



A P R I L 2 0 1 3



# GardenWise

A publication of Guilford County Extension Master Gardeners

## It's the Final Countdown!

Spring is all around us, and I know you all are as excited as I am. I have been ready to play in the "soil" since I pulled up my tomato plants last year. With the cold weather soon behind us, our gardens will be ready for planting. I hope everyone has their seedlings started and at the ready. As the old saying goes, "don't stick anything in the ground 'til after tax day." I feel like it may hold true for this year as well. As we all count down the few days left, remember that there is always something to learn from the garden even when you are just watching and waiting. Take time to observe the subtle changes in the air from winter to spring, the color and texture of the soil as it starts to waken from its cold winter slumber, and say goodbye to some of those cold weather weeds. Patience, my gardening friends, and happy spring planting!

-- Eva Preiser, EMG

## The Gardener's Morning

The robin's song at daybreak  
Is a clarion call to me.  
Get up and get out in the garden,  
For the morning hours flee.  
I cannot resist the summons,  
What earnest gardener could?  
For the golden hours of morning  
Get into the gardener's blood.  
The magic spell is upon me,  
I'm glad that I did not wait;  
For life's at its best in the morning,  
As you pass through the garden gate.

-- Howard Dolf

<http://www.backyardgardener.com/poem/>

## Quick Veggie References

### Peppers, Sweet:

Planting Dates: May 1- 31

Popular Cultivars: California Wonder, Yolo Wonder, Pimento, Mexi-Bell, Jingle Bells, King Arthur, Lilac Bell, Lemon Bell, Purple Beauty

Planting Tips: In May start seeds outside or transplant seedlings. Space plants 18 inches apart. Minimum soil temperature should be 65F

Harvest: 75-80 days to mature

<u>Pole Beans:</u>	Planting Dates: April 15 - July 1 Popular Cultivars: Kentucky Wonder 191, Blue Lake Stringless, Romano, Kentucky Blue Planting Tips: In May start seeds outside or transplant seedlings. Space plants 6 inches apart. Minimum soil temperature should be 50F Harvest: 65-70 days to mature
<u>Cantaloupe:</u>	Planting Dates: April 20 - June 1 Popular Cultivars: Classic, Magnum 45, Ambrosia, Honey Brew Planting Tips: In May start seeds outside or transplant seedlings. Space plants 24 inches apart. Minimum soil temperature 70F Harvest: 85-99 days to mature
<u>Eggplant:</u>	Planting Dates: May 1- 31 Popular Cultivars: Florida Highbush, Special Highbush, Ichiban, Rosa Bianco Planting Tips: In May start seeds outside or transplant seedlings. Space plants 24 inches apart. Minimum soil temperature 70 F Harvest: 80-85 days to mature.

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### 2012 Ohio State University Annual Trials

Last summer I was privileged to attend The Ohio State University Annual Trials with my daughter. While she was interested in annual flowers, I was drawn to the container and hanging basket trials that contained vegetables that could be grown in small spaces. There were 750 varieties planted representing 25 companies.

Universities conduct annual trials to provide education and research to the community and landscape professionals. Visitors are able to observe the growth and visual characteristics of plant varieties being tested. Most universities record their data on their websites, so at the end of the season, one can see what the top performing plants were for that particular growing season. Results for this annual trial can be found at <http://ohiofloriculture.osu.edu>

Although plant varieties in the vegetable category were not rated in the top twenty finishers, I was able to observe and taste many quality vegetables that can be grown in our urban garden settings in raised beds or patio containers. My personal **tomato** favorites of the 13 varieties tested were Tumbling Tom Red, Tumbling Tom Yellow, and Tumbling Tom Junior Yellow. **Bell pepper** favorites included Mohawk, Redskin, Bellina and Popeii. The **zucchini** variety Buckingham as well as Green Fingers **okra** were grown in containers and provided an abundance of produce.

I encourage you to visit the website above to see the vast listing of varieties tested so you can form your own opinions on what you might like to plant. I was not disappointed in the production of any of the vegetable varieties, so it really is a matter of personal taste which variety (s) you might prefer.

--LeAnn Glessner, EMG

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### Guilford Extension Community Garden Mentor Program Description

#### Why a Community Garden Mentor Program?

Community gardening is a great tool for improving food access to individuals who may not have good garden conditions on their property. Many community gardeners are first time gardeners

and need help with the basics of growing a garden. Garden groups may need help with garden organization and operation. Garden mentors help support community gardens by providing information and resources from Guilford Cooperative Extension to community gardens.

