



The Newton Farmer

e-newsletter

November 2010

Dear Farm Friends,

This is the last farm newsletter of the season. I hope that you were able to preserve some memories, and some produce, from the farm this summer. I have lots of great memories as well as some good food: I cut up and froze lots of tomatoes and some kale, and I dried herbs and hot peppers. I hope you have a good winter and that you look forward, as I will, to next season at the farm.

Your editor,
Susan Tornheim
sftornheim@yahoo.com

Notes from Greg Maslowe, Farm Manager

As I walked around the farm on this cold, blustery morning, the leaves falling from the sky recalled a ticker-tape parade: nature celebrating its own bounty. We too had much to celebrate this season. A bumper crop of tomatoes fueled record sales at the farm stand. A new contract with the city. A Community Preservation Act grant to renovate the barn into a four-season educational and community facility. It was truly a year to celebrate.



Spring and fall are, to me, liminal times marking the transition between cold and dark, and light and heat. Just as the weather changes at these times, so too does the farm. There is a distinctly different feel to the farm when the field has been mostly plowed down and planted with cover crops. It feels small. I look out and think, wow, that's all there is. It remains that way until the following spring when we begin to plant. As we turn the field and begin to plant, the farm seems to grow (despite our eternal crunch for more planting space). By August the farm is a much larger place. I have this same psychological experience when I walk through familiar woods at different times of year. As the leaves fall from the trees, woods that

seemed to go on and on are suddenly bare. You can see through them, and they seem only a fraction of their summertime size. This is one of the reasons I find New England so alluring: the landscape changes so significantly with the seasons.

I love farming and working outdoors year-round because I get to enjoy these changes. Farming provides an interesting juxtaposition. It ties you to one place, creating a strong sense of fixedness, almost permanence (I rarely go anywhere between March and November). Yet at the same time it forces you, relentlessly, to make peace with change. Nothing ever remains the same. Nature is always in motion. Sometimes the change is predictable, like the arrival of autumn. Other times it is jarring and unexpected as when one of our great old apple trees came crashing down in the middle of the night a few days ago. But always the changes make you adapt and hopefully find some way of making the best of the situation.

Last month I wrote about cover cropping and hinted at some new methods we're trying out at Newton Community Farm to deal with winter rye. The problem with rye, as you may recall, is that it is not killed by New England winters. So when spring arrives, the rye begins growing again and can make it difficult to prepare beds for planting. Typically farmers deal with rye by plowing it under, which buries the rye upside down a good 12 inches underground. This can work pretty well but is not the best thing for your soil, and while it can be replicated by a home gardener with a shovel, it is pretty labor-intensive.

If you don't need to plant a bed until mid-May, however, there might be an alternative. Winter rye flowers around mid-May. Once an annual (as opposed to perennial) plant flowers, it switches from vegetative growth (stems and leaves) to reproductive growth (the flowers). If you cut, or even just break, the stem at this point, the plant can't repair the damage to its vascular system, and it dies. That's the theory. So with rye, if you mow it (or just break the stems by stomping all over it, although I find mowing/cutting more successful) in mid-May when it's in full flower, you can kill it quite easily.

We tried this for tomatoes in 2010. We mowed our rye and let it sit for two weeks to see whether it really was dead. We discovered that we had to re-mow it, most likely because not every stem was in flower at the same time, but then after the second mowing we were able to plant our tomatoes right into the mowed rye without ever tilling the soil. The cut rye provided some mulch (though we added more), and the decomposing roots did not inhibit the growth of the tomatoes at all.

While the labor to plant into the cut rye was greater than planting into a nicely tilled bed, this no-till approach was much better for the soil. In 2010 we planted 1/10 of our tomatoes this way. We'll expand that percentage for 2011 and keep more careful records of just how much time was involved in this no-till tomato system versus our normal practice of tilling beds to prepare for tomatoes. It has been a fun experiment, and I'm looking forward to learning more about the pros and cons next year.

As I sign off for the winter I want to encourage all of you to snuggle up on a couch or comfy chair this winter with a seed catalog and join me in dreaming about all the great things just waiting to burst forth from our gardens next spring. Try growing something next year, no matter how big or small, that will help nourish and sustain you. It's empowering, fun, and the very best way to know where your food comes from.

Greg Maslowe

Building Our Information Center

When the Anginos lived on the farm they had chickens, housed in the chicken coop, built in 1914 by a previous resident. As part of the chicken operation, there was a chicken run in the location of the current greenhouse, and farther to the west side there was a pullet shed. Pullets are young chickens that need to be housed separately from adult chickens to avoid injury.



When Newton Community Farm took over the land, the pullet shed was falling down, and we removed it. After the CSA season ended this year, we began rebuilding this structure — adaptively restored as the farm’s information center. The 12 ft. by 8 ft. building will have a front porch to protect visitors from rainy or sunny days. A bank of historically appropriate windows will open to display information about the farm.

Lipof Real Estate Services, Inc., donated funds for this building project; additional donations are welcome. Anyone handy with a hammer and nails should contact Greg; we will be having a work day in mid-November to side and roof the

building.

Ted Chapman

Winter Classes

It is mid-November, and that means that the end of the traditional New England growing season is here. As it was on its way out, we offered several classes to help you make the most out of fresh produce and extend the bounty into the cold winter months—from pickling and pie making to jams, jellies, and even season extension for those of you with your own gardens. We also successfully debuted our new Budding Chefs series for third to fifth graders. This fall we learned about applesauce and pickles (and made some great recipes!). Be on the lookout for more Budding Chefs classes next spring when we will bring food from the fields into the kitchen again.

