

## Basic Community Garden Plot Maintenance

### Watering:

- Check soil moisture at the root zone, being careful not to damage your plants' roots as you dig. As your plants mature, they will have larger, deeper and wider root zones. For small seedlings with roots in the top 1"-2" of soil, it's time to water if that zone is dry. For large established plants, dig deeper: if the soil is moist in their root zone 6"-12" below the surface, they will be fine.
- When watering, soak the soil deeply. Avoid watering the soil to only a couple inches; plants will have difficulty developing deep roots if the only moisture available is on the surface of the soil. And, shallow watering will dry out more often, creating stress on the plants and wasting water.
- Check your garden weekly for its watering needs. Plants transpire (lose) more water during dry (low humidity) weather, including cool days. During periods of low humidity, whether hot or cool, plants may need a deep watering more often.
- Cultivate the soil before watering, when possible. Loose, aerated soil more easily absorbs water. Water slowly and gently. Make puddles that last a few moments after you water; that is how to know the soil is nearly saturated. If your soil is loose with lots of organic matter content, it will not dry into a hardened surface that can limit the availability of air to the plants' root zone.

### Mulching:

- Spread a 3"-4" layer of mulch over vegetable beds to reduce loss of water from the soil and to suppress weed growth.
- Look for sources of organic mulches (dry grass clippings, shredded dry leaves, straw, compost, etc.) Organic mulches add nutrients to the soil and build soil structure, as well as reduce water loss and suppress weeds.
- Newspaper (black and white print) or plastic mulch can also be used. It is recommended that these be laid out before planting.

### Fertilizing:

- Add any fertilizer and soil amendment (such as garden limestone) according to your soil test results/recommendations. To do otherwise is a waste of time, money and may be detrimental to your garden soil.
- Use either an organic (alfalfa meal, blood meal) or mineral (crushed stone) fertilizer. Compost makes an excellent, slow release complete fertilizer (often near 1-1-1 ratio.) If you use a chemical fertilizer, use only the amounts recommended. More is not

better. If you practice succession planting or intensive spacing, your soil may need an additional dressing of fertilizer before planting the next crop.

#### Weeding:

- Weeds compete for water, nutrients, space and light. You will remember the importance of removing weeds when it is 90 F with 80% humidity on a summer's day and your garden needs weeding (weed your garden during the coolest parts of the day!)
- Regular, weekly weeding keeps weeds under control. Two things to remember about weeds:
  - A continuous crop of weeds emerges all season long. Some are spring growers, some mid-summer growers, some show up in the fall.
  - Weeds create a seed bank in garden soils. Weeds that have gone to seed may sprout some of their seeds over a period of years.
- Remove all parts of the weed, including the roots.
- It is easiest to pull weeds out when the soil is soft and slightly moist, such as after a good rain or deep watering.
- Weeds are "a plant out of place." Sometimes they are merely plants we are unfamiliar with, but may be native plant species, invasive plant species, wildflowers, etc. Get to know what plants are un-invited guests in your garden: some may be edible, some may attract beneficial insects, some may be noxious weeds, etc.

#### Pest Problems (critters, plant diseases, weeds):

- Keep garden debris cleaned up!! SANITATION is an effective, safe control for pest problems.
- Clear out weeds that attract pest critters (not all critters are insects); keep a border of plants that attract beneficial critters.
- Rotate crops, mulch, water deeply and regularly to encourage healthy plants, plant disease-resistant varieties and follow other good gardening guidelines to avoid plant disease problems.
- Avoid putting any diseased plant material into a small composting site. Bag and remove diseased plant material from the community garden.

#### Harvesting, Trimming, Deadheading:

- Harvest in a timely fashion. This discourages vandalism, wasted produce and minimizes the attraction of pests to your garden.

- Remove brown, graying or dying and dead leaves and plant parts at any time to prevent the spread of disease.
- If you have annual and perennial flowers in your garden, cut off any dead flowers. This is known as deadheading. Deadheading will encourage continuous flowering throughout the season on most annual and some perennial flowers. Deadheading will allow perennial flowers (including bulbs) to store energy in the roots for next year's bloom.

#### Pruning:

- If you have small shrubs, trees or vines in your community garden, you can help prune any damaged, diseased or dead branches at any time. Take great care to ensure the proper pruning tools are used and the proper pruning cuts are made. Improper cuts on shrubs, trees or vines can harm the plant.
- Flowering shrubs, trees and vines (including flowering fruit): most varieties are best pruned right after blooming time.
- Evergreen shrubs, trees or vines: prune during late winter or early spring.
- Edible fruit shrubs, trees or vines: prune during late winter or early spring.