

News from the May Garden Meeting: The plant sale went really well with about 1,000 plants sold. It was decided to hold the plant sale again next year. Garden worker Will Waller is working on fixing wheelbarrow carts and has purchased a welding kit to weld plastic. Hobie made new screens for the compost pile and will finish the donation rack. As a result of new gardener having set up a gazebo one of the plots, a discussion of the need for a rule about structures took place. For now, the gazebo will need to be dismantled. The committee decided it would be a good idea to solicit a treasurer, a volunteer coordinator, and a few international community liaisons for the gardens. A fundraising subcommittee update was given by Mark with one idea being \$50,000 for 50 years (the number of years the garden has been around according to the garden sign) and asked for some ideas from the committee. Will will do a trial stamping of metal stakes for the gardens, and Steve volunteered to BT spray potato plants.

News from the April Garden Meeting: We thanked garden committee member and garden worker Will Waller along with Lynn Hummel (UW College of Agriculture and Life Sciences) for their efforts in coordinating plumbing repairs and donations for the gardens. Garden registrar Gretel Dentine informed us that 16 people are on the waiting list for plots. Applications for 2010 revealed that Chinese, Korean, and Spanish are the most popular non-English languages spoken in the gardens and that Eagle Heights residents and UW-Madison students remain steady as priority gardeners.

Other items covered at the meeting included the plan to post photos of problem weeds in the gardens and on the garden website, the proposal to pitch some EHG profile show ideas to WI Public TV to drum up support and awareness of our rock wall project, and ways to alert gardeners about plumbing and water issues. Garden committee members are also currently working to set up a fundraising account through the UW Foundation and plan to establish one person to periodically check the account balance and thank donors. May marked the kick-off of produce donation collection for the St. Vincent food pantry. Donations can be placed in designated bins by the tool shed on Sundays and will be picked up and transported on Monday mornings.

At the time of this newsletter printing, details about the upcoming July garden meeting were still being decided. Please check <http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org> for updated information.

By now, you should have planted your long-season and hot weather crops like beans, cucumbers, eggplant, herbs, melons, peppers, pumpkin, summer squash, winter squash, and tomatoes. Beans are great plants for any empty spaces you have in your plot. They naturally replenish the soil with nitrogen and grow quickly. Remember to place tomato cages, sticks, trellises, or other climbing structures with your beans.

Cucumbers, eggplant, melons, pumpkin, summer squash, and winter squash are best planted in mounds tightly covered with black plastic. Pile dirt about 4" high and shape into 1.5' x 2' or so. Cover snugly with a sheet of black plastic and pile dirt all around the edges of the plastic to secure. Burn or cut one hole for seeds and seedlings at each end of the plastic-covered dirt mound. Thin to one or two plants per mound once seedlings are established. When watering, avoid spraying the leaves of these plants as much as possible to prevent powdery mildew and other undesirable conditions. When melons and pumpkins begin to grow fruit, it is also a good idea to place the fruit on top of upturned buckets, large rocks, or stumps to prevent moisture rot.

Thoroughly aerate soil intended for herbs and consider mixing some sand into the planting area to promote good drainage and root growth. For pepper plants, make sure the soil is enriched with compost or fertilizer and try throwing some matches into the planting site to add some sulfur. When putting in tomato seedlings, remember to bury the bottom 2/3 of the plant to build strength

and productivity. Also, if part of the seedling breaks during transport or sowing, plant it anyway. Many damaged tomato seedlings bounce back to become healthy adults. And don't forget to stake your tomato plants with sturdy supports once they grow larger! Choose thick branches instead of thin sticks and tomato cages, and set them deep into the earth (1' down or deeper).

As your crops are being harvested and eaten, now is also a wonderful time to begin composting in your garden plot. Much of your organic fruit and vegetable waste can be put right back into your plot to create nutrient-rich soil. The best part is the process is low-maintenance and almost hands-free. The naturally occurring worms, microbes, and other organisms in your plot do most of the work.

One compost site is sufficient for a community garden plot. A good compost area has solid sides, an open base placed on bare or grassy earth, a wide top opening for easy filling, a minimum capacity of 66 gallons (300 L), and a removable or open side or lid. You can make a free-standing compost pile anywhere in your plot with a border of boards, large rocks, stumps, old fencing, or sticks. Alternately, you can use a pre-fabricated compost bin like an Earth Machine. Be sure to leave enough space around your compost site to allow you to easily add, remove, and mix the contents.

Half of your compost pile should comprise kitchen and other green waste and half should comprise dry brown leaf mulch. If you have access to straw-rich cow or sheep manure, use proportions of 1/3 green waste, 1/3 manure, and 1/3 leaf mulch. Start by building layers that are about 2" thick. Always top your pile with leaf mulch and water regularly. Regular mixing and exposure to air and heat will help expedite the process of turning your pile into a medium-fertility soil improver that you can spread throughout your plot in as few as 12 weeks.

Good Compost Pile Ingredients:

- Vegetable peelings
- Vegetable crop waste (cut up thick stems and rinds into smaller pieces)
- Fruit peelings
- Cooked vegan leftovers free of animal fats and oils
- Shredded paper
- Paper bags
- Coffee grounds
- Tea leaves
- Onion skins
- Egg cartons
- Rhubarb leaves
- Soft hedge clippings
- Lake weed
- Herbivore plant bedding
- Poultry manure
- Straw-rich cow or sheep manure
- Leaf mulch

Bad Compost Pile Ingredients – DO NOT USE:

- Citrus scraps
- Dairy products
- Meat and fish
- Eggshells
- Cat/dog poop

Purchased flowers
Diseased plant remains
Plastic, glass, cans, and other inorganic trash

It is argued that young weeds can also be composted, but this runs the risk of growing more weeds. I recommend placing all weeds in the communal weed pile instead. When the compost is ready to spread on your topsoil, it will be rich, dark, light-textured, and earthy smelling. Spread a ½” layer of the mature compost anywhere in your plot to boost fertility.

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