

The Ithaca Community Gardener

A newsletter of Project Growing Hope / The Ithaca Community Gardens

September 2007



EVERYTHING YOU NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT WORKDAYS (BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK)

Madeline Maher, Workday Coordinator

As we all know, belonging to a community garden means helping out and giving back in some way. The majority of us do this with 'sweat equity', by helping with the many tasks that need to be completed in order for the garden to survive and thrive as it does. When you registered for a plot, you were shown a series of dates of workdays one could participate in. Each gardener, depending on the number of plots one asks for and is assigned, has to fulfill either a work or, if one cannot work for some reason, a monetary requirement. Most of us participate in a garden's workday, which satisfies our membership in the garden and helps build our community, as well. Four hours per plot is the amount we give back; more with multiple plots.

Each of the last Saturdays of the month, April through October, are designated as Gardens Workdays. From 10 o'clock until noon, the current set of tasks gets assigned and completed (usually!). About a week prior to the workday, a reminder is sent out to those who signed up, asking for an RSVP, so we can get a headcount and plan the day. If you signed up for a day you can no longer make, or want to change a date, it's no problem. As long as a workday or other requirement is completed, it does not matter which workday one attends.

As the workday coordinator, I ask the Board and the special task coordinators what needs to be done. I compile the list and send it to our workday leaders, who, themselves, are fulfilling a work requirement by leading the workday. Be sure to check in and give the leader your name so that your hours can be counted and viola! You have fulfilled your requirement and can spend the rest of the summer guilt-free, picking the purslane out of your tomato patch!

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Hawk sightings! At least one hawk has returned to the garden looking for it's dinner! Let us know when and where you see birds of prey at the gardens by emailing the listserve. They are a big help with keeping the rabbits, mice, and other vegetable-eating-critters under control.

GARDENING TIPS

Aerated Compost Tea is an aerobic water solution that has extracted the microbe population from compost along with the nutrients. In simple terms, it is a concentrated liquid created by a process to increase the numbers of beneficial organisms as an organic approach to plant/soil health. Compost teas are distinguished from compost extracts both in method of production and in the way they are used. Teas are actively brewed with microbial food and catalyst sources added to the solution. An air pump bubbles and aerates the solution, supplying plenty of much-needed oxygen. The aim of the brewing process is to extract beneficial microbes from the compost itself, followed by growing these populations of microbes during the 24- to 36-hour brew period. The compost provides the source of microbes, and the microbial food and catalyst amendments promote the growth and multiplication of microbes in the tea.

You can apply the tea with a sprayer to inoculate the phyllosphere*. (Be sure to strain/filter the tea well so it doesn't clog up your sprayer!) Foliar applications of compost tea have been reported to prevent early and late blight on tomatoes and help with powdery mildew.

Compost tea can also be applied as a root feed to inoculate the rhizosphere* by simply watering the plants with the diluted tea about every two weeks. You can also accelerate your compost pile by adding a little compost tea!




**The phyllosphere is a term used in microbiology to refer to leaf surfaces or total above-ground surfaces of a plant as a habitat for microorganisms. The below-ground bacterial habitat (i.e. the root surfaces) are referred to as the rhizosphere.*



NOTE: It is important to remember that raw animal manure and compost are very different things. The composting process, the heating, assures the absence of pathogens like *E. coli*. Do not use raw manure to make Compost Tea!

How to Make Aerated Compost Tea

(you will need an electricity source to make this!)

- Fill a clean 5 gallon bucket or larger tub with water and let it sit overnight for the chlorine to outgas 
- Put 1 cup of inoculant (any well made compost teeming with micro organisms) in a stocking and suspend it in the water 
- Put an airstone in the bottom, attach the air pump and let it start bubbling (A small aquarium pump and airstone will do!) 
- Add ¼ cup of food (unsulfured molasses for most applications) for the bacteria (rapidly reproducing organisms need food to fuel their cell division).
- Let the whole brew bubble for 24 – 36 hours
- Pour the mixture through a strainer to remove any big debris and apply the compost tea to your flower and vegetable plants immediately. The beneficial microbes will begin to die shortly after the air source is removed.

The tea should smell sweet and earthy. If it smells bad, do **not** use it on your plants, but dump the mixture back into your compost pile.

