

# Vegetable Garden Notes

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Rochester, New Hampshire  
12/01/08

Gardening has played a major part of my life experience. I grew up in Lancaster County Pennsylvania. There, my family gardened using fertilizers and sprays. In my adult years, I lived in New Hampshire. There, I started growing Organic Vegetables. Throughout the years, I have been faced with different growing conditions and locations. I have learned a lot from my own experiences and also from other gardeners. My goal for this journal is to show people the little things that have worked for me.

During my childhood, many of my daily chores were related to vegetables that we either grew or picked from other sources. The freezer and shelves in the cold cellar were always filled with canned vegetables, fruits, jams and grape juice. While watching television, we shelled peas and lima beans. I climbed many trees picking Sweet and Sour cherries. I still remember my dad growing a climbing Pole Bean called Lazy Housewife in the middle of the cornfield. That area of the country is truly blessed for growing a variety of fruits and vegetables.

In 1975, after a tour of duty with the United States Air Force, I relocated to the State of New Hampshire. At my first apartment, I grew some tomatoes; the gardening bug was back in my life. The next year, I had a rental with a common ground growing area. That garden was a learning experience. I did not watch the growth close enough. My cabbage was growing great when I noticed small holes in the head area. Green Cabbage worms were everywhere. In my frustration, I trampled every plant. Then, just as the corn was ready to pick, the raccoons hit; no more ears, just tears. My neighbors who had gardened for many years offered their advice over many cups of coffee.

In 1981, Eileen Vaughan introduced me to Organic Gardening. I just thought that it would be easier to spread some 10-10-10 Fertilizer or spray some Sevin on the bugs. Composting, Organic Fertilizers, picking off bugs and learning about Organic fertilizers seemed like a lot of work and a waste of time. I soon learned that Organic Gardening brings you in contact with your garden. The Natural Growth delivers a certain feeling of pride.

When we moved to the Wakefield, New Hampshire area, I was blessed to have a larger garden area. It also allowed me to be able to work together with my daughters, Rebecca and Julie and their mother, Eileen.

My neighbors, Leif and Beritt Johannessen, were a couple that owned a farm for generations. They raised sheep, grew raspberries and many types of vegetables. Composting was one of the most important parts of their garden. When I help them in their garden, it is like tilling in a bed of gold. It is probably some of the richest soil that I have ever worked with.

Through them, I learned how important organization is. The key is to know what, where, when and how. Documentation is very important. Keeping a journal allows for

you to look back and be reminded of what worked and what failed. My notes include general information that works for me in New Hampshire.

In 2003, I moved to Rochester, New Hampshire with my wife Donna. The garden at our house is a small 24-foot square plot that gets 8 hours of sunlight, sandy soil, and some disease problems like Powdery Mildew. I plant a combination of 3-5 foot wide rows, use an Intensive Planting system, have Raised Beds and have some vegetables in containers. I start many of my seeds indoors, but do buy seed starts. Leif and Beritt also let me use a garden area of 60 by 100 feet. This offers full sun, wetter soil with similar disease problems. I have gardened in this location for the last 18 years.

For information about gardening in your area, you can contact your States Cooperative Extension Service and find the nearest Seed Companies and Nurseries. By talking with local gardeners, you can learn many tips for your particular region. When going to local fairs, check out the most common varieties grown. These specific varieties should be great for your area. The more you experiment with different varieties, the more understanding you will have for your particular garden.

## General Information

### Fertilizing:

- Composting is by far the best way to enrich the soil. It is economically the best option and helps the environment. My Month-to-Month notes include some examples of things to compost all year long. The location of my compost pile is not the best. It is filtered sun light through pine needles. This takes longer for the items to decompose. Work with what you have available. This option also is best if you choose to not use animal products.
- Liquid Seaweed/fish: This is strongly recommended. If your budget allows, the following examples are expensive. Add where needed: Organic blends like 6-5-3, animal manures, bagged compost fish waster, dehydrated cow manure or a pellet type called, "Cockadoodle Doo."
- Epsom Salt: This is for peppers and tomatoes. It adds magnesium for growth.
- Lyme: Add in the fall if needed.

### Organic products for insect and pest control:

You can avoid some of these costs by hand picking the insects off of the plants throughout the growing season.

- Colorado Potato Beetle Beater: This is used to spray potato beetle larvae.
- Dipel Powder or Thuricide liquid: This is strongly recommended for cabbage, broccoli and Brussels sprouts. It also works for hornworms on tomatoes and potatoes.
- Liquid Rotenone/Pyrethrin or Rotenone Dust: This is used for squash bug nymphs, cucumber beetles and flea beetles.
- Safer Insect Soap: Aphides, white flies and spider mites.
- Copper Fungicide: Generally used for prevention of fungal problems. I prefer not to spray, but it is an organic product.

