

The Newton Farmer

an e-newsletter from
Newton Community Farm



September 2009
Dear Farm Friends,

There's a change in the air and, with the return of students to school, most of us feel that it's fall. It's also harvest time with farm shares getting bigger with fall produce. The farm will celebrate the change of seasons with its annual Harvest Festival in October, and you have a chance to get involved. New fall classes are starting up as well, the first on September 20, a fascinating tour revolving around goat cheese! So a lot is happening, and I hope you can take part.

Your editor,
Susan Tornheim
sftornheim@yahoo.com

Notes from Greg Maslowe, Farm Manager

September is a month of exhaustion at the farm. Usually this is because we're so busy picking that there's hardly time to breathe. Hauling 50-pound buckets of tomatoes, eggplant, summer squash, and peppers from the field to the barn—over and over again—leaves our backs aching. This year the exhaustion is still there, but the reasons are different. While the peppers are starting to come in heavily, 2009 was a total bust for tomatoes, and the eggplants have been lackadaisical. Instead of reaping the bounty of months of work, we're busy preparing beds for cover cropping a bit early this year. While it doesn't make me particularly happy to be doing this, it is in a sense a silver lining: We're hoping to get much of our field seeded to oats and field peas rather than winter rye.



What's so great about this, and why are we able to do it this year? First, oats and field peas will protect the soil from the damaging effects of New England weather but will be killed by the cold. That means that next spring the beds that are planted to oats and peas will be easier to prepare for planting. Winter rye, on the other hand, is not killed by the cold and therefore can create difficulties the following spring when it needs to be killed before we plant cash crops. In addition, the field peas, a legume, will "fix" (that is, capture and sequester) atmospheric nitrogen, which will then be available to next season's crops. Winter rye doesn't do this.

So why would we ever plant winter rye as a cover crop rather than oats and peas? In order to get a good stand of oats and peas before the weather turns too cold they need to be planted by mid-September at the latest. Winter rye, on the other hand, will germinate at temperatures approaching freezing. Since in a normal year we would keep tomatoes (which constitute almost 30 percent of our total growing space) in the ground well into October, winter rye is really the only option for a winter cover crop. This goes for many other crops as well. So this year's terrible tomato blight affords us an opportunity to nurture our soil in a way that we would not ordinarily be able

to do.

September is also the month in which we begin preparing the hoop house for winter growing. We've already seeded the first mesclun mix. As the month progresses we'll do more mesclun, as well as seed or transplant spinach, head lettuce, mizuna, and komatsuna into benches in the greenhouse. I've been very inspired this summer by Eliot Coleman's new book on winter growing, and I hope to have greens well into winter—with no supplemental heat. By the time of our Harvest Festival you should be able to visit the hoop house to see what we've planted for winter. For those of you who are really interested in how to do this, we're offering a course this fall on season extension in which we'll talk about unheated greenhouses (hoop houses), as well as cold frames, what varieties to grow, when to plant, and how to harvest during the winter. Check out the course listings on our Web site for more information.

The weather this season has not only created challenges for growing vegetables but also for raising bees. Our bees did not survive the winter last year, so we've been working hard to try to ensure that they'll make it through the winter this year. One aspect of this was extracting honey earlier in the season to give the bees more time to replenish their stocks. The first step in extracting honey is getting the bees out of the supers (the parts of the hives that are used for collecting honey). This is done by installing traps that allow the bees to exit the supers, but not reenter. During this process we noticed massive bee activity outside one of the hives. Tens of thousands of bees had descended on the hive to rob the now unguarded honey! Our bee keeper reported that, while he had heard of robbing, he'd never actually witnessed it until this year. We lost about 30 pounds of honey from that hive in 24 hours! The most likely reason for the robbing is that the strange weather this summer altered the bloom schedule for wildflowers, causing many of them to bloom earlier than normal. This left the bees without food during the late summer, causing them literally to start starving. The same phenomenon has resulted in wasps devastating our raspberries. We'll still get some honey from the bees this year, and hopefully we'll be able to successfully overwinter the bees, but it certainly was exciting to have to try to stop that many bees with just a wet sheet and some duct tape!

Harvest Festival in October



Sunday, October 18
1–4 p.m. at the farm

Everyone is welcome at our big Harvest Festival on October 18. There will be music, children's activities, cooking demonstrations, farm tours, delicious food, and more. See you at the farm!

We are looking for a few more volunteers to help out with the Harvest Festival. It's a great way to enjoy the farm and make a contribution to building community around it. (For CSA sharers, it also counts as work hours.) If you are interested, contact Peter Barrer at pbarrer@verizon.net.

Photo: Hugh and Hans Toulmin at the 2008 Harvest Festival.

[For more information about the festival, click here.](#)

Fall Classes at Newton Community Farm

Our Fall 2009 course catalog is now available. This month we're starting with a tour of Valley View Farm, makers of wonderful goat cheese. Also in September, you can learn how to use worms to make your own compost in our vermicomposting class.

For the full schedule of courses through December, follow the link below.

