A Gardening We Go!

The gardening season is well underway and you should be seeing lots of green in your garden by now – tiny shoots, small seedlings, and if you are lucky maybe even some lettuce or spinach to harvest! As the weather continues to become reliably warm, the pace of the plants’ growth will really pick up. How exciting it is to see the changes in the garden as you nurture and care for it.

With the dedication and support of over 100 fabulous volunteers, we have reached our goals and successfully completed the installation of this season’s raised bed and container gardens. A huge thank you to everyone who has generously donated their time and talents to help us achieve our mission of feeding families together! Don’t forget to give your mentor a call if you have any questions or problems. He or she is a great resource for answers to your gardening questions.

Your Friends at Growing Places

What’s Happening…

- Your first crops should be ready for harvesting! Be sure to watch for lettuce, peas, collards, swiss chard, garlic scapes, and radishes.

- With lettuce and greens, instead of pulling out the whole plant, you can trim off leaves for a fresh salad or steamed greens every day.

- Cutworms - if you are bothered by severed beans, eggplant, and other plants you may have cutworms. Dig carefully with your fingers around the root of the plant. You will be sure to find a 3/4 to 1 inch little grayish worm. Squish it and then put the dirt back around the base of the plant. No more troubles! Plant something in its place if what was growing there has died.

- Test the soil in your garden before watering. To do this, stick your finger in down to the knuckle...is it dry or wet? If it feels wet, you do not need to water. If it feels dry and there is no rain in the forecast, water thoroughly at the base of the plant stem with your watering can or sprinkler.

Tips for a Better Garden…

- Even seasoned gardeners have to stay on top of their gardens daily if only for a short while inspecting for bug damage like chewed leaves, sawed off stems, droppings on any leaves. Also, note the leaf color and how the plant is growing.

- Pick weeds as they come! This makes for a cleaner garden and prevents them from crowding the roots of your veggies.

- Plant another square or two of bush beans for a continuous crop.

- Thin carrot seedlings to about 1 inch apart.

- Plant radishes around your squash, melon and cucumber plants. Radishes help to keep the squash bugs away.

For quick answers to all your questions, please refer to your Growing Guide…a great reference book with pictures and descriptions.
If the garlic that you planted last fall has not already done so, it will soon be sending up a long thin curving stalk. On that stalk you will find a bulge which is the seedpod that forms on hard-neck garlic plants in June. The stalk and the seedpod are called a “scape”. It is best to remove the scape with a sharp knife or scissors so that the plant puts its energy into growing a nice fat garlic bulb instead of the scape. But don’t throw out your scapes! With mild garlic flavor and aroma they are wonderful additions to stew, roasts, marinade, salads, sandwiches, sauces, bread, pasta, pesto, stir-fry, roasted, or even steamed and eaten as a vegetable. The possibilities are endless!

When the scapes are newly-budded and still in full curl, they are tender and provide a delightfully subtle garlic flavor. Cut them when they curl between 1/2 and 3/4 turn. After the scapes have straightened and the flower top is maturing, they will be tough.

Garlic scapes store well. You can keep batches in the refrigerator for upwards of three weeks, though fresh cut is always the best. Remove all of the stalk tip above the pod [umbel] before cooking.

(Excerpted from www.dakotagarlic.com)

**New Crop… Garlic Scapes**

Staking Tomatoes

Late in the season, tomato plants become so large and heavy that they fall over and their fruit can become damaged. There’s nothing worse than seeing a tomato eaten away by bugs just because it was touching the ground. Staking the plants will help prevent that. You can use tomato stakes specifically designed for the job, or improvise with a tall sturdy stick, old broomstick handle, unused ski pole or just about any straight, strong pole.

To do this, tie the main stem of the tomato to the stake very loosely with strips of soft rags, old panty hose or very soft string or yarn. The stem needs to remain about 1 inch or more from the stake. If you tie the plant stem too tightly to the stake, the tomato will not be able to grow properly. See the picture to the right to get a better idea. Often tomatoes develop many branches from the main stem and these tend to put a heavy load on the plant. You can also tie up these branches to the stake to help keep the entire plant balanced.