- Oyster shells: Spread around plants when transplanting in garden to control cutworms. You can also wrap paper strips around the plants for control.
- Flat Saucers: Place in the soil and fill with beer or grape juice to control slugs.
- Bird Scare Flash Tape: This will add flashing, motion and noise to distract crows from pulling up new sprouts.

#### Creating the garden:

- Fencing: Three-foot nylon or rabbit wire.
- Four-foot bamboo or wooden stakes: helps to protect your hard work. This keeps animals from walking into the newly planted rows. If you can't put up a fence, I have tied crisscrossing rows with nylon netting or Remay cloth. I have also broken small dead branches from a Hemlock tree and placed them over the row. To control turkeys and deer, I found good success with a nylon fence. Moose, well they just walk right through.
- Portable Greenhouse/growing rack: This item is for starting seeds, hardening off or season extender.
- Three foot wide back plastic: used mainly for sweet potatoes, but have used with peppers and tomatoes.
- Remay cloth: used to protect some early plantings, bug control and late summer/fall frost protection. Use five-foot long wire to make hoops over row for a tunnel effect. Hold on with clothespins.
- Dial Seed Sower: A must for dispensing seeds. Dial settings to match the seed size. Reduces seed loss and thinning.
- Trellis Plus: This is a mesh netting for climbing vegetables like cucumbers, pole beans, melons and tomatoes.
- Four foot Fluorescent lights: To start seeds indoors, use these lights for more hours of sun. My sunniest window only offers only 5 hours of sunlight. It is best to have 12 hours of sunlight.
- Compost pile: Pitchfork for turning the pile. Machete for chopping: I have my Grandfather's Corn stalk cutter.

#### Planting and Maintenance:

- Weeding: Do your best but do not worry about getting them all up. There are some that support growth of specific vegetables, attract insect/bee/bird, are PH indicators and some are just pleasant to look at.
- Grow different vegetables: One never knows what the season will bring. For an example, my Wife Donna, makes Pepper relish. This year, the pepper crop was down, so she made it with peppers, cucumbers and zucchini.
- Inter-planting: I plant Dill. This helps to keep the Cabbage Butterfly away from Cabbage, Broccoli, and Brussels sprouts. French Marigolds distract insects and Basil adds a growth benefit to tomatoes. There is also the added fragrant aroma from the herbs and flowers.
- Journal: Keep notes from year to year. This allows you to make a month-by-month growing guide. Also, you never know when someone like your daughter will be interested in reading them. I still remember when she could not leave the dinner table until she finished at least one asparagus spear on her plate. Now

she is painting them. Thank you Rebecca, for inspiring me to write this journal. I am happy that she will always have this information as well as others. It is a treat feeling to leave something beneficial behind.

### Harvesting

Each seed variety has specific harvesting times. Keep the seed packs for further study on each variety. Below are general harvest times for different types of vegetables.

- Beans:  
Snap: Wait till they are pencil sized and then keep picking.  
Fresh Shell: When the bean is plump.  
Dried Shell: When pods are dry and brown.
- Beets:  
When root is 2-3" in the soil, they are ready. Up to a third of the greens can be picked for salads or cooked during growth.
- Broccoli:  
Cut off first head at 4-6." This sends off new shoots. Pick these as it grows so that flowers don't form.
- Cabbage:  
Ready when completely formed, but still firm to the touch.
- Carrots:  
Eating the baby carrots helps to thin the growth. This yields large carrots later. When mature, orange is seen popping out of the ground and it easily twists out.
- Cooking greens, lettuce and spinach:  
Pick leaves from the outside in and this will allow the plant to continually grow and produce.
- Corn:  
When the tip feels rounded and it has brown tassels. The corn kernel should also be squishy to the touch.
- Cucumbers:  
When they reach the size described on the seed packet, they are ready. They should be picked continuously to yield more fruit.
- Eggplant:  
These can be picked at any size.
- Onions:  
Thin row during growth for greens and eat at any bulb size. When plants mature, let them grow till they flop over. Pull these up and place in a warm, dry place. Let them cure.

- Peas: Pick continuously and eat immediately for best flavor.
- Peppers: These can be eaten whenever they reach a pepper-like look. Continue to pick to spur growth or leave on for red pepper.
- Potatoes:  
After the plant flowers, you can dig into the hill for small potatoes. After the foliage dies the potatoes can be carefully removed from the soil. Dig these out from the side. Sweet potatoes are best dug up before the frost.
- Squash:  
Summer: At 6-8", pick once a day.  
Winter: Allow to fully ripen on vine until the stem breaks or it looks like the color on the seed packet.  
Pumpkins: This is the same as Winter Squash.
- Tomatoes:  
They are ready when they reach the described color on the seed packet. At the end of the season, the green tomatoes can be fried and eaten. Also some varieties for short storage turn red by wrapping them individually in newspaper.
- Freezing tip: For quick soup or burritos, rinse and drain cut up onions, leeks, green shell beans and peppers. Next, freeze them on cookie sheets. Empty into a storage bag into the freezer.

