

News from the June Garden Meeting: Garden Registrar Gretel reported that the waiting list has remained pretty stable at about eight people. It was decided that if a plot opens up and there is no one on the waiting list, gardeners with half-plots would have the opportunity to rent another half-plot. The Potluck on June 19th was a success and another one will be planned in the future. Gretel and Robin talked to the GOC about the difficulties of enforcing the 7-year limit on renting a garden plot and the GOC decided to drop the rule in favor of stressing that applying does not guarantee a plot and that a priority system is in place. New plot stakes are scheduled to be stamped in the next 2-4 weeks. Hobie finished construction of five food sheds for food donations. Mowing will occur less often to save on labor costs.

The fundraising committee will make plumbing its top priority. The committee liked the idea of selling garden T-shirts to produce good publicity for the gardens and possibly raise some money. Although our finances are better than last year, most likely fees (like the “no workday fee”) will need to be raised. As of July 17th, we were in fourth place in the Edy’s contest at www.communitiestakeroot.com. Please continue to vote (daily if possible) so we can win fruit trees. Workdays for August will be announced and advertised on the garden website: <http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org>, and a tomato workshop will be held August 14th. Please also check the garden website for details about the upcoming August garden meeting and future workshops.

For me, cucumbers are the quintessential summer vegetable. Their crisp cool taste is refreshingly hydrating on a hot day. If you planted cucumber seeds in May or at the beginning of June, you should be nearing the end of their production cycle. For future planting information and a five-star pickle recipe, read on.

First, if you planted cucumbers last year, choose a new spot in your garden to plant a subsequent crop. A new site will help eliminate any soil-borne diseases from the previous year. Direct-sowing cucumber seeds is recommended since seedlings do not transplant well. Prepare the planting area by aerating and adding a generous amount of compost or organic fertilizer to your soil. Heap additional soil into a 1.5 x 3’ mound for every two plants that you intend to have. Space mounds at least 3’ apart. Cover the mound tightly with black plastic mulch to ensure pest resistance and plant health. Secure the edges of the black plastic by piling dirt around the perimeter. Burn or cut two holes for seeds about 10-12” apart in the top of the plastic. Place 2-3 cucumber seeds about ½” deep in each hole. Thin to one plant per hole once seedlings are 3-4” tall.

Cucumber seeds need temperatures of 64-86°F (18-30°C) to germinate and temperatures of at least 50°F (10°C) to maintain healthy growth. Cucumbers like sun, but they will also tolerate some shade, especially in late summer. Planting cucumber seeds in new mounds every two weeks or so through late July is a good way to ensure a steady manageable supply for eating and pickling. Cucumbers do not tolerate frost, so protect your plants with plastic for a night or two if needed. Prune the ends of the vines after 5-6 leaves are visible to encourage a more robust plant. Water plants regularly and pick off slugs to keep them healthy. Harvest when cucumbers are a good size for eating or pickling.

Growing cucumber plants vertically is a good idea to conserve garden space. To do this, build your mounds next to a fence, archway, or structure made of wire, net, or string. When vines are long enough, pick them up and start hanging them along the support structure. Prune the ends of vertically grown vines when the vines start to extend beyond the top of the supports.

[Busia’s Slightly Sweet Polish Dill Pickles \(makes 5-6 jars, quart-size and smaller\)](#)

sterile water-seal jars (boil lids and jars 1 min. to sterilize; don't touch inside of jar or lid; jars will be hot)

enough pickling cucumbers to fill your jars

½ cup of sugar, heaped

⅓ cup of salt, heaped

3 ½ cups white vinegar

1 quart water

1 Tablespoon pickling spices (I use the mix from Penzey's), heaped

1 handful of fresh dill and 1 peeled and crushed garlic clove for each jar

(Make sure your hands are clean before you begin.) Place the dill and garlic into the sterile jars with sterile tongs. Scrub the burrs off of the cucumbers and boil 1-2 min. to soften if desired. Carefully place cucumbers into sterile jars with sterile tongs. In another pot, simmer the sugar, salt, vinegar, water, and pickling spices for 10 min. Pour the liquid mixture over the cucumbers to fill the jars $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Carefully grab the outer rim of each jar lid (use sterile tongs if lid assembly is required) and screw onto each jar tightly. Flip the jars upside-down and place into a large pot or pan of hot water (can use the hot water from boiling the cucumbers). Hot water should come about halfway up the sides of the jars. Let the jars sit in the hot water until the water is cool (room temperature). Store sealed jars in a cold cellar or refrigerator. When opening each jar, listen for a suction or popping noise to indicate that your jar seal was good and the pickles are safe to eat.

For more information about growing cucumbers and pickling, refer to previous garden columns available here: <http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org/tips/monthlyadvice.shtml>.