Growing Times

Hello Gardeners!

As the New England harvest season starts to pick up in earnest, good garden hygiene moves to the forefront of our recommendations for keeping your garden in top form. While you enjoy the pleasures of sun-warmed cherry tomatoes and fresh garlic that you’ve been waiting for since fall (see Harvesting Garlic Bulbs), know that you’re also taking steps to keep your garden healthy. Fruits and vegetables that are allowed to rot on the stem or vine will quickly become a breeding ground for disease, so harvesting regularly is like giving your garden a good scrub, leaving it nice and clean. As you’ll read in Tomato Troubles, garden hygiene can not only prevent, but can also treat some instances of disease.

As you scour your garden for ripe veggies, be on the lookout, too, for signs of pests. In Bugs Behaving Badly, we highlight the symptoms, treatment, and after-care for the dreaded Squash Vine Borer, which is unfortunately common.

Now is the time for vigilance. Harvest, weed, inspect, and water your garden consistently and it will reward you with fresh fruits and veggies all summer long. If you have questions, especially about harvesting or pest ID, ask your mentor or call one of us in the office. We’re here to help.

Happy Gardening!

Your Friends at Growing Places
978.598.3723

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Veggie Wrap-Up

- If your squash plants appear to wilt despite watering, check for Squash Vine Borer holes and remove the pests if needed.
- Identify and treat tomato blights with careful pruning and good garden hygiene.
- Now is the time to harvest, cure, and store your garlic bulbs.

Bugs Behaving Badly

Pesky garden bugs are out in force now. They can be found hard at work munching tender plant leaves and boring into plant stems. One of the worst of the bunch is the Squash Vine Borer (photo, right).

If you notice orange slush or grains along your squash vines, along with cracking stems or holes, you have borers. The vines wilt and become limp, despite your best watering efforts, as all the goodness is sucked out from within. All of the vine’s energy is drawn away from your growing squash and the plant will soon die. There is only one remedy and it takes patience, a steady hand and a sharp knife, so adults only please! Continued on page 4
Most of us have yellow flowers and little green tomatoes in our vegetable gardens now, which are a very welcome part of summer gardening. Less welcome are the yellow spotted leaves some of us have been finding when we go out to water each morning. The likely cause of this are two forms of soil borne fungi. Early Blight, and Septoria Leaf Spot, will cause a previously healthy plant to develop a spattering of brown spots on the lower leaves which becomes a quick progression of spotting and yellowing from branch to branch. If left unchecked, the infection will work its way up the whole plant, reducing tomato yield and finally destroying the plant, but Growing Places has the following tips to help you cope with Tomato Trouble.

If the infection is confined to the lower leaves...
Cut off the infected branches with scissors and discard them. Don’t lay the branches or stems on the ground while you work. Wipe your scissors with a bleach wipe after each cut to avoid transferring the disease to healthy sections of the plant. Either put the diseased leaves on the burn pile, or put them in a trash bag. Be sure to wash your hands. Mulch around the tomato plant and be very careful to water gently at soil level without wetting the leaves. Keep the area around the tomato plant clear of weeds to allow good air circulation. Whenever possible, only pinch back the shoots on your tomatoes and tie up new branches when the leaves are dry to avoid contamination. Good garden hygiene is your best defense against fungal diseases.

If the infection has spread beyond the lower leaves...
Follow the same procedures above and remove all the infected parts of the plant, making certain to pick up any shriveled leaves from the soil surface. Once the disease has reached this stage, the only way to hold it in check is by spraying the plant. Copper sulphate spray is widely available at garden centers and large retailers and is a certified organic bio control for both of these difficult-to-treat tomato diseases. We recommend that you read the instructions very carefully before spraying.

At the end of the growing season, do not compost your tomato plants. Remove them from the beds, clean the area around them of debris and either burn the plants or put them out with your trash.
Be sure to let Growing Places know if you experience Early Blight and Leaf Spot so that they can record it.

Although frustrating, however, these diseases should not be confused with Late Blight, a particularly virulent fungus that occurs towards the latter part of the growing season and affects a wide variety of plants. Late Blight was responsible for the Irish Potato Famine and all cases should be reported to the University of Massachusetts Amherst Extension. We’ll keep you updated on this in a future newsletter.

- Contributed by Gaynor B.