## Growing Notes: Month-by-Month

### January

- Start Ordering seeds and plants; the earlier you order, the better chance you will get the varieties you want. Sometimes you get some cost savings for early orders. I still plant my favorite varieties but I am always looking for new additions. You will find that some varieties will produce better than others. An example of this would be the Purple Bush Bean Variety called Royalty Purple. I was looking for a Bush Bean that could tolerate cold soil and less sun exposure for early spring planting. There may be many companies who have a similar style, but only one may have the perfect variety for your region.
- Order onion, sweet potato and strawberry plants that cannot be ordered locally.

- Look for last year's row markers in the snow and remove some pine needles for a winter treat of parsnips and carrots.
- Layout design of garden for the coming growing season.
- Mid month: start Watercress, Scallion and mini onion seed indoors.
- Keep composting: add coffee grounds, eggshells and vegetable scraps.

## February

- Continue ordering seeds.
- Early in the month, start lettuce and celery indoors.
- In the middle of the month, start early small patio type tomatoes like Beaverlodge Slicer and Plum inside. The first tomato was ready on June 30<sup>th</sup> in 2008.
- Late month, start the peppers indoors. I have found great success with the Jalapeno variety, TAM (OP). I have saved this seed for the last 15 years. Hungarian Hot Wax (OP) and Margaret's (OP) have been great also.
- Keep composting: Add the chopped up Pumpkin/Winter Squash shells. Add small amounts of shredded black and white newspaper. Also, add small amounts of wood ashes on the pile.

## March

- Start cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and lettuce indoors.
- Buy fertilizers.
- Begin to till garden areas that have dried out for spring planting only. Let the other areas continue to grow the cover crop planted from last fall.
- Remove pine needles from garlic bed and fertilize.
- If soil is ready, plant spinach, Swiss Chard, parsnips and peas.
- Put up fence around garden.
- Keep composting. Take a walk along the beach/shore line and pick up some seaweed to add to the compost.

## April

- Take pine needles off Asparagus and fertilize.
- Remove pine needles from strawberries, fall planted spinach and parsnips.
- Begin to dig up parsnips. These are the sweetest in the spring and are a great treat.
- In the middle of the month, start eggplant and tomatoes indoors.
- Plant carrots, beets, lettuce, turnips, scallions, mini onion and celery plants outdoors.

- Keep composting: Add raked up yard/garden debris. Sprinkle on some garden soil. Start turning over pile.

### May

- Till the rest of the garden.
- Onions, strawberries and potatoes arrive. Plant as soon as possible. Rake in fertilizer when needed.
- Early month: start watermelons, cantaloupes, Summer Squash, Winter Squash, pumpkins and cucumbers indoors.
- Mid month: Plant purple beans, cabbage family plants and corn outside.
- Plant some of the Walla Walla onions closer together for thinning sometime in July. The sweet bulbs grow fast, plus have the added benefit of the thick green stems that can be used like scallions.
- Towards the end of the month, plant more corn, bush/pole beans, pole lima beans, carrots, beets, Dry Shell and green beans.
- Asparagus ready for picking.
- Scallions and Purplette Onion ready for picking.
- Begin to look for cutworms, slugs and flea beetles.
- Hill potato rows as plants grow.
- Buy local varieties to flesh out the rest of the garden. When buying plants, inspect for aphids and an overall healthy look.
- Liquid fertilize plantings.
- Keep Composting: Add grass clippings and manures. Sprinkle with some garden soil. Cover pile with a tarp during rain periods. Keep turning pile.

### June

- Sweet Potatoes arrive. Plant in a row that has been hilled with black plastic. Punch a hole over 12 inches planting the stem deep to the bottom of the first leaves.
- Early month: Plant third corn variety Supersweet Twice as Nice. This variety likes warmer soil.
- Plant tomatoes, peppers, squash, melons, cucumbers, pumpkins and eggplant in the garden.
- Check for bug activity. Protect plants from cutworms and slugs. Go out at early evening with a flashlight and pick them off.
- Plant more Bush beans, Dill, Basil, Parsley, Tarragon and Cilantro.
- Liquid fertilize plants.
- End of June stop eating Asparagus and let new shoots sprout and fertilize these.
- Continue looking for insects. Keep an eye out for white cabbage moth eggs.

