

News from the Garden Committee: The deadline for submitting plot applications for the 2010 season was Feb. 15. The gardens are full and there is also a waitlist, but you can still complete and submit an application (available at the gardens' web site, [www.eagleheightsgardens.org](http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org)). It is possible you will get a plot later in the season.

At our February meeting, we arranged with a local farmer to bring tomato and other plants to the gardens for sale. This will happen in late May and perhaps again in early June. Please watch this column and the gardens' web site for details. We are also beginning an effort to replace the splintery, hard-to-mark white fiberglass corner stakes at Eagle Heights Gardens with nice metal stakes neatly stamped with plot numbers. The stakes are not free and take some time to prepare, so complete replacement of all stakes may take several years. We spent a lot of time talking about how to deal with our large (>\$4,000) plumbing bill from last year. There is no magic answer, since our irrigation systems at both are gardens are old and falling apart. In 2010, we will try to do as much work as we can without calling in plumbers. Over the not-very-long term, we need to design, raise funds for, and build a new, easier-to-maintain system. We also need to raise more money to pay our registrar and garden workers, all of whom are currently volunteering many hours in addition to those for which they are paid.

Our next meeting and potluck dinner will be at 6:30 pm on Wed., Apr. 28 in the Eagle Heights Community Center. All gardeners are welcome -- please come and help run the gardens! We will meet inside through May, then in the gardens (weather permitting) in June, July, and August. We are also hoping to arrange a joint Housing-Assembly-Gardens potluck in the gardens in late May -- please e-mail Robin at [mittenth@gmail.com](mailto:mittenth@gmail.com) if you are interested in helping with this.

Welcome new gardeners and welcome back to all returning gardeners! By now, most of you know your plot assignments. I urge you to do a walk-through of your new plot if you haven't done so yet. Please locate any perennials you want to keep (if you don't know what they are, give them a season to find out) and others you could put on the share shelf before tilling your soil. Perennials can be identified by giving a sharp tug on the mass of dead-looking branches. A firm root structure usually belongs to a perennial. You can also check near the base of the plant for signs of new green growth.

April is a good time to aerate and amend your soil and start planting cold-resistant crops. Break up hard clumps of dirt with a hoe or rake and add some organic fertilizer or compost. Move any compost piles from the previous year to a new spot in the garden to redistribute nutrients and beneficial insects. The beginning of spring is also an ideal time to start digging up weeds like Quack grass and Canadian nettles. Quack grass is best pulled up by hand when the ground is soft from a recent rain. Rototilling in the hopes of combating weeds only makes the problem worse by multiplying and spreading them. As for the nettles, the roots for these spiky beasts can run 1-2' underground. Dig up the entire root to eradicate the plant. If you need help identifying perennials and weeds, ask a fellow gardener. Returning gardeners are eager to make your first gardening experience in a new plot a positive one.

Now that you've prepared your dirt, you can start putting in seeds, seedlings, and cuttings for cold-weather crops like greens (spinach, kale, lettuce, etc.), peas, potatoes, carrots, onions, leeks, cabbage, broccoli, and beets. If frost is still a danger, you may want to protect more delicate greens and peas. Consider placing a milk jug terrarium over your seed site -- one jug for each plant. Simply cut the bottom off of a gallon-size transparent milk jug, clean thoroughly with soap and hot water, let dry, place over your seed, screw the cap on, and place a flat rock or other heavy object on the cap to secure against wind.

Peas, like beans, are a great addition to the garden because they replenish the surrounding soil with nitrogen, making it more fertile for a subsequent planting in the same spot. There are several varieties of peas to choose from, including purple strains and those with edible pods (no shelling required). Most varieties also have attractive blooms. Seedlings started indoors in March can be transplanted to the garden when 4" tall (protect from frost with a milk jug terrarium). Pea seeds can be directly sown outdoors when the soil is no longer wet and cold and the danger of frost has passed.

A soil temperature of 50°F is needed to start growing peas and seeds can be planted outdoors until early June (some shade is recommended for summer plantings). A layer of leaf mulch over the planted seed will keep the soil moist for germination. Space rows of peas 2' apart and place vertical supports like sticks, wire mesh (tomato cages), or netting to allow the plant's tendrils to climb. Water the plants regularly once the flowers on the plant open (you will have to haul the water if before mid-April) and pick peas frequently to promote new growth. Peas also store well if blanched (boil 1 minute) and frozen or dried ("rattle" dry on plant) and stored in airtight containers.

For more information on gardening this season, check out the garden column archives at [www.eagleheightsgardens.org/tips/monthlyadvice.shtml](http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org/tips/monthlyadvice.shtml), online advice at <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Lawn-Garden-C2.aspx> or <http://attra.org/horticultural.html>, or these recommended books: Jerry Minich's The Wisconsin Garden Guide (detailed but not too wordy, good pictures and info on plants and pests specific to Wisconsin), Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening (great photos and concise help on organic gardening, covers a wide range of plants and growing styles), and Gayla Trail's You Grow Girl (tips on organic small-space gardening, herbs, and tomatoes).