Web resources:

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/compost-tea-notes.html>

<http://www.communi-tea.org/>

<http://www.taunton.com/finegardening/pages/g00030.asp>

PESTO

The name pesto comes from the same Latin root of "pestle," which is fitting as the sauce, in its simplest form, is made by crushing a few key ingredients together. You can make pesto with basil, spinach, garlic greens*, arugula, tomatoes (sun dried) and even chard. You can process them separately or combine what tastes good to you!

Ingredients:

Basil, spinach, garlic greens, etc.
olive oil
garlic cloves
parmesan cheese
pinenuts or walnuts



Processing:

Place basil, garlic, pine nuts, and a little oil in blender or food processor container. Cover and puree until leaves begin to look crushed. Continue adding basil with small amounts of oil to blender, using a rubber spatula to help to combine pureed mixture.

Add Parmesan cheese and 1/8 tsp. salt. Cover and process until pesto mixture is smooth.

For freezing:

Freeze just the processed greens, garlic and olive oil. Add the nuts and cheese after defrosting. This gives the pesto a fresher taste.

* Plant a whole garlic bulb in the Fall. Cut the greens the following Spring when they are about 18 inches tall. Cut them close to the soil. The greens will grow back at least one more time.

Who's Who

Everyone contributes to keeping the gardens a vital community. Gardeners pay memberships and participate in workdays. Board members meet regularly and organize us. Coordinators take on special tasks and help the board keep the daily operations of the garden going. Thanks to everyone for keeping the garden working for us all!

2007- 2008 Board Members

The board meets on the first Tuesday 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*

PURSLANE, a wild edible



What is it?

Although many consider purslane weed, it is eaten throughout much of Europe and Asia as a leaf vegetable. Purslane contains more Omega-3 fatty acids than any other leafy vegetable plant.^[3] It also contains vitamins (mainly vitamin C, and some vitamin B and carotenoids), as well as dietary minerals, such as magnesium, calcium, potassium and iron. Also present are two types of betalain alkaloid pigments, the reddish betacyanins (visible in the coloration of the stems) and the yellow betaxanthins (noticeable in the flowers and in the slight yellowish cast of the leaves). Both of these pigment types are potent antioxidants and have been found to have antimutagenic properties in laboratory studies.

How to use it

The sweet-and sour stems and leaves are good in salads or cooked as a side dish (steam, simmer or sauté 5 to 10 minutes). Use chopped purslane as a thickening agent in soups (like okra). The stems make excellent mini-pickles. Purslane may be preserved for winter use by pickling in apple cider vinegar with garlic cloves and peppercorns.

Try out a recipe in the next column! They come highly recommended.

Cucumber-Purslane-Yogurt Salad

- 2 large Cucumbers, peeled, seeded and cut into quarter-round slices
- 1/4 pound Purslane, large stems removed, washed and drained well
- 2 tablespoons each, Fresh chopped mint, cilantro and chervil
- 4 cups Whole milk yogurt
- 1/4 cup Virgin olive oil
- 3 cloves Garlic, puréed with the blade of a knife
- 2 teaspoon ground Coriander
- kosher Salt and ground Black Pepper

Place the cucumber, purslane and herbs into a large bowl. In another bowl, stir together the yogurt, olive oil and garlic, coriander and season to taste with salt. Add the yogurt mixture to the vegetables and mix well. Add a pinch of ground black pepper. Taste the dressed cucumber-purslane salad for seasoning, adding a little more salt if needed. Serve chilled.

Verdolago Con Queso

- 1 quart purslane including stems
- Approximately one-half cup Monterey Jack cheese, shredded

Collect tender purslane, including the stems, and carefully rinse to remove any sand or soil. Gently boil for about two minutes or until tender. Drain the water and chop the purslane into smaller pieces. Return the purslane to the frying pan and shred the jack cheese over it. Keep the purslane in the pan just until the cheese melts. Be careful not to over-melt the cheese. Serve warm.

Pickled Purslane

- 1 quart purslane stems and leaves
- 1 quart apple cider vinegar (or old pickle, jalapeno juice, etc.)
- 3 garlic cloves, sliced
- 10 peppercorns

Clean the purslane stems and leaves by rinsing with fresh water. Cut into 1" pieces and place in clean jars with lids. Add the spices and pour the vinegar over the purslane. Keep this in the refrigerator and wait at least two weeks before using. Serve as a side dish with omelets and sandwiches.

Garden History

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!





Annual Membership Meeting of Project Growing Hope and The Ithaca Community Gardens

Saturday, November 3rd

5:00 to 7:00 PM

**Cornell Cooperative Extension,
615 Willow Avenue, Ithaca**

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