Hello Gardeners!

These fall days and nights are truly wonderful! “Good sleeping weather” as we New Englanders say. Your garden is also enjoying this time; the bugs are less numerous and the ground tends to stay moister, especially after the rain we had this week. Keep your ears open for news of a frost in your area and be prepared to follow some of the tips below to deal with your garden if you want to protect the plants that are still producing.

At this point you can most likely put your hoses and watering cans away. Plenty of rain this week and the decidedly cooler temperatures mean that you should be able to rely on Mother Nature for any watering needs until your garden has been set for the winter.

Be sure to check out this week’s recipe section for ideas on ways to use some of your extra green tomatoes. If you have never tried them, they have their own wonderful sweet-spicy taste. The most popular way to eat them is fried. They are quick and fun to make and, as you will see, there is room for lots of creativity with spices. Enjoy!

Your Friends at Growing Places

What’s Happening…

Autumn Frost is on its Way

Autumn has arrived and you may have noticed that the days and nights have become cooler. You may also have noticed that the coolest nights have had very few clouds and little wind. Clear, windless nights are the ones most likely to produce frost. By now many of the plants in your garden have slowed or stopped their growth and some of the area’s trees are already shedding their leaves. Unlike the trees however, most of the vegetables and flowers in your garden are not built to survive Massachusetts’ winters. In fact, most of them will die sometime over the next month or two – probably after the first hard (or killing) frost – when the outside temperature drops to 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

Frost occurs when water in the air becomes cold enough to form ice crystals on the ground and on plants. Sometimes this won’t damage your vegetables. However, when it’s cold enough, the water inside a plant turns into ice and destroys the plant’s structure. Frost damage usually can’t be repaired and the plant usually dies. Warm weather crops like tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, melons, and eggplant are the most likely to be damaged first. Other crops like kale, carrots, spinach and cabbage resist frost damage and can even taste better after a frosty night.

Tips for a Better Garden…

• Harvest, harvest, harvest.
• Water only if we have a dry spell.
• Remove rotting produce to avoid bug and disease issues.
• Remove the string that divides your garden into squares – it will disintegrate over the winter anyhow and it’s easy to restring in the spring.

Planting Garlic

Garlic planting occurs after October 31st – if you plant too soon the bulbs might start to sprout and you will lose your crop. Choose garlic bulbs with crisp, dry skin (paper), not bruised, soft or wrinkly. Crack the bulb and separate the cloves, DO NOT remove the skin. Spacing is 9 cloves/sq ft or 4” apart. Plant cloves root end (blunt end) down and cover with 3-4” of soil. After you have planted your garlic, it is a good idea to mulch the bed. Leaves, compost or straw make good mulches. Water well and then only water again when the soil is dry.

Remember, garlic loves water and food, but it must have good drainage or it will rot. Keep the weeds away from your garlic at all times; you either grow weeds or garlic, but not both! Every clove you plant will become a whole head of garlic by July!

If you requested garlic from us, you will be receiving a delivery of it closer to planting time.
If a frost is forecast:

- Check your previous newsletters for storage tips and then harvest as many tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, melons, squash, basil, etc. as you can – even your green tomatoes can be wrapped individually in newspaper and placed in a cool dark area to ripen slowly (not the refrigerator; it’s too cold).

- Cover your garden with large lightweight pieces of cloth, such as old bed sheets or a shower curtain, in the evening before a frost is predicted and take them off the next morning. Looks funny but it works!

- Put a mulch layer of hay over your root crops and leave it there until you are ready to harvest them.

COLD TEMPERATURE TOLERANCE OF VEGETABLES AND HERBS
(COURTESY OF WWW.HORT.PERDUE.EDU)

- Tender (damaged by light frost)
  
  Beans  Cucumber
  Eggplant  Melon
  Pepper  Pumpkin
  Tomato  Basil

- Semi-hardy (tolerate light frost)

  Beets  Carrot
  Cauliflower  Chard
  Lettuce

- Hardy (tolerate hard frost)

  Broccoli  Brussels sprouts
  Cabbage  Collards
  Kale  Kohlrabi
  Parsley  Oregano
  Thyme  Peas
  Radish  Spinach

Did You Know…

That early frosts will often occur in valleys rather than in hilly areas? Cold air is heavier than warm and while the warmer air rises to the hills. If you live on a hill, you might be lucky when the first frosts hit and not see any damage to your garden.

Harvesting and Storing Fresh Carrots

To know when carrots are ready, look for dark green foliage, bright orange flesh, and a root that is about the size predicted on the seed packet and/or is about 1/2 inch across at its top. Pick those carrots with the largest roots first, so the rest have more room to grow. If you leave them in the ground too long, they’ll get too big and woody and lose their flavor.

