
The Newton Farmer

an e-newsletter from
Newton Community Farm



October 2008

Dear Farm Friends,

Welcome to the October/November edition of the Newton Farmer, the final one for this year. Greg looks back over the past season and reflects upon our farm community. We have two articles for home gardeners, an update on the barn and a review of the exciting programs we had over the summer. Finally, read about the wonderful Fall Harvest Festival. We'd like to remind our readers that CSA shares go on sale in early February and a notice about this will be emailed to everyone on our list in mid-January.

We wish everyone a joyous holiday season and a happy New Year. See you next spring!

Your editors,

Carol Rose and Gil Rosen

Notes from Greg Maslowe, Farm Manager



The growing season is over and most of our beds are put to rest. We still have a few crops left in the field—late season broccoli, cauliflower and lettuce, and various greens that will remain over the entire winter (collards, kale and arugula). Tom and I were also able to get growing benches built for one side of the greenhouse, so we have an experimental planting of lettuce and mesclun mix going. We're interested to see how late we're able to harvest in the protection of the greenhouse. What will we do with what's left? The farm stand will remain open on Saturdays for the first few weeks in November, there are a few restaurants that want to buy from us, and we're working with a group of business students at Olin College who have started a company delivering local food to people's homes.

This was a hard year for tomatoes. We got about half the yield we were expecting due to wet conditions and the inevitable disease that brings. On the other hand, however, we met our goals for getting the entire farm into production, with many beds producing two or even three cash crops this season. And produce sales exceeded our already high expectations. So I guess we can't be too upset about the tomatoes—every year there's probably going to be something to complain about due to weather.

As I think back on our 2008 growing season the thing I am most excited by was the incredible growth of community support for the farm. We were able to fund the first phase of our barn renovation entirely with

privately raised funds (!), our fall festival brought upwards of 1,000 people to the farm (many of whom had never been here before), and our educational programs are beginning to blossom. In addition to all these highlights, there is another that really stands out—we witnessed an incredible desire for people to come and support the farm with their backs and their hands. We had about eight high school and college-age students spend their entire summer vacations volunteering at the farm (some for up to 8-hours a day, 5 days a week), and many others who spent portions of their summer here. We had many regular adult volunteers, some from the CSA, but many just people who had heard about the farm and wanted to come and learn by participating in our daily activities. Our open volunteer times (Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings) were always well attended.

I've been asked a number of times lately what it means that we are a “community” farm. There are many elements that make us a community farm, but I believe the essence is that our relationship with the community is one of both giving and receiving. We give people a place to learn about growing food, and a place to work together at a common task and towards a common goal. People work with others who are younger, older, or the same age. It is this sense of community that brings volunteers back time and again—not just the pleasure of doing back breaking work under a blazing sun for no money, but the chance to get to know a little more about each other while you're working toward a common good. What does the farm receive? We receive the labor we need to make the farm run. And perhaps more importantly, we receive the good will of a community that keeps us going through all the hard work and challenges. Hearing people express their happiness at seeing the farm operating again; hearing people recognize the value of having a place like this in their city—these are the kinds of things that energize me and make this great endeavor successful.

What makes this a community farm? We work together with people from all over Newton and beyond for the enrichment of ourselves, our community, and our world.

Our 2008 Harvest Festival was a big success!



Thank you to all who came to our Harvest Festival on October 26th. It was an unusually warm fall afternoon (70 degrees) and we counted between 700 and 1000 people in attendance! While listening to the music of the Boston Front Porch and Outrageous Fortune, folks toured the farm and saw demonstrations in canning, growing bean sprouts, and composting. Chef Kayo D'Oliviera cooked for us with fresh farm produce.

Children decorated pumpkins, made prints with vegetables, and took their turns weaving saplings and ribbons into a large twig frame. Julia Priest entertained the young ones with music and dancing, and children and adults alike were captivated by the chickens on loan from David Fogel and Melissa Wendt.

Two representatives from the Newton Whole Foods stores, Ava Fantasia and Terri Petrunyak, came and presented the farm with a check for \$10,501.42 from the 5% Day on September 10th! (Thanks to all who shopped that day!)

We would like to thank all the volunteers who made this event possible, including those who donated to our bake sale and those who donated to our silent auction. We would like to give a special thanks to Whole Foods for donating the soup, cider, and cream cheese, Rosenfeld's Bagels for the pumpkin bagels, and the Nicewicz Family Farm for the apples.

And last, but not least, we would like to thank our festival sponsors:

Whole Foods
The Village Bank
Karp, Liberman & Kern/Sotheby's International Realty
TBA Architects
Lipof Real Estate Services

First Step of Barn Renovation Nearing Completion by Peter Barrer



Our contractor, Thoughtforms Corp., has made excellent progress on the barn renovation. The structure is stabilized, the new windows are in, and thick insulation is being installed on the walls. The last steps of this phase will be completed in November: red cedar siding, the newly installed roof, and painting.

Soon we will begin fundraising and planning for the second phase, to renovate the interior for public use.