### **What is a community garden mentor?**

A Community Garden Mentor is someone who is knowledgeable about gardening, enjoys sharing that knowledge with others, and has been trained to support community development around gardens. A Community Garden Mentor encourages best practices in the community garden.

### **Community Garden Training Program:**

Community Garden Mentors receive 6 hours of mentor training in classroom instruction. Mentors are required to attend a quarterly meeting with other Garden Mentors, are encouraged to attend in the 'Growing the Green Way Educational Series' and to take advantage of other classes offered by the Consumer Horticulture Program of Guilford Cooperative Extension. Garden Mentors are also expected to carry out the duties of a Community Garden Mentor.

In addition to training and orientation, Guilford Cooperative Extension provides Garden Mentors resources for their assigned garden such as seeds, starter plants (when available), soil nutrient testing, ongoing support during the mentorship process, and printed material on vegetable gardening, pest identification, pest management, composting, growing fruits, growing herbs, and growing flowers. We strive to partner Garden Mentors with the garden of their choice.

### **How to Become a Community Garden Mentor:**

If you are interested in becoming a community garden mentor, complete an application and return it to Karen Neill, Extension Agent Guilford Cooperative Extension, 3309 Burlington Road, Greensboro, NC 27405.

### **How to Request a Community Garden Mentor for your Community Garden:**

If you are interested in requesting a community garden mentor for your community garden, call Karen Neill at 375-5876

## **Pizza Garden**

Looking to get your kids involved with the garden this year? Why not plant something everyone will enjoy: grow a pizza garden.



A pizza garden can be any size or shape, and can easily be grown in containers, on a sunny patio or terrace. Just make sure you have good garden soil with the proper drainage, pH level, enough sunlight (6 to 8 hours) and access to water. It is most fun, however, to make it circular, shape of a pizza pie, with triangular slice-shaped beds containing different vegetables and herbs. In smaller pizza gardens, you can use bricks, stones, wood, mulch—or even the spokes of a wagon wheel. In your pizza garden, you will need a combination of herbs and vegetables. Let's start with the herbs which we know are essential for creating a flavorful sauce.

**Oregano** is a perennial herb that gives pizza the characteristic taste and wonderful smell. It may be used fresh or dried. **Parsley** is a biennial herb that reseeds itself. Plant 2 or 3 plants in a wedge. There are several kinds of basil varieties, but I recommend sweet basil for your pizza garden. **Basil** is an annual herb and you can plant 2 to 3 plants in a wedge. To finish off our sauce we need the main ingredient- Tomatoes. Plant at least one **Tomato** plant. A paste tomato variety, such as Roma, is

recommended for your pizza garden. Roma has small, oblong tomatoes with a thick meaty flesh.

As for your toppings, you might want to try several vegetables. **Onions** can be planted from seeds or sets. Select red, white or yellow for your garden. You can plant up to 30 onion sets in your garden. Plant a **Pepper** or two in your garden. Plant any green, sweet, bell type pepper. If you like hot, spicy pizza, plan on growing a hot pepper variety. For a unique twist try **Arugula**. Its finely cut dark green leaves contrast beautifully with the white cheese and red sauce, to make the colors of the Italian flag! Top your pizza with arugula just before serving instead of baking it, since arugula will quickly burn to a crisp in a hot oven.

All of these plants are easy and fun for kids to grow. Of course, you can add additional plants to your pizza garden that may go into making a pizza, such as, wheat, garlic and rosemary.

Nothing makes a project more fun than when you get to eat the end result!

--Karen Neill

### Planting Seeds in Eggshells

#### What You Need:

Empty eggshell halves  
Egg carton  
Seeds – Vegetables, Flowers or Herbs  
Soil  
Spoon  
Spray bottle  
Permanent marker



#### What You Do:

- Put eggshell halves in egg carton. Cut off the top of the carton.
- Spoon in pre-moistened potting soil.
- Plant 2-3 seeds in each eggshell, according to instructions on package.
- Use a permanent marker to label each eggshell seed type.
- Spray with a fine mist about every other day. Don't overwater as there are no drainage holes.
- Place in a sunny window.
- When seedlings emerge, snip the weakest or smallest ones to leave one seedling in the shell.
- When the first set of true leaves appear, seedlings are ready to transplant in a pot or directly in the ground.
- Gently crush the shell and remove a few shards around the bottom.
- The eggshell will break down naturally and add nutrients to your plant!

-- Sarah Crawford, EMG

### The Tomatoes Are Coming! The Tomatoes Are Coming!

With the arrival of the Piedmont's **Average Last Frost Date** (typically quoted as **April 15**), garden centers, farmers' markets, and plant sales throughout the region will soon begin selling tomato transplants. And home gardeners who choose not to start their own from seed, will be flocking to these outlets to find just the right variety to plant in order to produce the taste treat that all salivate for:

the perfect, juicy, savory-sweet goodness that shouts "Summer!"

