

The Ithaca Community Gardener

A newsletter of Project Growing Hope / The Ithaca Community Gardens

June 2008

WELCOME to the 2008 GARDENING SEASON!

We have some exciting new and ongoing activities this year starting with a proposal from Challenge Industries to help weed the gardens' shared spaces of invasive plants. The compost team has renewed energy to turn garden weeds and waste into usable compost. And one of our gardener's ideas and initiative has resulted in a Cornell class project to help us look at the options for adding more water spigots to the Gardens' far reaches.

The early good weather has energized all of us: new as well as returning gardeners. We've been pulling weeds, adding manure, building beds, and planting seeds. The board welcomes your ideas, proposals and active work to make the Community Gardens a friendly, green and fun place to garden.



2007- 2008 Board Members

The board meets on the first Wednesday of every month. All garden members are welcome to attend.

- **Cally Arthur**, *Vice President*
- **Dan Clune**, *President*
- **John Dopyera**
- **Ira Handwerker**
- **Ron Liso**
- **Bianca Moebius**, *Secretary*
- **Sheryl Swink**, *Treasurer*

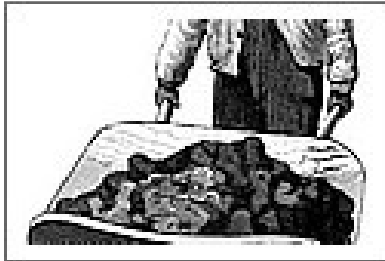
inside this issue...

- 1** Welcome
- 2** Gardening Tips!
- 2** Need Seeds?
- 3** Recipes
- 5** Garden History

GARDENING TIPS

Early Spring Garden Tasks

✦ **Weed young spring weeds. Mulch bare spots in beds.** Any weeds which appear in your garden beds will be easiest to pull now, as the roots are shallow. Covering bare spots with mulch or ground cover will minimize the emergence of new weeds. A depth of 3 to 4 inches is usually sufficient. To help prevent rot, keep mulch a few inches away from tree trunks and the crowns and stems of plants.



✦ **When it's dry enough, 'top dress' beds** with compost or well-seasoned manure in preparation for planting. If your planting beds are established, resist the urge to dig the bed; established beds have a complex soil ecosystem which is best left undisturbed. Nutrients added from the top will work their way down into the soil. If your beds are new or have been fallow for awhile, dig in the manure and compost.

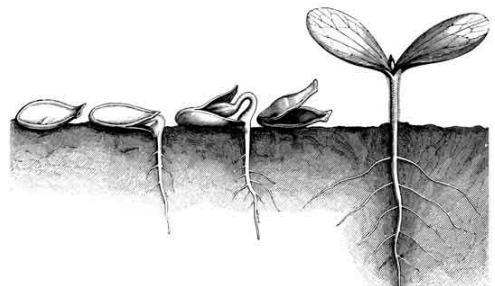
✦ **Plant early spring vegetables when soil is workable.** Soil is ready for gardening once it is free of ice crystals and crumbles easily. Soil that is too wet is easily compacted, reducing beneficial soil aeration. Common early spring crops are peas, spinach, lettuces and other

NEED SEEDS?

The **Seed Cabinet** at the Tompkins County Cooperative Extension has received many generous donations from places like Seed Savers Exchange, FEDCO, Harris Seeds, Thompson & Morgan, Park Seed, Renee's Garden, Heirloom Seeds and Johnny's Seeds.

The Seed Cabinet works like this: everyone is welcome to come and take some seeds for free (a reasonable amount, of course); everyone is also welcome to contribute accurately identified and dated seed to the Seed Cabinet for others to share. We have little envelopes here, or you can use your own envelopes, but be sure to put the year of seed collection on the envelope, as well as the name of the plant.

The Seed Cabinets are in the Agriculture/Environment office at Extension so they are mostly accessible during the work day, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tompkins County Cooperative Extension is located at 615 Willow Avenue in Ithaca (Dey St. exit from Route 13). Call 272-2292 for more information.



Gardening Tips, cont.

greens and leeks. For a prolonged harvest, plant several varieties, each with a different maturation date. Follow these crops with broccoli, cabbage, radishes, kale, turnips, new potatoes and onions.

✦ **Protect seedlings from hard frosts.** Early spring plantings are vulnerable to hard frost which can set in overnight. If you expect a hard frost, cover seedlings overnight with anything you have on hand - an overturned bucket (with a rock on top) or large flower pot, a cloche, or row cover.

✦ **To Mulch or Not to Mulch?**

Mulch is a material that covers the soil of your garden for the purposes of controlling weeds, retaining moisture, fertilizing, warming or cooling the soil, keeping plants clean, helping to prevent erosion, and helping to “grow” good, healthy soil.

Mulch comes in a variety of forms, living or green and organic or those that used to be living. Most organic mulches are pretty easy to use and will improve the soil by adding nutrients as they decompose and encourage earthworm activity.

Leaves, grass clippings*, and straw are very popular mulches at the Community Gardens. Simply spread the mulch on the soil and around your plants. The thickness of the mulch layer is related to the coarseness of the material. For instance, you need less leaves than straw. The finer the mulch, the easier it is to incorporate

RECIPES

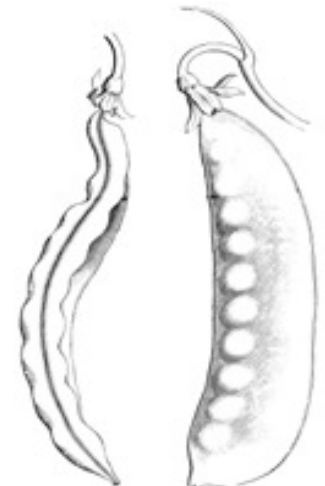
Do you have recipes you would like to share with other gardeners? If so, please send your recipes to Leslie at crone03@gmail.com for inclusion in one of the next newsletters.

