Hello Gardeners!

Have you ever noticed that some vegetables grow really well in other gardens in your town and not as well in yours. There may even be rain on one side of town but not the other! Differences in light, dampness, wind, and temperature — also known as microclimates — occur everywhere. They can make a difference even within one garden.

Midsummer is a great time to observe microclimates when you are out in your garden. Shadows cast by trees and buildings will be easy to see. What is growing well and what isn’t? Are any of your plants leaning over trying to get more sunlight? Is it usually windy in your garden? Maybe there are ways to change your planting pattern next year so that your tomatoes will get more sun or your lettuce will get more moisture. You may want to try new crops next year or you may decide that you are satisfied with the way crops are growing. You are the experts on your own gardening conditions. If you can make a quick sketch (or take a photo) of your garden as it is now or as you would like it to be, try to do it this week. By next year, your memory of this year’s garden may be a bit blurry.

Your Friends at Growing Places

What’s Happening…

- Pull garlic out of the ground if you planted it last year, and set it out to cure. (See article following, ‘Time to do the Garlic’)
- Blossom end rot appears as a black spot on the bottom of your tomatoes. It happens when calcium is unevenly distributed in the soil. Make sure to keep the soil around the tomato plant evenly moist, it will help the calcium stay where it belongs.

- **Broccoli**
  - Cut the central head with 5-6” of stem after the head is fully developed and before the individual flowers begin to open.
  - Once the central head has been harvested, smaller shoots will continue to grow and can be harvested. The more these are harvested, the more the plant will produce.

- **Beans**
  - Choose bright colored pods (greens, yellows, and purples!) that are flexible but feel crisp.
  - Be very careful to snap off only the bean, not breaking the stems, or yanking up the whole plant. The plant will continue to produce flowers and fruit if the beans are picked continually and carefully.
  - Pick when the plants are dry to avoid spreading disease.

Tips for a Better Garden…

- Keep checking your plants to make sure you harvest all that is ready to eat. Don’t let vegetables get too large or they start to get tough and lose their taste.

- **Tomato Hornworms** – These tomato leaf devouring caterpillars may appear in your garden! Tomato hornworms are large green caterpillars that grow up to 3-4” long – about the size of your small finger. Despite their size they have excellent camouflage– a light green color with white and black markings and a horn on its bottom. They also have dark brown droppings (also called frass). If you see one caterpillar, look for more.

Remove caterpillars from your tomato plants and drop them in a bucket of soapy water **UNLESS** you see that they have small white bumps coming out of them. The white bumps are the cocoons of a parasitic wasp. Leave those caterpillars and their wasp cocoons alone. The new wasps will kill the caterpillar, grow up and eat other caterpillars – protecting your tomatoes for you!
**Time to do the Garlic!**

When ¾ of the tops of the garlic that you planted last year have yellowed, it’s time to harvest. Check a single bulb by digging gently around it to loosen the soil, and then remove the entire plant. Try not to bruise or nick the bulbs, as they will not store as well. Bulbs should be well segmented and cloves easy to separate – if not they need to grow a bit longer.

Once you have dug them up, brush off excess dirt and spread plants in a single layer on a screen or paper (or tie into bundles to hang) in a warm, dry, airy location out of the sun. After 2-3 weeks, when the bulbs are completely dry (outer skins are paperlike), remove roots and tops leaving 1” of stem. Be sure they are completely dry: improperly dried bulbs will sprout. Store in a mesh bag (old onion bags work well) in a cool, dry location and use them as needed – delicious!

Garlic is used in all kinds of cooking, from Italian to Asian, with vegetables, bread or meat. The smaller a clove of garlic is chopped, the stronger it will be; and the longer it’s cooked, the milder it will be. So crushed raw garlic is the strongest, and slow roasted whole cloves are the mildest. If you’re worried about “garlic breath,” chew some fresh parsley along with your meal. And a little lemon juice will get rid of the smell on the cook’s fingers.