Before you join the flock, let's talk about what to look for when buying tomato transplants: what varieties to consider; how to select the healthiest transplants; and when to make your purchases.

The main questions to ask yourself before you begin your quest are:

1. What type(s) of tomatoes do you desire to harvest?
2. When (throughout the tomato growing season) do you wish to harvest?
3. Where do you plan to plant your tomatoes...garden setting or containers, or both?

#### 1. *What do you desire to harvest?*

Tomato transplants come in varieties based on size, shape, color, and uses (slicing, salad, and sauces). Additionally, tomatoes are often classified as either **Heirlooms** or **Hybrids**.

**Heirloom** tomatoes are varieties grown from seed saved from season to season, and passed down for at least three generations. Heirloom varieties hold on to the parents' characteristics generation after generation, which is important, if you want to save and reuse or exchange seed. The term "Heirloom" is actually a marketing term, generally applied to named tomato varieties from the World War II era, or at least 50 years old. Since the seed does reliably reproduce transplants like the parent, the term **Open Pollinated** or **OP** is more accurate. While they do tend to be less disease resistant and less uniform in appearance, fans insist that their flavor and uniqueness make up for any disadvantages. Some named Heirloom varieties that you might recognize include: Brandywine, Mortgage Lifter, Cherokee Purple, German Johnson, and the Mountain series (those last two listings were developed in North Carolina).

**Hybrid** tomatoes come from a cross between two different varieties, developed to obtain a certain set of characteristics. Fruit size, crop yield, longevity, consistent-production, and disease resistance are all traits bred into hybrids. Unfortunately, hybrids rarely retain the characteristics of the parent plant, so saving seed for next year is not recommended. Some named Hybrid varieties you might recognize are: Early Girl, Better Boy, Sun Gold, Sweet 100, Jet Star, Juliet, and Celebrity.

*Disease resistance*, you say? When selecting your transplants, it helps to know what **those letters on the labels** mean. For instance, labels for *Celebrity* read "VFFNT." This indicates resistance to various diseases to which tomatoes are vulnerable:

V = verticillium wilt

F = fusarium wilt (Two Fs on the label indicate resistance to both types of fusarium wilt.)

N = nematode

T = tobacco mosaic

#### 2. *When (throughout the tomato growing season) do you wish to harvest?*

Tomato transplants are often classified based on when the fruit will begin to ripen: **Early Season** (typically 50-69 days to first fruit from date of transplant); **Mid-Season** (70-79 days); and **Late Season** (80 days or longer) tomatoes. Most gardeners like to grow at least one Early Season variety, and possibly one long-growing Late Season type, but usually depend on Mid-Season varieties for their main tomato crop.

Additionally, tomato varieties are classified by their growth habits: **indeterminate** and **determinate**. **Indeterminate** tomatoes can reach over 6' and will bear fruit until frost in fall. If you wish to have tomatoes for slicing or salads all summer long, look for indeterminate varieties, which must be staked



or tied to trellises to support the exuberant vine-like stem growth and the weight of the fruit.

**Determinate** varieties grow to a certain size (typically 3-4 feet, or less) and then bear their fruit all at once. Bush tomatoes and plum tomatoes are the best-known examples of determinate types. Since the crop comes in pretty much at the same time, determinate tomatoes are great for canning or freezing for later use. These varieties do not need staking, but do benefit from the support provided by cages, and they do not need to be "pruned" by removing suckers (a practice often recommended to strengthen the main plant and improve the yields of indeterminate varieties).

### *3. Where do you plan to plant your tomatoes...garden setting or containers, or both?*

All tomatoes need "full sun," meaning you want to select a growing spot that receives at least 8 hours of sun each day. This requirement, along with space considerations, may dictate where you will grow your transplants.

Most indeterminate varieties need lots of room to grow, with spacing requirements from 18-36" in three-foot wide rows. The closer you plant tomatoes together, the greater risk you run of increasing susceptibility to diseases and/or pests. Air circulation is an important part of the environment you want to create for your tomato plants. A traditional row-garden setting will help provide adequate air circulation, as will one plant to a 5-gallon (or larger) container. If you avoid overcrowding and can provide proper staking or trellising, you can grow indeterminate varieties in intensive gardening settings, with the recommended "2-4 squares" per plant.

If you grow your tomato crop in containers, look for determinate varieties with the word "bush" in their names.