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**Do-It-Yourself Bug Repellant**

Mosquitoes eating you alive? Consider a do-it-yourself repellant using 10-25 drops of essential oils combined with 2 tbsps. of a carrier oil. Apply every 2 hours, avoiding sensitive skin as plant oils can irritate.

**Essential Oils** (mixing varieties improves repellant strength; can be found at local health food stores): Cinnamon; Lemon Eucalyptus; Citronella; Castor; Rosemary

**Carrier Oils:** Olive; Sunflower; Vegetable
**Quick Pickled Beets**

- 8 medium beets, ends trimmed and scrubbed
- 4 small onions, sliced and rings separated
- ½ cup liquid from boiled beets
- ½ cup white vinegar
- ½ cup honey
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon cloves

Bring beets and enough water to cover to a boil over high heat. Reduce to medium and continue to boil for 45 minutes. With 5 minutes remaining, add onion slices. Drain beets and onions, reserving ½ cup of the liquid; set aside.

While the beets and onions cool, add beet liquid, vinegar, honey, salt, cinnamon, and cloves to medium sauce pan and bring to a boil.

Peel beets under running water (should be easy once beets are cooled) and slice. Add sliced beets and onions to a Mason jar or air tight container of your choosing. Cover beets with boiled liquid, cover, and refrigerate at least 24 hours before eating.

- From the kitchen of Anna F.

**Harvesting Garlic Bulbs**

If you are a second-year or returning gardener, you probably have garlic ready for harvest. For New Englanders, harvest can be done mid July to early August. You’ll know when to harvest when the green stalks begin to yellow and fall over.

**How to Harvest**

Try to dig up your bulbs before the stalks are completely dry so that the garlic doesn’t start to decay in the ground. Feel around the base of the stalks to find the edges of the bulb and then gently lift the bulb to the surface with a trowel or garden fork. Carefully brush off the soil, or wipe it clean with paper towels. If you like, you can trim the roots. While you might want to set one bulb aside to use right away, the rest can be stored for later use.

**Curing Garlic**

In order to store garlic and enhance the flavor, allow your garlic bulbs to “cure.” This is the process of letting the outer layers of the garlic bulb and the neck of the stalks dry out. Curing prevents the garlic from losing more moisture while it’s in storage.

To do this, you can either bundle your garlic together with string and hang upside down, or braid the stalks and hang the braid. Either way, make sure all sides of the bulb get good air circulation and are out of the sun.

The bulbs are cured when the wrappers are dry and papery. This usually takes about four weeks. Remove the dirtiest wrappers by gently rubbing the bulbs between your palms, but don’t strip them completely.

**Proper Storage**

Bulbs should be stored in a cool dark, dry place for several months. Be wary of basements in this humid weather; the salad drawer of your refrigerator is a better option.

**This Year’s Harvest**

Despite loving care and early planting some gardeners have found this year that their harvested garlic is tiny. While it still tastes wonderful, the harvest won’t last long. Hopefully you will have more success with yours! If not, don’t be discouraged. There is always next year, right?

- Contributed by Gaynor B.

**Humans have been using garlic for over 7,000 years. This includes Ancient Egyptians’ use of it for culinary and medicinal purposes.**
**Bugs Behaving Badly, Cont’d**

Start at the hole, usually towards the base of the vine, and carefully cut into it, gently opening the incision inch by inch. Do not sever the vine. You will notice that the vine is empty and usually filled with more orange “frass,” the waste squash bugs leave behind as they work their way through the plant.

Continue to gently slice along the vine until you find one or more white grubs. Use your knife blade to remove the grub from the vine and discard it. If the remainder of the vine is filled with vegetative fibers, you have successfully removed your borer. If not, there are more inside and you will need to continue the process. To finish, bury the cut section of the vine under the soil to encourage fresh root growth.

—Contributed by Gaynor B.

**Farmers Market**

Looking to add to your harvest and want fruits and veggies grown locally? Stop by the farm stand at Sholan Farms to check out their produce for sale.

Summer hours begin Tuesday, July 23rd with the farm opening Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 9am-12pm.

**Address:** 1125 Pleasant St., Leominster

**Pick-your-own:**
- Raspberries
- Blueberries
- Blackberries *(limited supply)*

**At the farm stand now:**
- Garlic
- Kale
- Red Swiss Chard
- Green Swiss Chard
- Basil
- Kohlrabi
- Beets

**Coming soon:**
- Summer Squash
- Zucchini
- Cucumbers
- Peaches
- Radishes
- Peppers
- Eggplants