

# The Ithaca Community Gardener

A newsletter of Project Growing Hope/The Ithaca Community Gardens

June/July 2009

## WELCOME to the 2009 GARDENING SEASON!

Springtime in Ithaca gets people moving. Workday volunteers created several new plots this spring and new members have already planted them. New planting spaces include a children's garden that is being carved out of the "wild triangle" near the compost area by the railroad tracks. The space will let children have fun growing their own gardens; contact Heidi Marshner to help out.

Don't forget to check out the new website. The combined effort of former member Jackie Cerretani and new webmaster Cindy Skema has produced a good looking and informative site. Visit and bookmark <http://ithacacommunitygardens.org>.

Thank you Blue Heron Farms for donating organic seed potatoes, onion sets, lime basil, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, swiss chard, and escarole. Please try to go to their stand at the Farmer's Market on Saturdays and thank them for donating to us.



## 2009- 2010 Board Members

The board meets monthly. If you have an issue or idea to discuss or want to know more about meetings, contact the board via email at [ithacagardensboard\[AT\]gmail.com](mailto:ithacagardensboard[AT]gmail.com).

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

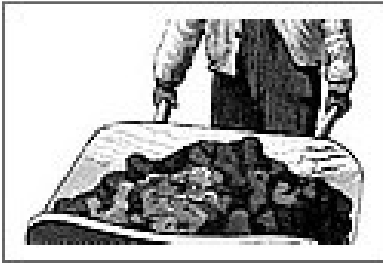
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## GARDENING TIPS

### 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.

✦ **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 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.

## *Gardening Tips, cont.*

Although wood chips can be used for mulch, they may make the soil too acid as well as tie up nitrogen. Also, wood products break down more slowly and thus provide less nutritive value to the soil in general. Although not the best mulch, wood chips work well in the paths 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.

## RECIPES

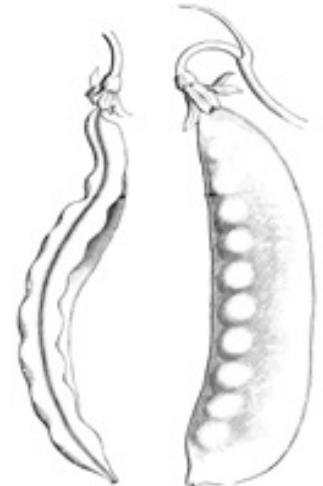
*Do you have recipes you would like to share with other gardeners? If so, please send your recipes to Leslie at [crone03@gmail.com](mailto:crone03@gmail.com) for inclusion in one of the next newsletters.*

### **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.



## **GARDEN PESTS**

### **SLUGS!**

Slugs feed on a variety of plant materials feeding mostly at night. They lay small masses of eggs in soil cracks. The young slugs that hatch from these eggs travel through the soil and damage germinating seeds and root crops.

#### **Ideas for Slug Control**

✦ Slugs are mostly water and produce large amounts of protective mucous. Consequently, slugs are susceptible to drying. The level of a slug population depends on the moisture conditions in a garden. Any practices that decrease moisture will reduce slug problems, although effects may not be seen immediately.

✦ The sharp edges of crushed eggshells around the plants will cut and kill slugs. The calcium in the eggshells is a good soil amendment anyway!

✦ Sprinkle a line of lime around your plants. A pile of unaged animal manure has an high acidity and provides a slug breeding haven leading to the assumption that slugs and snails are more of a problem in acid soils. By applying lime we sweeten the soil making it more alkaline and deterring the slugs. Obviously this won't work around plants requiring a more acidic soil.

✦ A mulch made of stems and leaves of strong

smelling herbs like wormwood, mints, tansy, lemon balm along with conifer twigs mixed in will help stop slugs and other pests.

✦ Oat bran will kill slugs when they eat it... sprinkle some around.

✦ Pulling the weeds from your garden is something you need to do anyway. As you pull each weed, you remove a potential slug outpost.

✦ Cultivate your soil regularly to keep the dirt clods broken up, and unearth any slugs which may have burrowed under the surface.

✦ Slugs are attracted to chemicals produced by many fermenting materials. These materials can be used to make attractant traps. For example, pans of beer or sugar-water and yeast mixtures can effectively attract, trap and drown slugs. A single baiting can remain effective for several days, as long as sufficient liquid remains. However, because the range of such traps is only a few feet, they must be placed throughout the planting to significantly reduce slug populations. Alcohol is not an attractant to slugs.



## From the membership...

### A Story Garden for Elsie

*Susan Nassar*

The last time I saw Elsie Shel Drake was a few days before she died. I was at Earlybird Farms to pick up donations from her for the Community Gardens. In her 80s, Elsie looked tired. I tried to get her to sit down, I offered to stay and help for free, but Elsie wasn't sitting down, not for me, not for her granddaughter Heather. It was growing season, plenty to do, plenty to plant. Did I find that tray of collards she saved for us? We all need more greens in our diet. Now these tomatoes, plant them deep, they'll grow roots along the buried stems. And take the marigolds, they help with pests. And the snapdragons, children love them. And the pansies and petunias, the zinnias, salvia, cleome – flowers are important too. I like to think of flowers all around.

Elsie's flowers lifted our spirits. They gave us hope that we would be able to grow again in the wasteland by Route 13. In those pioneer years after being kicked out of well-tended soil behind the P&C, Elsie's generous donations were living proof that people in the community supported us. To honor Elsie's years of giving, I am again digging out quack grass. It doesn't look like much yet, but in time the area around the concrete water valve (between the main entrance and shed) will feature perennials that tell a story about Elsie. Please call me if you have a story about Elsie – maybe some advice she gave you or if you have an idea about signs for the Story Garden that will last and look good.

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