So, *when should you purchase your transplants?* The first tomato transplants that arrive in garden centers are typically about 8 weeks old and ready to be put into the ground. It pays to plan to purchase some of these first arrivals, even if you must hold off planting for a few days due to the calendar and/or cold weather conditions.

Examine the transplants carefully before purchasing. Look for healthy, green plants with four to six leaves and sturdy, straight stems. Check leaves for signs of insects or disease, such as brown spots, holes or curling. Short, stocky, compact plants are preferable to tall, thin, leggy ones. Avoid plants that appear wilted, yellow or have spindly, thin stems.

An important step that some forget is to inspect the roots to make sure they are moist; dry roots indicate a lack of consistent watering, meaning that particular transplant has already suffered in its young life. Don't hesitate to lift the transplant gently from its cell or pot to inspect the roots and surrounding growing medium.

Possibly the most difficult step is to select young plants without blossoms or fruit, as younger plants tend to establish faster in the garden. While it is tempting to buy the transplant that already has a tiny tomato present, remember that you want the plant's initial energy to go into growing a strong root system. Don't hesitate to remove any early blossoms for better root development. You'll be glad you did when the stress of a long, hot, and potentially dry summer arrives.

*And, what happens if you are a bit late in selecting your tomato transplants and all those short, stocky ones are gone?* If you must select tomato transplants that seem a bit lanky, you can plant them 4-6 inches deeper in the garden than they grew in the pots. If the plants are *really* leggy, lay the stem in a trench, remove all the leaves up to the top 4-5, and carefully lift the top up while burying the rest of

the plant deep. Be sure to stake your transplant (if needed) at planting time, too.

Good luck growing your best tomato crop ever!

-- Patricia Lunn Adsit, EMG



### Growing Vegetables in Containers

Do you live in an apartment, townhouse, or condo with no land for gardening? Is your house located on a small city lot with lots of shade? (Please remember that shade is important, and the trees that create it even more important, but they *can* make it difficult to grow sun-loving plants.) *Desperate* to grow veggies and herbs this year, and painfully aware that almost all vegetable and herb plants need pretty much full sunshine for 6-8 hours a day?

**Don't despair.** Container gardening may be your salvation. Most vegetables and herbs grow perfectly well in containers, and you can set up your garden where the sun shines the brightest – even on your balcony or patio. (The article about Ohio State's field trials above mentions several varieties that have been bred especially for containers.) Container gardening isn't quite the same as growing in the ground, however, so here are a few things to keep in mind.

**The bigger the container, the better.** Virtually all vegetables, even tomatoes, can be grown successfully in a 5-gallon or larger container. As Patricia Adsit mentioned in her article on tomatoes above, you'll want to select bush-type tomato varieties. The same is true for veggies like beans, squash, and cucumbers. The type of container really doesn't matter a great deal, *as long as it has drainage holes*. You can often find clean, used five-gallon buckets, complete with handles, at local delicatessens or through Craigslist or Freecycle online. If aesthetics aren't critical to you, you can end up with a complete garden full of containers for under \$20 by using these buckets. If you have more money to spend, half-barrels make wonderful planters and can be purchased for around \$30 each at local stores like Tractor Supply. Since you'll be using large containers that can get heavy, you might want to position them where they will remain before filling them with soil, or you can put "plant trolleys" under those you want to move from place to place.

**Soil is important.** Soil is *always* important, container or not, so don't skimp on your potting mix. You might want to purchase soil with fertilizer already mixed in; if not, we recommend mixing in some timed-release fertilizer as you fill the container. Fill containers to within about 2 inches of the top. You should plant your seeds or transplants exactly as if you were planting them in the ground. If the plant shouldn't be in the ground before April 15, then follow that same rule with your containers.

**Watering and fertilizing are critical.** Just as with vegetables in the ground, regular watering is important. However, since containers (especially porous ones like clay pots) may dry out more quickly than soil at ground level, it's important to check *at least daily* to see if water is needed. Just stick your finger a couple of inches into the soil, and if it feels dry, it's time to water. Water until you can see water coming out the bottom of the container. With all this watering, you're actually *rinsing* nutrients out of the container at a more rapid rate than if the plants were in the ground, so frequent fertilization is absolutely critical. The fertilizer you added when you filled the container should last for about 8 weeks, but after that, you'll want to start additional applications. A water-soluble fertilizer is ideal; if

you're concerned about overfeeding the plants, you can feed a half-strength solution weekly. If your plants look lush, bushy, and healthy, chances are good you're doing things just right.

