

WTCGG



Washington Township Community Garden

NEWSLETTER: The Garden In Spring

It is snowing as I write this article. March came in like a lion and is leaving like a lion this year. There is no lamb in sight. I've never trusted April either. I remember as a young girl, walking to Easter church services in a pretty summery dress and freezing my legs off.

This month daffodils, crocus and spring bulbs of all kinds start to show themselves. We are so very thankful for these signals of impending warmer temperatures. This April is supposed to start out with days of temps in the 50's & 60's. JOY JOY JOY! (I still don't trust it) Just remember that our last frost date is mid May. When we get those very warm days in the coming months of April and early May don't be fooled into planting heat loving plants such as peppers, tomatoes and squash. Even if the plant & seed supplier companies mail them to you too soon, remember that our WTCG is even colder and windier than your own yard, and heat loving plants will either sit there and get stunted in growth or freeze in an overnight frost. Plan for success and protect those babies at home in warmth and protection until you are certain it will remain warm to hot at our garden. There is plenty of time here in NJ to grow a wonderful & plentiful garden. - Denise Tedeschi



FUNDRAISING:

T-SHIRTS for SALE at Long Valley Green Market

Our garden T-shirts have been quite a hit! They are available at the Green Market which opens soon. Priced at \$12 they are available in several colors and sizes from small to XXL.

APRIL GARDENING CHORES:

From the website:
www.awaytogarden.com

FIRST THINGS FIRST. In the edible garden, why prep the tomato row when you haven't even planted the peas or spinach? "Spot clean" key areas, so earliest crops can get sown, then double back later if other "must" extra-early chores are still undone.

STAY ON TRACK with seed-starting. Make a chart of what to sow when, indoors or out, or organize packets week-by-week, in an accordion file or recipe-card box. Move any packet that's best sown a little at a time ahead two weeks in the filing system after you use it, to plan for a staggered supply of salads, carrots, radishes and such. **PLANTS** that may have been pushed out of the ground by frost heave should be pressed firmly back into place.

ONCE GARDEN BEDS ARE CLEANED UP, topdress according to label directions with an all-natural organic fertilizer in areas that need it (based on soil test results), and a layer of finished compost everywhere. Wait to apply mulch until the soil warms thoroughly.

PREPARE NEW BEDS by smothering grass or weeds with layers of recycled corrugated cardboard or thick layers of newspaper, then put mulch on top.

FEED BULBS (including garlic!) with an organic fertilizer labeled for them as green shoots get up and growing. Few blooms on daffodils and other flower bulbs?

ONION & SHALLOT seedlings or sets can take cool weather and go out early.



SOWING for the garden...

Tips for Starting Your Own Seeds Indoors

Excerpts from the Organic Gardening website www.organicgardening.com

Place sure bets: Some plants lend themselves to home germination better than others. Surefire vegetables include basil, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, chives, leeks, lettuce, onions, peppers, and tomatoes. Some reliable annual flowers are alyssum, cosmos, marigolds, and zinnias. Perennials include Shasta daisies, columbines, and hollyhocks.

Get the timing down: To calculate when to sow your seeds, go to our [SEED STARTING CHART](#), print it out and then fill in the blanks. Then you will have a planting plan you can follow through the season.

Gather containers: Reuse last year's nursery flats if you have some around. Otherwise, any container 2 or 3 inches deep will do. Punch holes for drainage into the bottom of containers and set them into trays. Protect against plant disease by thoroughly cleaning all used containers: Wash them in hot, soapy water, and rinse with a dilute solution of household bleach and water. If you want a less-irritating substitute for the bleach, use distilled white vinegar.

Pick the right growing medium: You can buy bags of seed-starter mix or you can make your own seed-starting mix by blending equal parts of perlite, vermiculite, and peat. Add 1/4 teaspoon of lime to each gallon of mix to neutralize the acidity of the peat. You'll eventually want to repot most of your seedlings into larger containers before setting them into the garden. But lettuce, melons, and cucumbers are finicky about being transplanted and should go directly from the original containers into the garden. When starting these fussier plants, always add two parts well-aged, screened compost to your mix to give them a healthy beginning.

Sow carefully: Moisten your medium in the containers before sowing the seeds. Next, drop seeds onto the surface of the mix, spacing them as evenly as possible. Cover the seeds to a depth about three times the thickness of the seeds. Some seeds, such as ageratum, alyssum, impatiens, petunias, and snapdragons, should not be covered at all because they need light in order to germinate.



Top it off: Lightly sprinkle milled sphagnum moss, a natural fungicide, over everything to protect against damping-off, a fungal disease that rots seeds and seedlings. In the case of seeds that need light to germinate, sprinkle the moss first and then drop the seeds onto the moss.

Keep seeds cozy: Cover the flats with plastic wrap or glass to keep the environment humid and place them near a heat vent or on a heat mat made especially for seed starting. Most seeds germinate well at about 70 degrees F.

Keep them damp: Mist with a spray bottle or set the trays into water so the mix wicks up the moisture from below. (cont'd page 4)

sowing for the garden (cont'd)

Lighten up: At the first signs of sprouting, uncover and move the containers to a bright spot—a sunny window, a greenhouse, or beneath a couple of ordinary fluorescent shop lights (4-footers with two 40-watt bulbs). The lights are worthwhile, especially if you live in the North. They provide a steady source of high-intensity light. Short days restrict window light, and your seedlings need 12 to 16 hours of light a day. Suspend the lights just 2 inches above the plants and gradually raise them as the seedlings mature. If plants have to stretch or lean toward the light, they can become weak and spindly. To turn the lights on and off at the same time each day, hook them up to an electric timer.