2008 Program Review by Sarah Kaufmann

This summer saw the launching of a family program for toddlers and their parents called Farm Sprouts. The groups were small, but oh so fun! Families came to the farm to enjoy farm-based stories and then do a hands-on activity at the farm. Everyone had a chance to slow down, watch things grow, enjoy the bounty of the farm, and get their hands a little dirty. We observed all the wild colors on the farm, gathered ingredients from the farm to make salsa, planted seeds in the learning garden, and gathered seeds to sprout at home. Here is a list of the stories we read. These are wonderful stories to enjoy with family and friends:

Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Ehlert
The Cabbage Soup Solution by Erika Oller
How Groundhog's Garden Grew by Lynne Cherry
Deep Down Underground by Olivier Dunrea



This summer the farm was also visited by several groups of campers and students interested in spending a day working and learning at the farm. Two groups of note were the campers from the Environmental Science Program and a group of college students from Lasell College. After a morning of hard work on the farm, many of the middle school students expressed interest in coming back to the farm to volunteer. The group from Lasell worked up a storm as part of their orientation to a community service dormitory. The students enjoyed the farm so much they left an hour later than planned, inspired with the idea of incorporating sustainable agriculture into the work of their dorm. These two groups not only show how much a volunteer group can assist in the daily workings of the farm, but also how that experience can inspire and nurture an interest in sustainable agriculture.

Photo of Sarah reading during Farm Sprout program by Suzanne McLaughlin.

Growing Sweet Potatoes in our Newton Garden by Sam and Margaret Fogel

Sweet potatoes seemed like a great choice for a gardening experiment for our front lawn this year. We planted 25 twig-like shoots (slips) in two rows, about 10 feet from the sidewalk. It is important to know that sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), which originated in South America, is a sun-loving plant requiring a long-growing season

(100 days for the variety Beauregard). It is related to the Morning Glory, with heart-shaped leaves, and trailing vines that cover the soil, rooting at the nodes.

June 1st we cultivated a 4 x 20 feet strip of our sandy soil, made it fluffy, fortified it with compost and a small amount of slow-release fertilizer, then planted the “slips” that we had obtained from Johnny’s Selected Seeds (\$15 for 25). The little plants eventually grew over one entire side of our front yard, past the blueberries and through the Sedums. They looked like ivy, but more beautiful, and were unperturbed by insects or fungi.



About October 1, our curiosity could not be contained, so we began probing for sweet potatoes. Look what we found! Our harvest was 35 lbs of delicious tubers. A small one, baked in its skin, contains 25,000 IU of vitamin A and 400 mg of potassium. We also tried them in pancakes, adding ½ cup cooked mashed sweet potato to our regular recipe for whole-grain pancakes, along with a dash of allspice, cinnamon and maple syrup.

Fall Cleanup or What To Do with All Those Leaves? by Ted Chapman

Newton is full of trees and the leaves in our yards provide a wonderful opportunity to build organic matter and harvest free fertilizer. The basis of organic gardening is building healthy soil. This means adding matter to the soil that feeds microorganisms, which in turn provide the nutrients required for healthy plant growth and disease resistance. Organic matter applied to the surface of the soil as mulch in the autumn protects plants from the vagaries of temperature change. Mulch keeps the soils warmer into the cold weather allowing for root growth that is essential for abundant foliage and flowering during the growing season. It also limits the heaving that occurs with spring freezing and thaws.

So what can you do with all those leaves? Try composting them. One method is the three-bin system (Gardeners Supply 3-Bin Composting System - Item #35-989) which effectively changes leaves into mulch. Leaves are piled up in bin 1 with other garden waste. When well watered, these materials will heat up, and start the breaking down over the winter. Turned into bin 2 in the spring and bin 3 a year from now, those leaves will become ripe compost.

Another method is sheet composting: putting the leaves directly on vegetable garden beds and then turning them in the spring. Ideally, the leaves can be shredded using a lawn mower, mowing the grass and leaves directly into the lawn mower bag and emptying them onto your garden, rather than putting them into plastic bags for the city to collect. Chopping up the leaves speeds the decomposition process: "smaller rots faster".

If your home gardens include perennial beds, trees and shrubs, shredded leaves are ideal mulch. Applying 2-3 inches of shredded materials after weeding, transplanting and planting bulbs, does everything we talked about above and avoids the need for buying mulch next year. The leaf cover blocks sunlight and prevents the germination of latent weed seeds in the soil. The only caution is to limit leaf applications to no more than one inch over newly planted perennials and directly against the trunks of trees. Leaf mold (partially composted leaves) is an attractive mulch and by the next fall has been almost completely broken down by soil organisms.

If you have a large yard and mowing and raking leaves seem arduous, there are leaf vacuum/shedders (Troy-Built CSV 206 or Yard-Man 24A-203C701) that will reduce leaf volume by 90%, allowing the easy harvest of this fall’s bounty. You might even ask your neighbors if you can harvest theirs! Newton Community Farm offers courses on composting, building your own 3-bin system, and other gardening techniques. If these suggestions don't work for you, and you don't use herbicides or pesticides, you can bag your leaves in paper and deliver them to the farm for us to compost.

Farm Wish List

Bose/Cambridge Soundworks style table top radio to entertain the troops in the barn
Long bed pick up, 3/4 ton
Air compressor
Shop lights

If you can help us with these, please contact Greg Maslowe at [617/916-9655](tel:6179169655) or newtoncommunityfarm@comcast.net.

Please contact us if you have any questions about this newsletter, ideas for future issues or if you want to be added to our mailing list. Just email Carol and Gil at carolgil@mac.com. For more information about the Farm, email Greg Maslowe at newtoncommunityfarm@comcast.net or check out our web page at <http://www.newtoncommunityfarm.org/> (or click on the image at the top of the page).

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