And beyond those few special reminders, you can treat your veggies and herbs just as you would if they were in the ground. So rather than seeing the limitations your environment places on you, try seeing how easily you can create your *own* growing conditions by using containers. Happy gardening!

Additional sources:

<http://watauga.ces.ncsu.edu/files/library/95/container%20factsheet.pdf>

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/hil/hil-8105.html>

<http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu/tags/container-vegetables/>

<http://henderson.ces.ncsu.edu/vegetablegardening/>

<http://guilford.ces.ncsu.edu/2012/03/container-gardening-for-older-adults-and-children/>

-- Linda Brandon, EMG

### Community Garden Update!

#### Brandywine Community Garden

Our gardeners are prepping their beds for planting. This season we are pleased that we have a whole plot dedicated to Share The Harvest. Our individual plots are being tilled, compost added and cold weather plants at the ready. Those who have winter gardened are now along with all others preparing for the new plantings and hoping the NC sun and warm weather will hurry along and stay. It's an exciting time of year for all garden lovers.

-- Maureen Alley

#### Starmount Presbyterian Church Community Garden

The cold weather has slowed us down at the Starmount Presbyterian Church Community Garden, but we have been able to do some re-furbishing of our paths with cardboard and wood chips to smother the weeds and have put in a drain pipe to hopefully minimize some erosion. Crops planted so far: peas, onions, potatoes, radishes and kohlrabi. Our group of volunteers has expanded with church members from age 3 to 77 participating. A good start for the season.

-- Linda Anderson, EMG

#### Centennial Garden

Public Health staff have been preparing the Centennial Garden for spring planting. We have had 5 loads of compost delivered to the garden and the compost has been spread throughout the plot. We



have also added a 4 x 16 raised bed to this site. Asparagus has been planted in the bed. This is our first time planting asparagus, so we are keeping our fingers cross that this bed will continue producing for years. Other raised beds are planned for the site. We started planting this year's garden in mid February. Green peas, sugar snaps and cabbage were planted. With the weather patterns that we have been experiencing, none of the seeds germinated and numerous cabbage plants were killed by the cold weather. So March 12th, we replanted the garden with rainbow chard, rutabaga and additional cabbage plants. In anticipation for the summer vegetables, several staff have planted seeds in containers at their homes. We all have spring fever and can't wait to play in the dirt, We're just waiting for Mother Nature to cooperate.

#### Queens Court Community Garden (Brand New!)

We were able to get one of the four beds completed this past weekend as well as a strawberry ring. The weather was not cooperating as well as we'd hoped. We plan to have all beds built by this weekend, so we can start planting asap. It is probably for the best that we waited due to the weather.

-- Juliet Wageman



**Raised Bed at Queens Court**



**Strawberry Ring at Queens Court**

#### Mixed Greens Garden Report

This year our garden is under a new structure. We will no longer be managed by Extension Master Gardeners, but by a steering team made up of our own plot holders. It has been an interesting transition with almost a year of planning, but we are progressing nicely. With 96 raised beds within our garden, a large management team is necessary so the responsibilities of the garden can be spread among us.

It has been hard to get a grand start on the 2013 garden season with the wet and cool weather that we have experienced lately. Despite that, we met on February 28 for our annual kick off dinner at the Extension office. About 50 people attended either the meal or the meeting that followed. We enjoyed the Totally Tomato presentation by one of our local Extension Master Gardeners.

On March 9 we held our first workday in the garden. The soil was wet, but it was a great day to pull weeds in the beds and aisles. It was a great opportunity to meet and fellowship with our returning garden neighbors as well as those new to the garden this year.

We have a series of work /social events planned for the garden this year:

**Thursday, June 20 from 5:30 to 8** we will have a work evening and feast on cookies and lemonade.

**Thursday, August 15 from 5:30- 8** we will have a work evening and enjoy watermelon in the garden.

**On October 10** plans are being made for a covered dish harvest party. Details will be announced.

Something new to the garden this year will be **Thursday Evenings in the Garden** on May 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30, June 6, 16, 20, 27. We will skip July 4 and start meeting again July 11, 18, 25, August 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29.

Happy Gardening!

-- LeAnn Glessner, EMG



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## Passalong Plant Sale and Festival

Mark your calendars! Our Extension Master Gardener 2013 Passalong Plant Sale and Festival is Friday, May 10 and Saturday, May 11 at the Ag Center. Plan to bring your wish list, family, and friends for a wide variety of healthy plants that are sure to fit your garden needs! Our committee is already scouting for unique plants as well as time-treasured favorites. We'll have education and information galore, too. Don't miss out!

- Friday, May 10, 9 am - 3 pm
- Saturday, May 11, 9 am - 11:30 am