Cool down: Seedlings don't have to stay as warm as germinating seeds. Move them away from radiators and air vents, or off the heating mat, as soon they have germinated.

Feed them: If you're using a soilless mix without compost, begin to fertilize your seedlings as soon as they get their first true leaves. (These leaves emerge after the little, round cotyledon leaves.) Water with a half-strength solution of liquid fish/seaweed fertilizer every week or two. Use either a spray bottle or add the fertilizer to the water you set the trays in if you're using the wick-up method described above.

Give them room: If the seedlings outgrow their containers or crowd one another, replot them into larger containers filled with a mix that includes compost. Extract the seedlings with a narrow fork or flat stick, and handle by their leaves and roots to avoid damaging the fragile stems. Tuck the seedlings gently into the new pots, and water them to settle the roots.

Pet them: Lightly ruffling seedlings once or twice a day with your hand or a piece of cardboard helps them to grow stocky and strong. Or, set up a small fan to gently, continuously blow on your seedlings.

Toughen them up: About 1 week before the plants are to go outside, start acclimating them to the harsh conditions of the big world. Gardeners call this hardening off. On a warm spring day move the containers to a shaded, protected place, such as a porch, for a few hours. Each day—unless the weather is horrible—gradually increase the plants exposure to sun and breeze. At the end of the week leave them out overnight; then transplant them into the garden.



ORGANIC Gardening[®]

SEED-STARTING PLAN

The spring frost-free date in my garden is _____

CROP	WHEN TO START INSIDE	WEEKS FROM SOWING	SAFE TO SET OUT TIME (RELATIVE TO FROST-FREE DATE)	SETTING OUT DATE
Basil		6	1 week after	
Beets		4-6	2 weeks before	
Broccoli		4-6	2 weeks before	
Cabbage		4-6	4 weeks before	
Cauliflower		4-6	2 weeks before	
Collards		4-6	4 weeks before	
Corn		2-4	0-2 weeks after	
Cucumber		3-4	1-2 weeks after	
Eggplant		8-10	2-3 weeks after	
Kale		4-6	4 weeks before	
Kohlrabi*		4-6	4 weeks before	
Lettuce		4-5	3-4 weeks before	
Melons		3-4	2 weeks after	
Mustard*		4-6	4 weeks before	
Okra*		4-6	2-4 weeks after	
Onions		6-8	4 weeks before	
Parsley		9-10	2-3 weeks before	
Peas*		3-4	6-8 weeks before	
Peppers		6-14	2 weeks after	
Pumpkins		3-4	2 weeks after	
Spinach		4-6	3-6 weeks before	
Squash		3-4	2 weeks after	
Swiss chard		4-6	2 weeks before	
Tomatoes		6-8	1-2 weeks after	

* These crops are usually direct-seeded outdoors, but they can be started inside.

WHEN IS MY SOIL READY TO PLANT?

Q. Some seed packets say to plant “as soon as the soil can be worked” in the spring. How can I tell when that is? What happens if I start too soon?

Cal Matthews

Dayton, Ohio

A. Besides the danger that some seeds planted in cold soil will rot rather than grow, starting “too soon” actually poses a greater risk to the soil in your garden than to any seeds you plant early in the spring. Digging, tilling, and walking on soil that is still wet from melted snow or spring rains can damage its structure in ways that will haunt your efforts for the rest of the growing season.

Working wet soil destroys the pore spaces between soil particles that allow air and water to move through the soil. Large, compacted clumps of wet soil become impermeable, concrete-like clods that resist penetration by roots and moisture. Instead of soaking in, water runs off or sits on the surface of compacted soil, while a lack of air spaces limits root growth.

Working dry soil also damages the structure by reducing it to dust. If your soil is too dry to form even a loose ball, set a sprinkler to soak it deeply and thoroughly. Then wait a couple of days and test to see if it has dried enough to be safe to work. Originally published in *Organic Gardening Magazine*, April/May 2012

Take a hands-on approach to judging whether garden soil is too wet, too dry, or just right for digging: Pick up a handful of soil and squeeze it gently into a ball. Then apply light pressure to the ball with a finger from your other hand. If the ball breaks apart easily into loose pieces, the soil is dry enough to dig. If pressing on it flattens the ball or breaks it into large chunks, the soil is too wet—wait a few days and test it again.

Soil that won't hold together when you squeeze a handful is too dry. Working dry soil also damages the structure by reducing it to dust. If your soil is too dry to form even a loose ball, set a sprinkler to soak it deeply and thoroughly. Then wait a couple of days and test to see if it has dried enough to be safe to work. Originally published in *Organic Gardening Magazine*, April/May 2012



too wet



too dry



good to dig

You Bet Your
garden®



Have gardening questions? Call 1-888-346-9499, or send an email to garden@whyy.org. If emailing, please include your name and your location in the email, and the actual subject (not “help” or “question”) in the subject line. Don't miss any organic gardening tips subscribe to the You Bet Your Garden podcast.

Mike McGrath chats with callers and gives gardening advice on WHYY's public radio show You Bet Your Garden. Diane Muenzen recommends it as it is chock full of useful gardening info and hey, aren't you tired of listening to politics, sports or contemporary music anyway? Make use of your listening time by learning how to be a better gardener in our community garden and your own home.

Help Support Our COMMUNITY GARDEN

Please share this page with people in the community that you feel would like to help support our wonderful town garden so it will be here for generations to come. Details and donation forms may be found on our website: www.wtcommunitygarden.jimdo.com

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For your sponsorship we will plant bulbs, place pavers & stepping stones or plant a fruit tree in your name.



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1 Doz. Bulbs

Large logo featured on website.
A Fruit Tree planted in WTCG with dedication plaque.

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