Growing Times

September 3, 2010 Volume 7, Issue 5

Building Gardens, Growing Gardeners

Hello Gardeners!

There goes another incredibly beautiful week. Lots of sunshine with a forecast for some much needed rain. Remember to continue to water your garden during these rather dry spells we are having. Your tomatoes should definitely begin ripening and you might just be getting overloaded with them, as well as beans, squashes and cucumbers.

You can quickly freeze many vegetables for use later. Tomatoes can be frozen whole on a cookie sheet and then stored in a plastic bag in the freezer – great for soups and sauces. Summer squash and zucchini can be shredded and frozen in a plastic bag for use in soups and breads in the winter. Kale, collards and chard can be chopped and frozen in a plastic bag for addition to soups and stir frys. Don't forget to check out this week's recipe section of the newsletter for some distinctive, flavorful recipes for your abundant basil and tomatoes!

Have any questions or anything unusual to relate about your garden? Please remember to give us a call so that we can talk about it or come and take a look. We are here to help.

Your Friends at Growing Places

What's Happening…

- If you missed harvesting some of your vegetables, do not leave them on the ground to rot. This will attract more unpleasant insects and become a breeding place for disease. Remove to trash or compost.
- Go ahead and plant some spinach, lettuce or radishes for a fall crop!
- **Powdery Mildew**
  If you have noticed a powdery white substance on the leaves of your squashes and cucumbers, your plants are probably infected with powdery mildew. The leaves may dry up and turn brown. This disease can be a problem during humid weather with little rain (which we have had) and takes hold on plants with dense, shaded foliage where circulation is poor. Pick off affected leaves and compost or put into the trash.

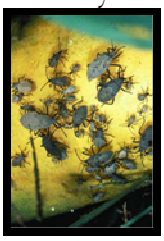
Spray the leaves weekly with 1 tablespoon baking soda dissolved in 1 quart water to treat the disease.

The disease will make the plant produce more slowly but won't stop it.

Tips for a Better Garden…

- With the return of the hot dry weather, there has been very little rain to keep our soil moist. Make sure to keep your garden beds well watered during this dry time. Signs of plant stress due to lack of water include wilted leaves in the early morning (plants with enough water can recover overnight), dry curling leaves all over the plant, not just at the bottom, or wilted looking vegetables.
- Weed, weed, weed - Yes, it is still important to weed. Right now the crabgrass seed heads are maturing and just waiting to toss themselves all over your garden so they can grow next year.
- Start a few squares of lettuce. It likes the cool weather and chances are you will at least be able to enjoy some great baby lettuce if it gets too cold before the heads form.
- If you have been seeing small flies or gnats in your kitchen, they're probably fruit flies. Fruit flies can be a problem year round, but are especially common during late summer/fall because they are attracted to ripened or fermenting fruits and vegetables. Construct a trap by placing a paper funnel (rolled from a sheet of paper) into a jar which is then baited with a few ounces of cider vinegar. Place the jar trap wherever fruit flies are seen. This simple but effective trap will soon catch any adult flies which can then be killed or released outdoors.

- **Squash bug nymphs** can be found running around your squash plants at this time of the year. They are small grayish insects that are often found on the leaves of squash, pumpkins, cucumbers and melons. You can handpick them and destroy them. Place a board on the ground near your plants and check underneath in the morning. Dump nymphs into soapy water.



Melons!

Oh so delicious! Oh so hard to wait for! And oh so tough to tell when they are ready to pick. Melons create a mystery all their own with their small globes that become huge sometimes overnight. We know it's hard to wait for them to be perfectly ripe, but they taste best that way.

Here are some growing tips:

• Don't water melons as frequently as your other plants. Giving too much water now can cause cracking or a bland taste.

• Remove any flowers from the vines. This will redirect the plants' energy towards ripening the remaining fruits instead of trying to grow new ones (there aren't enough days left in the season for these flowers to mature fully into melons).

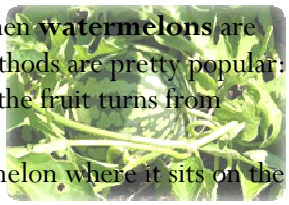
• If you have melons growing up a trellis and are concerned about them falling off, you can create a sling for them from old pantyhose or socks.

• All the melons on a single plant will ripen at about the same time

• After harvest, refrigerate muskmelons (such as cantaloupe) to preserve sweetness. Honeydew and watermelon can be stored in a cool humid spot out of direct light. But remember, they won't keep long so eat as soon as possible and enjoy!

And some harvesting tips:

- For **most melons** (except watermelon), the fruit is ripe when the rind changes from gray-green to yellow-tan. The fruit is still firm, but can be fairly easily separated from the stem with gentle thumb pressure.
- It's a bit harder to tell when **watermelons** are ripe. The following 3 methods are pretty popular:
  1) the tendril nearest to the fruit turns from green to brown;
  2) the underside of the melon where it sits on the ground is yellow;
  3) tapping it lightly produces a low-pitched "thump" instead of a high-pitched "ping".



