

The Newton Farmer

an e-newsletter from
Newton Community Farm



September 2010
Dear Farm Friends,

We've all noticed, I suspect, that the days are growing shorter and that fall colors are beginning to appear on a few trees. The temperature is dropping, especially at night, and it's time to bring in any houseplants that were summering outside. Of course, Labor Day is always the official end of the summer season for me, and any remaining summery days are a gift. I wish you a peaceful turning of the season.

Your editor,
Susan Tornheim
sftornheim@yahoo.com

Notes from Greg Maslowe, Farm Manager



The year 2010 may come to be known as the year the tomatoes thought they were zucchinis. After 2009's disastrous blight, 2010 was not only a good year for tomatoes, it was phenomenal. There was a rumor that if you left your car doors unlocked while visiting the farm, you might come back to find that someone had filled the back seat with excess tomatoes.

Of course, all good things have to come to an end. As we rapidly move into fall weather—cool days and even cooler nights—tomato production has slowed greatly. We still expect to get tomatoes at least through the end of September, but we won't be having any more weeks of harvesting 2,000 pounds (that's one ton) in three days.

The sheer volume of tomatoes coming out of our field this season is even more surprising in light of the fact that we skipped planting our third succession of tomatoes this year. Due to a combination of temporal and spatial constraints we made the decision to plant only the cherry tomatoes from our third planting of tomatoes. This meant that we didn't plant literally hundreds of plants. In hindsight, that decision seems to be genius. We've been struggling to keep up with the picking as it is. If we'd had another 500 plants, I think we'd have quit.

So why do we plant tomatoes three times? A couple of reasons. First, it's an important element of organic tomato production in a humid climate like New England's. We regularly get early blight (a distinct disease from late blight, which destroyed crops last season). Early blight causes leaves to turn yellow and die, starting at the bottom of the plant and working up. Eventually it will kill tomato plants, or at least defoliate them so badly that

the fruit, exposed to the sun, gets scalded. We could spray fungicides to help with early blight, but we'd have to do that all season long since it lives in the soil. Instead, we plan on the plants getting it at some point. Since we know they're going to get it, we plant multiple times so that as one succession of plants is declining due to early blight, the next succession is just coming into peak production. I've planted as few as two successions, and as many as five. Two worked well this year with its dry weather, but in general I like to plant three times, with a smaller very early crop to get us going, a big main season planting, and then another smaller late-season planting. In addition to helping manage disease, multiple successions spread out the harvest over a longer season, which is good for customers and great for the workers who have to pick all those tomatoes.

By this time of year production from our first succession of tomatoes has slowed to the point where we decided that the output of tomatoes wasn't as important as the benefits to the soil of getting an early cover crop onto those beds. So we've cut down the trellising, spread oats and peas (peas, a legume, will add valuable nitrogen to the soil, but only if they're planted early enough before a killing frost), and mowed the vines. Those beds are now resting and will be ready for an early crop next spring.

That's a lot about tomatoes. But now you know how Megan and I feel. Once the tomatoes start coming in fast and furious it feels like we've got tomatoes on the brain. They stain our hands, break our backs, consume our thoughts, and, of course, fill our bellies. And while we love to hate them in September, we'll all be reminiscing fondly and longingly about them in January.

Fifth Annual Harvest Festival

Sunday, September 26

1:00-4:00 p.m.

Rain or shine

At Newton Community Farm

Free to attend. We will have food for sale.

Our fifth annual Harvest Festival will take place on September 26 from 1 to 4 p.m. Come and celebrate another successful season with live music, children's activities, pumpkin decorating, farm tours, delicious food, and more. Don't miss our biggest event of the year!

[Click here for farm events.](#)

Harvest Festival Help Wanted

We are looking for 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 Kelly Lake at education@newtoncommunityfarm.org.

Bake Sale Donations

If you like to bake, think about donating a baked good to this year's Harvest Festival. The money we make from selling these tasty items helps support our educational programming. If you'd like to donate a baked good, let us know at education@newtoncommunityfarm.org. Then bring your donation to the farm between 10 a.m. and noon on Sunday, September 26. We cannot take cakes that need refrigeration such as cheesecakes. Please include a list of ingredients.

Newton Community Farm Exhibit

The Jackson Homestead and Museum, which offers regular exhibits saluting aspects of Newton's history, has invited the Newton Community Farm to exhibit at the museum. The show opened on September 15 and includes panels on the farm's historical themes. Five large and colorful panels depict the farm as an example of: a vernacular New England farm, including the development of south Newton; the influence of Italian immigration on the farmscape and its agricultural history; and the stories of significant members of the Angino family,

especially Jerry Angino, Newton's walking historian.

The exhibit also displays panels on the farm's current education opportunities and sustainable agricultural practices. On November 10 from 5:30 to 7 p.m., midway through the exhibit period, there will be a reception for the farm community to celebrate the farm and what we have accomplished in the past six years, bringing a piece of Newton's history back to life to create a better future for us all.

We invite each of you to join us.

Ted Chapman

Lecture: Canning and Preserving Garden Fresh Vegetables

(or how a city mouse learned to be a country mouse)

Tuesday, September 28

7:30 p.m.

Druker Auditorium at Newton Free Library, 330 Homer St., Newton Centre

Free

Lisa Janice Cohen will discuss the practice of preserving; provide resources for further learning; and tell the story of how one self-described "city mouse," who could barely boil water, has become committed to preserving.

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

Lumiere Dinner

Tuesday, October 19

7 p.m.