- When corn is knee high, sprinkle fertilizer on both sides of row.
- The row of spinach from last year's plantings should be finished so plant more carrots. The Rainbow variety is great for soups.
- Cut off garlic scrapes (the curly flower stems). Keep these for some cooking.
- Keep composting: Add more grass clippings. Sprinkle on some garden soil. Keep turning over pile.

## July

- Early in the month, start harvesting peas.
- After peas are finished, till and replant rows with more carrots, Bush beans or summer cover crop like Buckwheat that bees love. This can be later added to the compost pile.
- The Red Norland Potatoes should be flowering. This means that it is time to dig up the new potatoes.
- Purple beans will be ready.
- Look for squash bugs on the squashes and pumpkins. Scrape them off with a stick because they stink. Look for their eggs that are laid on the underside of the leaves.
- Keep watch for hornworms on tomatoes, peppers and potatoes. Look at the outer branches for leaf damage.
- Green and Yellow Wax Beans should be producing.
- Carrots ready.
- Plant more cilantro.
- Liquid fertilize plants.
- Compost pile: Stop adding to last year's compost. This will be ready to add to the garden this fall. Start up a new pile for the rest of this year into next July.
- Keep composting: Lots of green garden debris can be added to speed up decomposing. Sprinkle on some garden soil. Add water during dry spells. Keep turning pile.

## August

- Reward month: almost everything is producing. There is a lot of fresh eating, canning, freezing and sharing with family and friends. Homemade salsa beats any of the store bought brands. Fresh cut up sweet corn makes the best Sheppard's Pie.
- Keep bug watch. Japanese beetles love pole beans. Knock these off into a can of soapy water.
- Liquid fertilize plants.
- Start Spinach for fall leaf salads and over wintering for next spring's early growth.
- Start a lettuce mix.
- Boost third and fourth corn planting with Fertilizer. If you are having woodchuck/ raccoon problems, you can sprinkle dry blood.

- Keep composting: Add more manure. Sprinkle on some garden soil. After eating Lobsters, throw in shells. Keep turning over the pile.

### September

- Dig up potatoes after the plants have died back. Protect them from the sun light after digging up.
- Green shell beans ready. Keep some on the plants to dry for next years planting.
- Dry shell beans ready.
- Winter Squash/Pumpkins can stay on the vines even after a light frost. Pick before a heavy frost.
- Dig up onions after tops have died back.
- Sweet potatoes ready for digging up.
- Corn ready: third planting early in the month. Fourth planting (Silver Queen) mid month.
- Everbearing Strawberries (Ozark Beauty) producing now through October. Keep remay cloth handy for frost protection.
- Keep composting: Add lost of dried garden debris and vegetable scraps from canning.

### October

- Plants remaining in the garden: Brussels sprouts, cabbage, leeks, swiss chard, beets, carrots, celery, lettuce, spinach, cilantro and parsnips. Dig a few parsnips for fresh eating.
- Make a quick plan for garden layout next year.
- End of month: ready area for planting garlic. Place nylon netting over garlic bed so squirrels do not disturb by planting nuts.
- Start tilling and plant White Sweet Clover and Winter Rye Grass. The Winter Rye Grass will sprout again next spring.
- Start collecting Pine Needles for later.
- Keep composting: Mow leaves with a mulching lawn mower and add to the compost pile. Sprinkle on some garden soil. Many apple peelings can be added. Keep turning over pile.

### November

- Dig up leeks: makes a great soup.
- Brussels Sprouts will keep even when the snow starts falling. Pull off cabbage, beets and celery.

- Remove the nylon netting from the garlic bed before covering with pine needles.
- Mark with stakes: carrots and parsnips. Keep some carrots in the ground covering with pine needles for winter delight. The variety Bolera is a good keeper.
- Cover with pine needles: spinach, asparagus, parsnips and strawberries.
- Keep Composting: Lots of Thanksgiving Day vegetable scraps to add. The local turkey flock likes to dig around the compost pile. What do you suppose they are dropping? I stop turning over the pile as the cold weather approaches.

#### December

- Record inventory of seeds for next year. Note any observations for next year's garden. New seed catalogs start arriving (smile). I just received some. I am excited about trying a tomato called Ultimate Opener Hybrid, a lettuce mix called All-star Gourmet, an Open-Pollinated Sweet Corn called Double Standard and a cantaloupe called Sarah's Choice F1.
- As I said before, keep building your gardening knowledge. To get ready for the senior years, I plan to do research container gardening. The Internet has been an excellent place to find garden information.
- Relax while you can, and give yourself some time off from the garden.
- Keep composting: add some Lyme and spread the balance of Pine needles not used in the garden.

Bring on the New Year!