We aren’t offering any classes during the holiday season, but be sure to check the Web site for a whole new list of classes starting in January 2011. During the winter months we will be offering classes in beer brewing, bread making, vermicomposting, garden planning and more. The new listings will be posted by the beginning of December. And looking even further ahead, we are already hard at work planning classes for next spring and summer. We will be offering our Farmer in Training summer camp for middle-school students again in addition to a whole slew of new classes and old favorites. Thanks to everyone who participated in our educational programming in 2010, and to those of you who haven’t made it to one of our courses or workshops yet, we hope to see you in 2011!

Kelly Lake

[Click here for class information.](#)

Design of Barn Second-Phase Construction

The city has selected CSS Architects to begin to design phase two of the barn renovation, which will turn the main barn floor into handicapped-accessible community/workshop/education space with bathrooms, a demonstration kitchen, a safe floor, heating, and lighting. The lower bays will get a new concrete floor, lighting, rebuilt doors, and a new ceiling. There will also be a new screened three-season porchlike addition at the back of the barn for additional programming space and as a second emergency exit. The driveway leading to the barn will be regraded. The city is providing construction funding through the

Community Preservation Act process. If Newton authorities and relevant committees give the necessary approvals without delays, the firm can complete the designs in a timely manner. Then the design will go to bid in the spring, and the qualified low bidder will complete the work at the end of 2011.

Peter Barrer



Publicity Volunteer Needed

Newton Community Farm is looking for a volunteer to write and edit occasional e-mails to be sent to our list, at most one a month. (This job is different from that of the Newsletter Editor, which is a separate volunteer responsibility.) Time spent can count as CSA work hours. Please contact Peter Barrer at pbarrer@verizon.net if you are interested.

Peter Barrer

Drying and Freezing: Two Great Ways to Preserve Your Herbs

Have you ever felt bad because you brought home more herbs than you could use right away? Despair no more. Drying and freezing, two preservation techniques explained below by farm member and writer Lisa Janice Cohen, will extend the pungency of your herbs for at least three months.

To dry herbs, tie them together and hang them upside down in front of a sunny window. "The universe pretty much does the rest," says Cohen. Be prepared for some of the leaves to fall and crumble as they dry. Dry your herbs as soon as possible. If you wait too long, wet leaves will turn moldy. If you grow more herbs than will fit in one window, consider buying a food dehydrator.



Lisa prefers to freeze the basil that her husband grows in four enormous pots in their yard. Here's her method:

1. Pick the leaves before the plants flower.

2. Wash them.
3. Spin them in a salad spinner to dry them.
4. Tear the leaves coarsely in a food processor.
5. Mix with enough olive oil to lightly coat the edges.

You can freeze basil in ice-cube trays, so it's easy to grab only enough for one recipe.

If you'd like to keep your herbs just a little longer than they'd last in the refrigerator, put their cut ends into a cup of water on your counter. They'll last a couple of weeks, Lisa says.

Lisa has been a member of Newton Community Farm since the farm's beginning. She also has meat and winter root-vegetable farm shares. "With all these shares, either you resign yourself to wasting food and putting it on the compost pile, or you can learn to preserve it," she says. This is why she started preserving food.

Susan B. Weiner

State of the Orchard

The three-year-old orchard is doing well. In 2010 we harvested 79 Liberty apples, 33 Honeycrisp, 9 Crimson Topaz, and 20 Crown Empire for a total weight yield of about 60 pounds. Apple quality was excellent (15-25% with blemishes). Honeycrisp apples were large, weighing about 0.5 pound each; most other varieties weighed 0.4 pound each. We had little need for fungicides as the summer was hot and dry. Pesticide use was minimized by using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices with maggot apple bags and lures. We look forward to significant apple production next year, perhaps 25 to 50 apples per tree, or a yield of 200 to 400 pounds. We plan to add four to six additional trees next spring, partly by removing the two large sweet cherry trees because of incompatibility. If you are interested in helping this fall or next year, contact Sam Fogel at sam@fogel.com.

Sam Fogel

Protect Your Trees From Winter Moths

Be prepared to spray the trunk of fruit and other trees with dormant oil spray (such as Bonide All Seasons Horticultural & Dormant Spray Oil). You will need multiple applications starting when you first see the moths in mid to late November through January. Spray the entire trunk of young trees and in particular the first foot closest to the ground.

Also consider putting masking tape on a dry day around the trunk close to the ground and then coating it with sticky stuff. The female moths will try to crawl up the trunk and get caught. I use a Tanglefoot product called Tangle-Trap Sticky Coating. Wait until all the leaves fall off the tree and then clean around the base of the tree to remove loose stuff that will stick.

You can buy Bonide's product, as well as Tanglefoot products, from Amazon.com, or look for them online.

Sam Fogel

Volunteers

Volunteer hours are done for the season.

Please contact us if you have any questions about this newsletter or ideas for future issues, or if you want to be added to our mailing list. Just e-mail Susan Tornheim at sftornheim@yahoo.com. For more information about the farm, e-mail Greg Maslowe at greg@newtoncommunityfarm.org or check out our Web page at newtoncommunityfarm.org (or click on the image at the top of the page).

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