Garden Spot Light

The Luther Burbank Middle School (LBMS) garden in Lancaster was a fantastic project which, in addition to providing the students with good healthy food, was a fun learning experience for everyone involved. It was a joint venture of the Junior Life Skills Program and the SPED PAC (Parents Advisory Council) and was funded by a generous gift from the 8th grade class. The Junior Life Skills Program is a public school class for students ages 11-14 with significant special needs.

All of the kids, teachers and volunteers got together in the late spring to build and plant the garden. It was exciting to see so many people ready to help and the kids really seemed to enjoy participating. They filled endless wheelbarrows of soil and dumped them into the three wooden raised beds. They loved mixing the soil "recipe" (fertilizer and vermiculite) in the beds and stirred it with their rakes and shovels like they were mixing giant cauldrons of soup! They carefully planted the seeds and plants into the designated squares and even had fun hammering in the stakes to make a nice fence. The garden was placed near the entryway of the school summer program which enabled everyone to watch the lush garden grow before their eyes.

The students helped care for the garden by watering it over the six week summer program and were able to observe the different phases of garden plants from seed to veggies. Additionally they harvested some of the produce as it matured and the students from the life skills class plan to use the veggies to make refreshments for the upcoming SPED PAC meeting!

Recipes…

Kate's Mom's Blender Pesto

(This is wonderful on cooked pasta or as a base sauce for homemade pizza)

Ingredients:

2 cups fresh basil (lightly packed)
½ cup olive or vegetable oil
2 tablespoons pine nuts or walnut pieces
2 cloves garlic (lightly crushed)
1 teaspoon salt
½ cup parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons pecorino cheese (optional)
3 tablespoons softened butter

Preparation:

1. Put basil, oil nuts, garlic and salt in blender, blend until smooth; see Note below.
2. When blended, beat in the grated cheese by hand.
3. Beat in the softened butter.
4. Before spooning over pasta, at about 1 tablespoon of the hot water in which the pasta was boiled.

Note: Pesto can be frozen! Just put the blended basil, oil, nuts, garlic and salt into ice cube trays and freeze for about 4 hours. The pesto cubes can be stored in plastic bags and kept until you need a taste of summer. Add the rest of the ingredients after thawing.

Tabbouleh Salad with Tomatoes

(adapted from the New York Times Cookbook)

¾ cup med-fine cracked bulgur wheat *(available in the rice/ethnic food section of most grocery stores)*
4 tablespoons olive or other oil
¾ cup chicken or vegetable broth
3 cups lettuce cut into bite-size pieces
½ cup peeled tomatoes, seeds removed, cut into small cubes
1 cup coarsely chopped parsley
¼ cup finely chopped mint
¾ cup chopped scallions
2 tablespoons lemon juice
Fresh ground pepper to taste

Preparation:

1. Put cracked wheat into small sauce pan and add 2 tablespoons of oil; stir to coat grains; set aside and let stand 5-10 minutes.
2. Add broth to cracked wheat and cook over very low heat for about 1minute, stirring.
3. Remove sauce pan from heat and set aside to cool
4. Put cracked wheat into a 2 quart mixing bowl and, using your fingers, break up the lumps.
5. Add the chopped greens and vegetables and stir to combine thoroughly.
6. Add the lemon juice and pepper and stir to combine.

Serves 6-8 as a side dish.

On the last day of school they had a nice party which most of the parents attended. The students made zucchini brownies which my son Will, who has major food phobias, ate and liked! I never would have imagined that he'd eat zucchini in any form!

The GPGP garden has provided the students and volunteers not only with the opportunity to learn gardening skills, but with the chance to strengthen their social skills and experience the sense of joy and accomplishment that comes with nurturing and caring for living things. Through the garden, the special needs students were able to interact with members of the general student body on a common project.

I'm sure that the students take great pride every time they walk by their beautiful garden full of fresh produce and flowers. Children today need to be more connected with the world outside and should develop an understanding of where their food comes from, how it grows and most of all how delicious fresh food is. (except hot peppers-WHAT WERE WE THINKING!)

I think the students will enjoy this activity for many years to come. Thank you GPGP for providing all the materials and being so organized on planting day which really helped make it a huge success! Great job!

Story submitted by:
Lori Colby
Vice Chair of the Nashoba SPED PAC and parent of a student in the Life Skills class

Growing Places on the web

Our Website:

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Volunteer Opportunities

Do you want to get more involved in Growing Places Garden Project? Contact us at staff@growingplaces.org to learn more about our volunteer opportunities.

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Things to Remember

POSTPONED!

This year's Harvest Celebration on 10/21 has been postponed. Watch for more information and a **new date** coming soon.

Don't Forget...

To check your GPGP Growing Guide if you have a gardening question or are looking for information!

(Photo courtesy of Bill Shrader)

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