Sept. 20: Valley View Farm Goat Cheese Tour

If you've ever been curious about cheese making and are interested in seeing firsthand the process of how goats' and cows' milk is turned into delicious cheese, please come join us for an afternoon of exploring and touring Valley View Farm. Cheese will be available for sampling and for sale after the visit. Bon appétit.

Sunday, September 20, 2009

1:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.

Meet at Newton Community Farm to carpool to Valley View Farm in Topsfield, MA

Fee: \$10 members, \$12 nonmembers



Sept. 26: Get Started in Vermicomposting

Make and take your own indoor composting system and learn the why and how of vermicomposting. Using a simple yet effective system, you will turn your food waste into potting soil with the help of red worms. Odors are minimal, the system is compact, and it can “live” in your garage or cellar all winter! You will produce nitrogen-rich liquid fertilizer for your indoor plants and compost for your garden. We provide the materials, worms, and instruction. You bring a bin, and you leave with a working system for your home. Bins are \$10 each and can be preordered when you sign up for the course.

Saturday, September 26, 2009

2 p.m.–3:30 p.m.

At Newton Community Farm

Fee: \$23 members, \$25 nonmembers

Photo: In the Learning Garden

In spite of the many challenges the weather has sent our way this year, classes in the Learning Garden can still harvest many wonderful veggies!

[For course catalog and registration form, click here.](#)

2009 Farmer in Training Program

Our first annual Farmer in Training (FiT) program was a big success and attracted 24 students over the course of six weeks. The maximum number of students per week was six, and we averaged four students a week. At the end of every week the “farmers” prepared a harvest lunch from produce grown at the farm and were given a little plant-identification quiz. This year Newton Community Farm rented a 40x20-foot community garden plot in Nahanton Park. The students spent their time working at this plot where we grew food for the Newton Food Pantry; doing hands-on projects at the farm; and discussing Newton Community Farm, sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and growing our own food. Several participants were interested in doing two weeks, but the program was really geared toward a one-week experience. Others asked about follow-up programs in the fall or inquired about FiT for next summer.

At the end of the week, the participants were given a certificate of excellence signed by Greg and me, and a few of them came back to volunteer at the farm. The most popular activities were planting, picking, and harvesting, and probably the least favorite activity was weeding (surprise, surprise). We're very much looking forward to an expanded, revised, and updated program for 2010. A mother of two sons who attended the program during a week with six boys wrote, “I wanted to let you know how much my sons enjoyed the FiT program last week. Many thanks to you for everything that you taught them. I hope you can have a few workshops in the fall that

they can participate in and learn further.” Thanks to Greg, Jenny, and all those who participated in the development and implementation of the FiT program.

Yannick Perrette

Photo: Michael Costello deals with carrots as a Farmer in Training.

[Click here to see an article on the farm and the FiT program that appeared in the Newton Tab.](#)



Web Site Makeover

Our Web site has a new look! Launched last month, the new site has a cleaner design, improved navigation menus, and expanded sections on education and historic preservation. It also has sidebars that remind visitors of upcoming events and classes, as well as more places to display photos. We'll be expanding our content in the weeks to come, so check back often for updates.

Many thanks to our webmaster, Lisa Cohen, for her assistance in this project.

(For the tech-savvy: We migrated to a CMS-based system to allow multiple users to update the site. The site is now powered by Wordpress.)

Call for Volunteers: Publicity Committee Forming

Help us get the word out! We're forming a new committee to promote exciting farm happenings such as upcoming events, educational programs, and the latest farm news.

We'll have plenty of opportunities:

- * writing
- * layout design
- * graphic design
- * poster distribution
- * attending community events
- * street marketing
- * grassroots organizing
- * media relations
- * Web design
- * online communities

If you enjoy or have experience in any of these areas, we need you! Contact Christine

at christine_liu1@yahoo.com.

Volunteer hours on the farm: Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 9-12

Massachusetts Food Preservation Workshop Day

The Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA/Mass) is holding workshops on how to preserve food from the fall harvest in two Boston-area locations on September 19.

The event is part of Massachusetts Food Preservation Workshop Day, which has been organized to respond to the resurgence of interest in local foods and self-reliance. One workshop will be held from 10 to 4 at the Natick Community Organic Farm, 117 Eliot St., South Natick; and another will be held from 9 to noon at the home of Jill Ebbott, 70 Beaconsfield Rd., Brookline.

[Click here for full information on these workshops.](#)

Recipes

Since I love eggplant, I focused on two delicious recipes that use that bulbous purple gem. Eggplant Parmesan is a delectable version of the familiar dish and includes a great and easy recipe for Italian tomato sauce. Spicy Eggplant Relish uses both eggplant and green pepper and has intriguing tastes. Both dishes are now on the recipe list on the farm wiki.

[Click here for recipe list.](#)

Farm Stand

Hours: Open Tuesday through Friday, 3–dark; Saturday, 10–2 p.m.

Available in September: eggplant, sweet peppers, hot peppers, potatoes, winter squash

Farm Wish List

wood picnic table (still need one more)
about 1 acre of open space for farming in Newton

If you can help us with any of these items, please contact Greg Maslowe at [617-916-9655](tel:617-916-9655) or at greg@newtoncommunityfarm.org. We are a 501(c)3 organization. Your donations may be tax-deductible. Thank you for your support!