**Insect Pests in the Garden**

Color photos of the most common insect pests can be found in your Growing Guide. Once you have identified the pest, you can recognize the type of damage it is causing.

**Chewing damage** - Insects with ‘cutting’ mouth parts tear off plant tissue and chew it. Examples include beetles, caterpillars and grasshoppers that feed on fruit or leaves and often leave holes in the foliage. These insects defecate on plants and soil leaving excrement that may be brown, black or green in color and resemble small flecks or balls.

**Piercing, sucking damage** - Insects and mites with piercing mouthparts ‘suck’ liquids from the plants. Examples include squash bugs, aphids, stink bugs, thrips and mites. Many of the insects that feed in this manner leave a sticky liquid that may support the growth of a black or gray sooty mold. Damaged foliage often will turn yellow and eventually brown in color or become malformed in shape.

**Controlling Pests** – The best control is prevention.

(Excerpted from Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, EPP-7313, Home Vegetable Garden Insect Pest Control)

**Is that a weed?**

It can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between a weed and a newly sprouted plant. A good rule of thumb is to wait until you see a lot of the same looking plant in the area where you believe you planted the seeds.

Small “weedlings” can be readily pulled once you have identified the seedlings and will not take up too much of the seedling’s nutrients in that short a time. Once your seedlings begin to grow, it is important to keep your squares weed-free since weeds can crowd out your plants, and steal their water and nutrients.

For mild tasting radishes, provide even watering. Hot weather and too little or uneven watering can result in tough, very hot radishes.
Recipes...

**Lonnee’s Collards** *(from the Providence Journal Food Section)*

2 T extra virgin olive oil
2 T unsalted butter
3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
2 small onions, minced
5 C chicken stock
1.5 lbs collards, stemmed and roughly chopped (about 8 C)

Salt, ground pepper, and red chile flakes to taste

Heat oil and butter in 6 quart pot over medium heat. Add garlic and onions and cook, stirring often, until soft—6 to 8 minutes. Add chicken stock and bring to a simmer. Add collard greens, cover and cook, stirring occasionally until very tender, about 1 hour. Season with salt, pepper and chile flakes and serve immediately.

*Serves 4*

**Spring Peas with Mint** *(Recipe from Molto Gusto by Mario Batali)*

2 pounds peas in the pod, shelled or 2 cups fresh peas
1 medium red onion, cut into dice about the same size as peas
1/2 Bunch fresh mint, leaves removed and torn into 2 or 3 pieces each
1/4 Cup Red Wine vinaigrette *(recipe below)*

Combine the peas, onion, and mint in a medium bowl and toss with the vinaigrette. Season with salt and pepper and let stand at room temperature for 1 hour to bring out the flavors.

**Red Wine Vinaigrette**

.25 C red wine vinegar
.25 C sparkling water
.5 C extra virgin olive oil

Whisk all ingredients together in a small bowl. May be refrigerated for up to 5 days.

---

**Garden Spotlight**

**Early Season at Growing Places**

Beautiful seedlings from our partner, Applefield Farm in Stow

Planting containers in Leominster

A community of gardeners in Shirley
Local area Farmer’s Markets

Several farmer’s markets have already started for this growing season. They are a great place to meet your neighbors, chat with others who are passionate about gardening and a place for trying something new that you might not have in your garden. Many also accept food stamps and WIC. For a complete list visit www.massfarmersmarkets.org (also available in Spanish and Portuguese)

Farmer’s Markets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gardner</td>
<td>Thu. 8:30-12:00pm Fri. 3:00—6:00 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton</td>
<td>Thu 3:30—6:30pm Now thru 9/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterling</td>
<td>Fri 3:30—6:30pm Now thru 11/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>Friday 3:00—6:00 Now thru 11/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visit our partner, Central Mass Agway, at one of their four locations for all your lawn and garden, pet and outdoor living needs.