thinned once they have 1-2 sets of true leaves. Most will be 2-3" tall by then and easy enough to grasp and pull.
- Thinning while the soil is damp will help you pull just the excess plants while leaving the ones you want to keep.
- Thinning in the evening gives the remaining plants a chance to adjust before being exposed to heat and sunlight.

How do I thin?

Flowers and leafy vegetables like lettuce and spinach can be thinned by gently pulling the unwanted plants. If you are growing in blocks, not rows, you can try simply running a flexible rake through the seedlings. Your plants won't be perfectly spaced, but doing this will open more space for them to grow.

Root vegetables, like onions, beets and carrots, can be more sensitive to thinning because disturbing young roots can cause them to become deformed. Transplanting long rooted vegetables, like carrots and turnips, will cause them to fork. You'll want to pull one seedling at a time, or try cutting the unwanted seedlings at the soil line, instead of pulling. Spacing will vary by variety and whether you want your vegetables to grow to full size, but in general, leave the anticipated size of the mature vegetable plus a couple of inches on either side. Refer to the *Growing Guide* for more information.

Vegetable plants that need thinning include:

Beets* (3-6" spacing)	Parsnips (3-6" spacing)
Carrots (2-3" spacing)	<u>Radishes</u> (2-3" spacing)
Lettuce* (18-24" spacing)	Spinach* (2-6" spacing)
Onions (3-5" spacing)	Turnips* (2-4" spacing)

*Harvest the greens from these plants anytime and toss in your salad for great taste and extra nutrition!

Recipes...

Braised Mixed Greens with fresh Peas

Serves 2-4

- 8 oz. (about 8 cups) lightly packed mixed hearty greens- mustard, chard, kale, collards
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 med onion chopped
- 1 large clove garlic chopped
- 2 cups chicken stock or water
- 2 cups fresh peas, shelled (can use frozen)
- salt and pepper to taste

1. Chop greens into 1" wide ribbons and set aside
2. In a large skillet or flame proof casserole, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally for 10 minutes or until onion is translucent. Add garlic and cook 2 minutes more.
3. Add greens and stir for 5 minutes or until they wilt.
4. Add enough water or stock to just cover greens (careful; not too much). Bring to boil. Lower heat and cook partially covered for 25 minutes until liquid has almost completely evaporated.
5. Add fresh peas (or thawed frozen ones). Continue to cook for 5 minutes and peas are bright green and tender.

Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve as a side dish or over barley, bulghur, couscous or rice...yummy!

Balsamic Potato Salad with Summer Herbs

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
- 2 garlic scapes or 2 medium cloves garlic, minced
- 2 lbs. potatoes unpeeled, cut into ¾" cubes
- ¼ to ½ cup fresh herbs, chopped (depending on what's in season, try basil, oregano, thyme, and/or rosemary
- 2 tsp. salt, or to taste
- Black pepper, to taste
- 2 Tbs capers
- A couple florets of broccoli, chopped

Set a medium-to-large pot of lightly salted water to boil. Combine all ingredients except the potatoes and capers to make a dressing. Whisk together and set aside to allow the flavors to meld.

When water is boiling, add cubed potatoes. Boil for 5-10 minutes, or until potatoes are easily pierced with a fork but not mushy. Drain in colander, then pour back into the cooking pot. Add the dressing and capers and toss thoroughly with the potatoes. Refrigerate and allow to chill for a few hours or overnight. Taste and add salt and pepper if necessary before serving.

Garden Spotlight

'Knee high by the Fourth of July'

The Seniors in Clinton are ready for a celebration filled with their home grown scrumptious veggies!



They have even expanded their garden to include corn.

We love it when our gardeners really go for it!

Homemade Natural Remedy for Cold Crops

(Broccoli, Kale, Cabbage)

Gets rid of cabbageworms, caterpillars, hornworms, aphids, fleas and other insects.

- 6 cloves of garlic
- 1 T dried hot pepper
- 1 minced onion
- 1 tsp liquid soap
- 1 gallon of hot water

Blend all ingredients and let sit for one to two days. Strain and use as a spray. Ground cayenne or red hot pepper can also be sprinkled on the leaves of plants (apply when leaves are slightly damp) to repel chewing insects or added to the planting hole with bone meal or fertilizer to keep squirrels, chipmunks, dogs and other mammals away from your garden. Be sure to reapply after rain.

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Things to Remember

Local Fruit of the season!

If you are looking for a *Pick Your Own Fruit* stand, check out: www.mass.gov/agr/massgrown

Strawberries, Cherries, Raspberries and Blueberries are in or will be available soon. It is a good idea to call ahead just to make sure of the picking dates, times and availability. A great outing for young and old alike!



Some of the local farms picking now in our service area are:

- Indian Head Farm, Berlin
- Lanni Orchards, Lunenburg
- George Hill, South Lancaster

Farmer's Markets:

Name	Hours
Fitchburg Wallace Civic Center John Fitch Highway	Fridays 8-2 7/6-10/26
Fitchburg-Burbank Health Alliance Hospital Burbank Campus	M and W 10-4:30 7/9-10/24
Fitchburg-Riverfront Park 40 Commercial St.	Thursdays 3-7 7/5-10/25
Gardner Monument Park	Thu. 8:30-12:00pm Fri. 3:00-6:00 pm Thru 10/25
Princeton Community Ctr	Thu 3:30-6:30pm Thru. 9/27
Sterling Rear—Old Tennis Court	Fri 3:30-6:30pm Thru. 11/2