

The Garden Plot, January 2010

By Sarah Goupell, University Apartments Resident

News from the November Garden Meeting: Much of the meeting was spent developing a calendar of garden-related dates for 2010. This calendar is intended both to let gardeners know what is happening and to help the garden committee keep track of tasks that need to be completed. For example, the calendar will tell when the water will be turned on and off, when toilets will be placed in the gardens, when plots will begin to be judged for weediness, and when the free seed fair will happen (March 20, 2010, it seems).

There was a discussion of "late blight," a disease of tomatoes, potatoes, and related plants, and what to do about it if it becomes a problem in 2010 as it was in late 2009. We will try to educate gardeners about how and where to buy healthy plants, and will pull out diseased plants if we see them in the gardens.

The committee would like to start a garden endowment to provide money in the long term for staff and educational programs. The UW can help with this, but we will need to raise at least \$1,000 to start our account. We will try to do this in 2010.

Our next meeting will be at 6:30 pm on Wed., Jan. 27 in the Eagle Heights Community Center. All gardeners are welcome -- please come and help run the gardens!

As I write this, snow is falling outside and I can picture all of the white garden plots – slates wiped clean for the coming growing season. For many of us, January evokes images of new resolutions and fresh starts. While it may be too early to start sowing seeds, why not start making a list of gardening goals for 2010? Or better yet, start keeping a garden journal if you haven't already. Haven't weeded consistently in the past? Didn't make the best use of your plot space? Now is the time to make new commitments to do a better job in 2010.

My husband and I started keeping a record of our plantings, harvests, and general garden happenings last year. I recently reviewed what we wrote and can tell how valuable much of the information will be over the coming spring, summer, and fall. For example, our last entry for the season, though brief, speaks volumes:

“8-23-09

Overwhelmed by tomatoes.

- 60 tomatoes? 15 lbs? – Matt's guess
- 100+ tomatoes? 30-40 lbs? – Sarah's guess”

The entry lets me know that our first bulky tomato harvest occurred on August 23rd and that perhaps we put in too many tomato plants to keep up with last year. A previous write-up tells me that we had eight tomato plants. This year we'll try six and see how that goes. Also, since I have an idea of when the tomatoes will be ready again, I can adequately prepare to process them. Before August 20th this year, I intend to get the fresh salsa recipe out and make space for bags of blanched and peeled tomatoes in the freezer. I may even break down and buy a pressure canner. Other adjustments that I plan to implement for 2010 based on my 2009 journal include harvesting dill earlier to freeze for use in making pickles and other recipes, rotating crops of spinach and purple string beans in my raised bed to yield two plantings of each, and keeping the back left corner of my plot free of sun-loving plants since my neighbor's sunflowers occupy the adjacent space.

A garden journal can also remind you of the pests and weeds that frequented your garden last season, spurring you to adequately plan methods and time allotments to combat them. Another of my 2009 entries, for example, indicates that I spent 2.5 hours weeding quackgrass out of my strawberry patch last year. It would be prudent for me to expect the same for 2010.

If you haven't been keeping a record of your plantings so far, or if you are new to the Eagle Heights Gardens community, consider trying it out for 2010. Some topics worthy of writing down could include what you cook with what you grow, plants from another plot that you've admired and might like to try growing yourself, dates when you planted certain crops, and ideas for new garden layouts. You can also keep track of the perennial plants in your plot, so you don't dig them up by accident when the ground thaws.

If you're one of many gardeners who harvested a bounty of garlic last year and still have a few heads to use up, try this simple recipe mixed with an antipasti platter of olives and cheese or spread on toasted or warmed bread:

Roasted Garlic

- 1 or more heads of garlic
- olive oil

Preheat oven to 400F. With the rounded part of the unpeeled garlic head sitting on a counter or cutting board, cut about 1/4" from the tops of the each of the cloves in the head. This should expose the inner naked cloves, while leaving most of the peel intact. A garlic head with all cloves cut should resemble an open flower. Next, place the garlic on a sheet of aluminum foil large enough to wrap the garlic head in. Drizzle olive oil over the top of the garlic. Bring up the sides of the foil and twist loosely to enclose the garlic. Cook for 30 min. Let cool. Unwrap garlic and use a small knife to help remove the cooked garlic cloves from the peel. Pack cloves in olive oil and store in the refrigerator for up to 1-2 months.