Generally, carrots will maintain their sweetness and nutritional value for about 4 or 5 weeks. To prevent them breaking when you pull them from the ground, use a tined garden fork to lift them out of the soil. Carrots will keep in the refrigerator washed, with the tops cut off for 2 to 4 weeks. They stay crisp longer if stored in a plastic bag. If the carrots get a bit limp, they can usually be restored to some crispness by soaking them in cold water for about 30 minutes.

When the frost arrives, use the garden as a refrigerator. The last crop can stay in the soil under a winter mulch of 10 or 12 inches of leaves or bales of hay. Cut off the tops before you put out the thick mulch. Harvest them, a few at a time, as long as the ground doesn’t freeze solid… If the ground freezes it is impossible to dig up your carrot-sicles.

Harvesting and Storing Cabbage

Harvest cabbage anytime after the heads form. Test that the heads are solid (firm to pressure), but harvest before they pass their prime and crack or split. Late fall or winter cabbage can be stored for several months in humid conditions as close to freezing as possible. Pull out the cabbages and hang in a moist cellar, roots and all, or cut heads, remove loose outer leaves and spread one layer deep on shelves or pallets in a moist cellar. Store only disease free heads.

Harvesting, Ripening and Storing Tomatoes Before the Frost

It's important to harvest tomatoes before a frost hits because frosted tomatoes won't ripen. You can often stretch the tomato harvest several weeks by covering the vines with burlap, an old sheet, or heavy paper in the evening when frost is predicted. When the time comes, bring still-green tomatoes indoors and store them in a single layer, inside a paper bag until ripe, or hang the entire plant (minus roots) upside down and in a paper bag to help ripen still-attached fruit. Or use those unripe tomatoes and enjoy fried green tomatoes (recipe below!), green tomato relish, jam, salsa…..
Recipes...

CARROTS GLAZED WITH BALSAMIC VINEGAR AND BUTTER

Courtesy of www.epicurious.com: Bon Appétit Dec 2000
Good for a large group or cut in half for a smaller group
1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
3 1/2 pounds peeled baby carrots or regular carrots, peeled, cut
into 2-inch pieces, halved lengthwise
6 tablespoons sugar
1/3 cup balsamic vinegar
1/4 cup chopped fresh chives

Melt butter in heavy large pot over medium heat. Add carrots and sauté 5 minutes. Cover and cook until carrots are crisp-tender, stirring occasionally, about 7 minutes. Stir in sugar and vinegar. Cook uncovered until carrots are tender and glazed, stirring frequently, about 12 minutes longer. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add chives and toss to blend. Transfer to bowl and serve.
Makes 10 servings

FRIED GREEN TOMATOES

Adapted from Jan in Harvard
A great way to use up those extra tomatoes that just won’t have time enough to ripen.

1-3 tbsp oil or enough for frying
Flour, preferably whole wheat but not necessary
Eggs with a little milk beaten in
Bread crumbs
Any spices you might like (oregano, basil, whatever)
Green tomatoes

Pour oil in pan and heat over medium heat. Mix together breadcrumbs and spices. Slice the tomatoes into 1/4 to 1/2 inch slices (thinner slices tend to be crispier) and place them in the flour to coat both sides. Place them in the egg and then in the breadcrumbs, again coating both sides. Put slices in hot oil. Fry until they are golden brown on bottom. Gently turn and fry on other side. Remove from pan and place on paper towel to absorb excess oil. Enjoy!

Garden Spot Light

Check out the bountiful abundance of some of our Fitch St. gardeners!

Look closely to see the slender stalks of corn.…

…the edible green seed pods of okra…

…And the beautiful flowers framing the whole scene!
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

Nitrogen is important for healthy leaf growth; so many vegetables need a lot of nitrogen from the soil. Coffee grounds are a great way to give your soil a nitrogen boost! Consider some of these possibilities:

- Sprinkle a thin dusting of used grounds around plants before rain or watering, for slow-release nitrogen.
- Add to compost piles to increase nitrogen balance.
- Mix into soil for houseplants or new vegetable beds.
- Encircle the base of the plant with a coffee and eggshell barrier to repel pests. (Slugs hate caffeine!)

So start saving your coffee grounds! Then when you have an empty square, dig in about 1/4 cup coffee grounds to get a leg up on next year’s plants.

Don’t Forget...

HEALTH BENEFITS OF GARDENING
The rewards are endless:

Enjoyment - from the physical activity
Exercise - improve your endurance, strength, mobility & flexibility
Relaxation - helps you relax and reduce stress levels
Fresh food - provides you and your family with a healthy source of inexpensive fresh food

The National Gardening Association claims that a 180 lb. person burns approx. 202 calories doing general gardening for 30 min, such as watering, planting and weeding.