At Lumiere Restaurant, 1293 Washington St., West Newton

Celebrated chef Michael Leviton hosts a special dinner benefiting Newton Community Farm.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

Shared Harvest CSA: Locally Grown Vegetables for Winter Eating

Shared Harvest Winter CSA, a partnership among several small family farms, provides locally grown vegetables for the winter months. Monthly distributions of vegetables take place at Busa Farm in Lexington. Two-month shares, distributed on November 20 and December 18, are available. What's in the winter share? Apples, dried beans, all kinds of greens, parsnips and 'taters, garlic and leeks, and so much more! Members can also order special add-ons, including local apples and cider, honey, cheese, maple syrup, and beans. You will find complete details at www.SharedHarvestCSA.com, including reviews from past shareholders and a subscription form. Contact GrettaAnderson@earthlink.net or [781-507-6602](tel:781-507-6602) for additional information.

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



Summer Explorations

This summer we had a wonderful time with our preschool friends every Tuesday morning during our Farm Sprouts Story Hour. In addition to exploring in our learning garden we have read stories about chickens, bees, and the vegetable ABC's, and we have spent time in our living sunflower house. (Yes! We have a "house" made out of real, living sunflowers_check it out!) The farm is the perfect place for a curious preschooler to explore our brightly colored crops, watch birds scavenging for bugs, and sample some juicy red raspberries and sweet cherry tomatoes. This month we have added a few extra story hours in the afternoons for those of you who didn't make it during the summer. See class info for details!

We have just finished up our Farmer-In-Training summer camp for middle school students who are interested in learning about life on a farm. We worked hard harvesting crops like carrots, tomatoes, and raspberries and maintaining a few plots of our own. We learned a lot about the importance of sustainable farming, and we learned some quick, healthy recipes using ingredients that we grew ourselves. And did I mention that we ended each week with a nature hike along the Charles River that ended with free burritos from Chipotle? Yes, there was that, too! Chipotle supports the farm, and not only did we get great burritos to celebrate a week of hard work, we also got to tour their kitchen and learn about ways in which small farms can partner with companies to make positive changes in the food system.

Kelly Lake
Farm Educator

[For class information, click here.](#)

September/October classes

Looking ahead, we have some exciting offerings to usher in the cool weather and shorter days of fall. We are offering several classes for kids and adults that will keep your cupboards stocked with farm-fresh ingredients through the winter months, from canning to pickling and beyond! And be sure to catch Lisa Cohen's talk on canning and preserving garden-fresh vegetables at the Newton Free Library on September 28 at 7:30 p.m. If you

have a garden of your own, you can come and learn about innovative ideas for extending the growing season in New England, and for those of you who are interested in the wonderful world of soil making, check out our workshop on backyard composting sponsored by our friends at Green Decade. Your summer may be winding down, but as you can see, our educational programming is still going strong. We'd love to see you on the farm as we settle into fall. Remember to stay up to date on our class offerings by checking our Web site, newtoncommunityfarm.org, for more info!

Kelly Lake
Farm Educator

[For more class information, click here.](#)

Growing in Planting Beds

When you visit Newton Community Farm you may notice that the crops are planted in beds rather than in traditional rows. Planting in beds is one of the core elements of the farm's design based on biointensive management concepts. Most crops are planted in 4 foot x 50-foot beds using a geometric spacing of seedlings that lets us plant and harvest more produce per square foot. The consistency of bed size lets us calculate accurately the soil enrichment, seedlings, or seed needed per bed. Planting in beds reduces the square footage dedicated to paths from 50 percent to about 30 percent of the total growing area, helping to prevent soil compaction and making it easier for plant roots to take in water and nutrients.

The farm offers periodic, hands-on classes teaching the biointensive methods used at the farm. The use of growing beds is a trend in modern agriculture, especially in small-scale vegetable farms and home gardens, where space is at a premium. The best use of this technique is the double-dug, raised bed. Raised beds are designed to be permanent garden structures, easily accessible and promoting optimal soil health. Double digging, a hand cultivation technique that loosens the subsoil to a depth of 18 to 20 inches, rather than simply loosening the topsoil layer with mechanical tillers that penetrate only 4 to 6 inches. After a few seasons of double digging, the only initial season cultivation needed for these beds is a once-over with a broad fork and rake. The lack of compaction and the incorporation of organic materials deep into the soil promotes ideal soil conditions for growing—water and nutrient storage and root penetration deep in the planting bed—and these rich conditions allow for increased planting density and higher yields.

Raised beds can be framed with a permanent edging that controls soil movement and increases the height of the planting surface, reducing the need to bend and making it easier to reach the interior of the bed. The optimal width of a raised bed is 30 to 48 inches depending on the size and flexibility of the gardener and whether the bed can be reached from all sides. Framing and raising the bed increases soil temperature and drainage. The higher soil temperatures created by the bed's sides being exposed to sunlight and air temperatures promote early- and late-season growing. But higher soil temperature increases biological activity and the breakdown of organic material and evaporation. Increased drainage has advantages in heavy clay soils but in sandier soils may increase water needs.

The optimal materials used to edge beds included recycled plastic lumbers or rot-resistant woods such as oak, locust, or white cedar, which we use at the farm. Many garden supply companies offer these materials in standardized lengths with a variety of ways to join the corners. Raised beds can be configured with various adaptations: trellises to promote vertical growth of vine plants such as tomatoes, beans, squash, and cucumbers; and hoops that support row covers for season extension or insect control.

Ted Chapman

Volunteers

Every Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 9 to 12:30. Volunteers are welcome to bring a lunch and eat with the farm staff after the session. Remember that CSA work hours must be completed by the end of October.



Farm Wish List

Old-fashioned hog scale in working order (the kind on wheels with a balance arm that is often found in the basements of older homes)

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!

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).