Here’s a quick and easy recipe from [www.garlic-central.com](http://www.garlic-central.com). Use it on everything from bread to baked potatoes.

**Garlic Cheese Spread:**

Whir in a food processor the following ingredients: 8 ounces feta cheese, 8 ounces soft cream cheese, 1-2 tablespoons plain yogurt (less for a thick spread, more for a vegetable or chip dip), 4 cloves of crushed garlic (adjust to your taste).

That’s it! Store in an airtight container in the fridge.

**An unwelcome visitor!**

While Gini and her husband were away for two weeks, their GPGP garden was visited by an unwelcome guest. Witnessed by a worker out of sight in the backyard, a woodchuck (*Marmota monax*), expertly scaled the garden fence and helped itself to the scrumptious vegetables growing in the garden. After feasting until stuffed, he ambled back to his entry spot on the fence and, with great difficulty due to his now full stomach, climbed up, over and out of the garden. What Gini found when she returned home was a garden full of chomped vegetables and a misshapen fence that the woodchuck had used as a ladder!

The woodchuck, also known as a groundhog, is a large rodent well adapted for digging, with short but powerful limbs and curved, thick claws. Mostly herbivorous (plant eating), groundhogs primarily eat wild grasses and other vegetation, and berries and agricultural crops when available. They are at their busiest from midday to late afternoon, though they might make an early morning or late evening appearance. To help keep woodchucks out of your garden:

- eliminate hiding or nesting areas, such as brush piles and nearby tall grass.
- seal off access to crawl spaces beneath your porch or deck.
- minimize other food sources - cover your compost pile; clean up birdseed

The good news is that since Gini’s return home the woodchuck has not been seen in the area - and her garden has had a chance to rebound from the abundant sunshine and recent rains.
Recipes…

Gloria’s Chicken and Greens
This recipe comes from one of our gardeners and mentors. It is her easy, flexible and scrumptious way to use the abundant greens and cruciferous vegetables from her garden. Experiment and enjoy!

Take chicken breast (approx. 4 oz. boneless per person) and cut into bite size pieces. Stir fry in a little bit of olive oil, and spices (salt, pepper, hots if you like) until done and put to the side. Stir fry in olive oil broccoli, collard, kale, spinach - anything you like and have at hand. Mix the chicken and veggie, add one 16oz container of sour cream and mix. Let it cook for about 5-10 minutes and then sit in the pan for about 10-15 minutes. Serve over white rice. Yummy!!

Sunny Baked Peppers with Tomatoes
Adapted from Parade Magazine, Boston Globe 2000

3 bell peppers
1/4 C olive oil
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
24 ripe cherry tomatoes
1 T capers
1 T fresh thyme
1/4 C balsamic vinegar

Preheat oven to 425 Cut the peppers in half lengthwise; remove core and seeds. Oil a baking dish and arrange peppers cut side up. Brush with oil.

Divide garlic slices among peppers. Place 4 cherry tomatoes in each pepper half. Sprinkle with capers and thyme. Drizzle each with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake for 35 minutes; cool to room temperature. Drizzle lightly with balsamic vinegar just before serving.

Garden Spot Light

This week’s lush garden belongs to Nancy Frasca and highlights one of GPGP’s new container gardens. Nancy is growing tomatoes, herbs, cucumbers, beans, eggplant and more — all in containers!

Look closely and you will see ripening cherry tomatoes, emerald basil, and flame colored nasturtium. Look again and you will discover the innovative way Nancy has employed to secure her tomato plant – by recycling plastic grocery bags! Nice work, Nancy!!
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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Summer 2010 Canning Class Schedule

Chelmsford - Aug 3rd
Gardner - Aug 5th
Littleton - Aug 18th
Lancaster - Aug 19th

Peggy Corbett, a competitive canner who provides canned goods to local shops, will put on a number of canning classes at Central Mass Agway this summer. All classes are 4-6pm in store. Discounts available in the store the day of the class.

Don't Forget...
To take the time to stand back and admire your garden… and pat yourself on the back for all the hard work you have done this season!