

News from the November garden meeting: An Opening Day of March 19th was announced for 2011 and a date of March 26th was set for the next Seed Fair. Garden Registrar Gretel reviewed a comprehensive summary of gardens activities for 2010 and it was decided that compiling a summary would be a registrar goal each year. Gretel is also working on a Registrar Handbook for future use. The “Grow A Row” program was a success thanks to Eric Domyan. Approximately half a ton, or 56 bins, of produce were donated to St. Vincent DePaul. Conduit was chosen as the material to be used for the center plot stakes in the coming Spring. If the material works out well, it is planned that all remaining stakes will be replaced with conduit. A new soil and compost sifter on wheels has been constructed and added to the tools available for general gardener use.

Another draft of a short set of rules to be posted throughout the gardens was proposed. Garden Chair Robin Mittenthal voiced his plan to leave the chair position and brought up the need for a replacement. Applications for new and renewing gardeners will be available on the Eagle Heights Garden website (<http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org>) December 15th.

Organic, local, and seasonal are three of the most important factors in choosing food that is good for your body and the environment. As an aspiring or returning Eagle Heights gardener, you can give yourself a pat on the back for adding all three into your diet. Though not mandatory, hopefully many U Houses gardeners also choose to grow organic in addition to locally and seasonally. To fully take advantage of the benefits of growing and eating organic, local, and seasonal, consider planting produce that normally has high pesticide contents when grown non-organically.

The fruits and vegetables highest in pesticide content (according to www.foodnews.org) are:

- Celery
- Peaches
- Strawberries
- Apples
- Blueberries (Domestic)
- Nectarines
- Sweet Bell Peppers
- Spinach
- Cherries
- Kale/Collard Greens

A good rule of thumb is that if you can eat the skin or rind, it will be high in pesticide content if it is not organic. According to www.foodnews.org, these 10 fruits and vegetables are currently lowest in pesticide content:

- Onions
- Avocados
- Sweet Corn (Frozen)
- Pineapple
- Mango (Tropical and Subtropical)
- Sweet Peas (Frozen)
- Asparagus
- Kiwi (Tropical and Subtropical)
- Cabbage
- Eggplant

When unable to grow organically, look for a store-bought organic product’s mark of organic certification. Many products advertise that they are “natural” or “grown on an organic farm”

without complying with organic standards. A seal of certification ensures that crops were grown without the use of conventional pesticides, artificial fertilizers, human waste, sewage sludge, ionizing radiation, food additives, or genetic modification. In the case of animals, organic certification also means that the animals were reared without the routine use of antibiotics or growth hormones.

If a food is not marked as “USDA certified organic”, there is no way to know that a cocktail of pesticides, antibiotics, and hormones was not used to produce it. Instead of these things, organic farmers, as many Eagle Heights demonstrate, use manure or compost fertilizer and crop rotation. Conventionally-farmed crops and processed animal products require less manual labor, which translates to fewer people employed. Organically-farmed crops, on the other hand, require more labor and contribute to rural employment and sustainable development. Buying local organic goods in particular keeps small farmers in business and instills them with a sense of pride and community.

While it is important not to completely shut out global economies, food that is grown closest to where you live has fewer negative affects on the environment related to transportation. Shorter food transportation distance translates to fewer CO2 emissions, which have shown a strong connection to environmental damage like global warming. In addition, purchasing food from local growers supports the livelihood of people in your own community. This in turn helps the agricultural sector of your local economy thrive and fosters feelings of community pride and involvement. In addition, money spent on local foods tends to be reinvested in the local community. For more information on eating locally, visit the website for “The 100-Mile Diet”. When at the grocery store, look for special signage indicating Wisconsin products if you’re interested in buying local foods. Growing your own organic fruits and vegetables also gives you a good idea of which Wisconsin fruits and vegetables are available during any given time of year. Consider trying to plan a meal or two around what is in-season.