Sugar Snap Peas with Toasted Sesame Seeds

- 1 tablespoon peanut oil
- 3 baby portabella mushrooms, sliced (1/2 cup)
- 2 cups fresh sugar snap peas, fresh snow peas or thawed frozen snow peas cut in half
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 1 to 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seed

Wash and string peas, slice mushrooms measure soy and sesame seeds and set aside. Heat oil in a wok or large skillet over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms and stir-fry until lightly browned. Add peas and stir-fry until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Stir in soy sauce. Cover and cook 1 minute longer. Sprinkle with sesame seed and serve.

Makes 4 servings.



Gardening Tips, cont.

into the soil at the end of the season. Some people like to “mow” leaves, chopping them into small pieces, before using them as mulch!

To be most effective, a mulch should be put down around heat loving vegetables (such as tomatoes and peppers) after the soil has warmed, sometime in June. For the cool season crops, the mulch should be applied in early Spring. Eventually mulches can be incorporated into the soil, thereby increasing the organic material in the soil.

Although wood chips can be used for mulch, they may make the soil too acid. Also, wood products break down more slowly and thus provide less nutritive value to the soil. Although not the best mulch, wood chips work well in the isles between planting beds.

There is a fine line between the usefulness of organic mulch for moisture and weed control and creating the perfect environment for pests like slugs or hiding rodents. Be careful not to “over mulch” and check under the mulch frequently for slugs and rodents (voles are popular guests at the Community Gardens).

Living or green mulches work well for tall or climbing crops that will not have to compete with the mulch for sunlight. Plants like clover, a legume that will actually add nitrogen to the soil, make good green mulches. Other examples of living mulches are buckwheat and winter rye. I have planted buckwheat between rows of bean

vines. After the beans are harvested, I pull out the bean vines and turn the buckwheat into the soil. Winter rye, planted in the Fall, can be turned into your soil in the Spring. Give it a couple of weeks to decompose before planting. More organic material to build healthy soil!

* A mulch of entirely fresh grass clippings can smell and might actually inhibit moisture and oxygen penetration into the soil.



Garden History *(first published in the Ithaca Community Gardener, June 2007)*

For 31 years, now, an experiment has been under way in Ithaca known as the “Community Gardens.” Though it is a humble phenomenon, thousands of Ithacans have been closely involved in its progress since 1976. That year a handful of Ithaca residents, all gardeners without land, joined together and started cultivating a vacant lot in their neighborhood. The project proved to be an enjoyable way for the gardeners to produce some of their own food and strengthen their community ties. The Gardens grew quickly as many new families and individuals became interested in what was happening and joined the efforts of the original cultivators. By 1981, 250 households were cultivating plots there, and the soil had become healthy and rich from five years of organic gardening.

Informal cooperation and decision-making played important roles in the early development of the Gardens. But as participation increased, the need for more organization became evident. The creation of a coordinator’s position funded through the Economic Opportunity Corporation and formulation of a Board of Directors elected annually from the ranks of the gardeners filled this need, and gave greater clarity and direction to the expanding efforts of the gardeners. The Community Gardens program soon became established as a community organization serving low-income people (80% of the gardeners in 1981 had incomes below federal poverty levels). In addition, educational activities, such as a free workshop series, and community services, such as assistance in senior citizens’ gardening programs, have all become possible.

The Community Gardens has faced many challenges since those early years. A major frustration occurred in 1982: The site was sold to a developer soon after the City of Ithaca had received a federal grant to purchase the property for the Gardens. The same year no coordinator’s salary was available, due to cuts in the federally-funded EOC budget. These crises were met through the dedication of the gardeners and the support of community members. The gardeners vacated the old Gardens site and leased a new site on a portion of a large tract of land owned by NYSEG. The fresh start was marked with the Gardens’ incorporation under the name of “Project Growing Hope.”

The new site was not exactly a gardener’s paradise. Quack grass grew everywhere in the heavy clay soil. Huge rocks and chunks of cement competed with whatever vegetables were brave enough to grow. A steady stream of traffic rolled along on nearby Route 13, and the location was no longer in a residential area. But the gardeners made the best of it, once again starting the long, patient process of nourishing the soil through organic gardening.

In 1986, the City of Ithaca purchased a ten acre tract where the Gardens is now located. Most of the tract was slated for development for light industrial use.

TO BE CONTINUED in the next newsletter!

From the membership...

Hello gardeners. Some perennial food I've tended for 7 years was almost ready last week. I returned two days later and found it cut and gone with the objects that surrounded and protected it moved away. I doubt a rabbit could have done what I saw. I've no idea whether the taker was a gardener or not. I still get very upset when food is taken, wanting to have choice about sharing my food and consideration from others regarding what I've worked to cultivate and harvest. I hope that if anyone has taken others' food, that you'll consider leaving other gardens alone for these reasons. Imagine your food being taken. And if this has happened, does taking another's food really contribute to the kind of world you want to live in?

I realize that many of us don't know each other by sight. However, I suggest that if you see someone harvesting in another plot who you're guessing isn't that plot's person and you're willing, that you introduce yourself to the person, find out their name and garden "status" and if relevant, let them know that others' gardens are to be left alone, ideally in a friendly manner. If someone's already taken food, you could also call a PGH board member to report what plot and the taker's name. (My plot begins across from the doorway of the Rt 13 side tool shed (2nd plot from big grass walk-way.

Becca Harber

Project Growing Hope/The Ithaca Community Gardens
P.O. Box 606
Ithaca, NY 14850



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED