

Growing Times



September 18, 2010 Volume 7, Issue 6

Building Gardens, Growing Gardeners

Hello Gardeners!

What a wonderful week we have had – brilliant, sunny skies, delicious, drenching rain, and perfect temperatures for being outdoors. The very best of New England!!


The onset of cooler temperatures means that your warm weather crops will really slow down their production. Cool crops like this weather and your lettuce and spinach should be looking and tasting mighty fine. And new crops are probably starting to ripen in your garden – winter squash and pumpkins! See below for tips on ways to tell when they are just right for harvesting. Be sure to also check out this week's article called *Time to pinch the flowers* to learn how to help your garden transition from summer to fall and get the most out of the remaining produce that is there.

We also have several volunteer openings to tell you about. First, we have an ***immediate need*** for Board Members to help with strategic planning. We also need Garden Mentors (to help 1st year gardeners) and Team Leaders (coordinate garden installation) for next spring. All training and materials are provided by GPGP. While it may seem early, we already have the applications for many new gardens rolling in and **WE NEED YOU!!**

Keep picking those vegetables and, as always, please give us a call if you have questions, concerns, successes or funny stories. We are here to help you.

Your Friends at Growing Places

What's Happening...

- Remove plants that are no longer producing – put into trash or compost.
 - Do you have radishes that have gone to seed? Try adding the seed pods to salads – they are quite tasty and very mild.
 - Old sheets or light-weight shower curtains are great for protecting your garden from frost. If it's going to be cold, just drape them over your plants in the early evening and remove them the next morning.
 - Did you know that the full moon nearest the first day of fall (Wednesday, 9/22) is called the harvest moon because it rises shortly after sunset and provides farmers with enough extra light to harvest their crops longer during those days. Watch for the harvest moon to rise next week on Thursday night! (9/23)
 - First and second year GPGP gardeners will be receiving bags of compost by their gardens around the middle of October. Instructions for using the compost will be included in the bags. This will provide food for your soil to absorb over the winter months so it is ready to go next spring.
-  **Help is needed to deliver garlic and compost. Email d.mackie@comcast.net if you can assist.**
- Now is also a good time to make a plan of your garden beds so that you don't plant the same crop in the same place next year. Rotating your crops helps to prevent disease and is a good way to make sure that your soil does not get depleted of nutrients.

Tips for a Better Garden...

- Keep watering the garden – a good deep watering three times a week is better than a little every day.
- It is important to remove any rotten or dried up produce and leaves from the garden beds. These are sanctuaries for insect and disease pests!!! Yuck, definitely not what we are trying to “cultivate!”
- The weeds are beginning to drop their seeds now, so it is important to keep weeding. Every un-weeded weed can become hundreds next season!
- Now is the time to consider buying veggies inexpensively at your local farm or farmers' market and freezing or canning them. This will save you lots of money AND you will have a nutritious taste of summer to get you through those long winter months. Check out www.localharvest.org to find the farmers' market nearest you.
- It's not too late to plant salad greens and spinach. Even if winter comes early you are sure to get some tender and delicious “baby greens.”
- Keep HARVESTING! Share any extra you are unable to eat or preserve, everyone is grateful for homegrown veggies!



New Crop – Winter Squash

The winter squashes – acorn, butternut, pumpkins, etc – are starting to ripen. These are great sources of nutrition that last into the winter and possibly spring. They often store very well in a cool dry location for several months. Acorn, delicata and spaghetti squash should be eaten first, since they do not store as long as butternut and buttercup squash. So how do you know when to harvest these squashes? There are two characteristic signs that indicate that winter squash is ready to harvest:

- The stem starts to shrivel up and dry;
- The skin is so hard that you can't cut it with your thumbnail. (Pumpkins are an exception as their skin tends to stay a bit soft even when ripe – the orange color is a good indicator, however.)

Cut squashes from vine with a sharp knife leaving 1-2 inches of stem. A little bit of stem keeps the squash from rotting. All winter squash *with the exception of acorn squash* will benefit from curing or drying, which toughens their skins and prolong their storage life. Cure harvested squash by letting them sit outside in the sun for 5-7 days. Store cured squash in a cool, dry location with good air circulation until ready to use. Acorn squash has the shortest storage time, so be sure to use them early (within a month or two). Other winter squashes can be stored for 3 or more months. Enjoy!

The Mighty Kale!

Just what is kale and why is it worth growing in the garden? Well, for one thing, kale is a powerhouse: it has slightly less iron than spinach, but 3 times more vitamin C, more vitamins A and B and more calcium, potassium and protein. Maybe Popeye should have eaten kale instead of spinach! It is also very easy to grow, produces continuously all season and can continue to produce into the fall and winter. In fact, frost actually improves the taste of this fine vegetable. It also can be stored in the fridge in a plastic storage bag from 2 weeks to a month or chopped up and stored in the freezer. Pretty good! To harvest kale, simply use a sharp knife to cut the leaves from the plant near the stalk. Usually it's best to take them from the bottom to keep the plant producing more at the top.

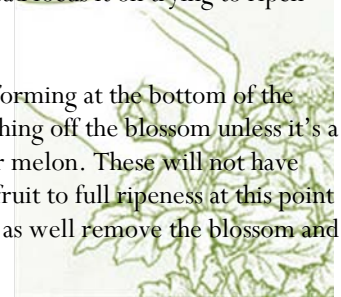


Since kale has a thicker leaf than spinach (more like cabbage and collards), it needs to cook longer to make it tender. It's often best to remove the thick rib running down the center of the leaf since this is pretty tough. Kale cooks down a lot so what might look like tons is likely to shrink to a small amount. It is delicious stir-fried with a little olive oil and garlic, covering it with a lid for a while to "steam" it a bit. Kale is also great when added to soups and stews.

Time to pinch the flowers...

Since your garden is starting to slow down its production, you want to do whatever you can to finish ripening the fruits and vegetables that are currently in the process of growing in your garden. In order to do this, you can pinch off any blossoms that you might be seeing—use a sharp scissors or knife, or even your fingers to remove the blossom from the stem. Removing the blossom will direct the energy in the plant away from trying to create a new fruit or vegetable and instead focus it on trying to ripen what is currently growing.

If there is a fruit forming at the bottom of the blossom don't bother pinching off the blossom unless it's a pumpkin, winter squash or melon. These will not have enough time to develop a fruit to full ripeness at this point in the season so you might as well remove the blossom and the forming fruit.



Good candidates for blossom pinching are pumpkins, winter squashes, melons, tomatoes, peppers and eggplants.

The Cucumber Story

According to the history pages, the Roman Emperor Tiberius enjoyed cucumbers so much that he insisted on eating them at every meal. Cucumbers can be used in a variety of ways:



Cucumbers contain most of the vitamins you need every day, just one cucumber contains Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2, Vitamin B3, Vitamin B5, Vitamin B6, Folic Acid, Vitamin C, Calcium, Iron, Magnesium, Phosphorus, Potassium and Zinc.



Using a pen and made a mistake? Take the outside of the cucumber and slowly use it to erase the pen writing, also works great on crayons and markers that the kids have used to decorate the walls!!



Tired of your bathroom mirror fogging up after a shower? Try rubbing a cucumber slice along the mirror, it will eliminate the fog and provide a soothing, spa-like fragrance.



Looking for a 'green' way to clean your faucets, sinks or stainless steel? Take a slice of cucumber and rub it on the surface you want to clean, not only will it remove years of tarnish and bring back the shine, but it won't leave streaks and won't harm your fingers or fingernails while you clean.



Out of WD 40 and need to fix a squeaky hinge? Take a cucumber slice and rub it along the problematic hinge, and voila, the squeak is gone!

(Excerpted from the NY Times, 'Spotlight on Home Series')

Recipes...

Zucchini Lemon Muffins

(Adapted from Cooking Light)

2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
2 teaspoons grated lemon rind
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 cup coarsely shredded zucchini
3/4 cup skim milk
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 large egg
Cooking spray



Combine the first 6 ingredients in a bowl, and make a well in center of mixture. Combine zucchini, milk, oil, and egg; stir well. Add to flour mixture, stirring just until dry ingredients are moistened.

Divide batter evenly among 12 muffin cups coated with cooking spray. Bake at 400° for 20 minutes or until golden. Remove from pans immediately, and let cool on a wire rack.

Garlicky Pasta with Fresh Tomatoes and Basil

(Adapted from Cooking Light)

The garlic flavor in this recipe is pronounced; reduce the amount to 2 cloves, if you prefer. If you can't find campanella, try orecchiette, fusilli, shells or elbows.

3 tablespoons olive oil
3 garlic cloves, minced
5 cups chopped plum tomatoes or other tomatoes (about 2 pounds)
6 cups hot cooked campanella (about 12 ounces uncooked pasta)
1/3 cup chopped fresh basil
1/4 cup (1 ounce) grated fresh Parmesan cheese
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
Heat olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add minced garlic; sauté 30 seconds. Add chopped tomatoes; cook for 2 minutes or until thoroughly heated, stirring occasionally. Add pasta, basil, cheese, salt, and pepper, tossing gently to combine.

Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 1 1/3 cups)



Garden Spot Light

This week's highlighted garden can be found in Hudson, Massachusetts and belongs to Stephen and his family.



It is overflowing with an end of the summer abundance of vegetables and flowers – including eggplant, tomatoes, summer squash, herbs and lettuce.



They even have a special sentinel keeping watch over the harvest!



Growing Places on the web

Our Website:

www.growingplaces.org

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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

Eat a Rainbow!

Colorful fruits and vegetables deliver healthful doses of vitamins, minerals, and disease-fighting phytochemicals. The darker the color of the fruit or vegetable, the more nutrients it usually contains.

Here are some examples: color green—lettuce, spinach, kiwi, and broccoli; yellow/orange—sweet potatoes, cantaloupe, oranges, and carrots; red—tomatoes, strawberries, cranberries, and apples; blue/purple—blueberries, purple grapes, plums and egg plant; and white—onions, garlic, and leeks.

Source: "The Color Guide", National Cancer Institute



Back to School...

Don't forget to use the fresh veggies from your garden for nutritious school snacks for your kids!

Accompany your veggies with dressings, dips, cheese or peanut butter. Get creative and colorful!

*'Let food be thy medicine and
medicine be thy food'
- Hippocrates*