

**August 4, 2021**

*“Aside from our usual harvesting and pruning activities in the Edible Garden today (August 3), the EMGs did a bit of manual pest control in order to help our plants reach their fullest, greenest potential. We even had a couple of newcomers that we’re excited to tell you about!” – Margot*

#### Catching Up

- The Extension Master Gardeners have started disinfecting their tools in order to prevent cross contamination in the Edible Garden. Today they used 70% isopropyl alcohol out of convenience, but one EMG pointed out that bleach wipes work well too.
- The **Roquette arugula** seeds that were planted last Tuesday are already germinating! Hopefully, this will be our third round of a successful harvest.

#### Feature of the Week – Tomato Hornworm

Hornworms are pests in Virginia, and Tomato Hornworms specifically can easily decimate your tomatoes and other plants in the nightshade family with their voracious appetites. They can eat anything from entire leaves to small stems and green fruit, a real nuisance in the garden. Not only that, but because of their light green color they can be extremely difficult to spot amongst the foliage until it is too late. This morning, I found one such Tomato Hornworm sitting on a pepper leaf in the edible garden. However, it was not alone. As you can see in the picture below, Hornworms are often accompanied by Braconid Wasp parasitoids, meaning that those little white cocoons contain larvae who live as parasites on the hornworm host until it eventually dies. While this phenomenon is most definitely detrimental to the hornworm, it is beneficial to gardeners as a form of biological pest control. If you see a Tomato Hornworm unaccompanied by these little fuzz balls, the easiest way to get rid of them is to pick off the hornworms and throw them in some soapy water. However, if you see something like the picture below, you can choose to let nature take its course.



**August 4, 2021**

Today's Activities

Tuesday's harvest menu (August 3) included: **Pattypan squash, yellow squash, Butternut squash, Lima beans, White Carson beans, zucchini, okra, peppers, arugula, basil, and tomatoes**

- The EMGs did some judicious pruning on the tomato plants today, which has become a regular occurrence due to their yellowing, dry leaves. They continue to speculate about what could be wrong with them. It might be something with the soil, it could be overcrowding, or the plants could have been infected to begin with. At this point, the best thing to do is to simply try and minimize the damage, especially since they are continually producing healthy flowers and fruit!
- The first Lima beans and Butternut squash were harvested this morning! Butternut squash becomes ready to pick off the stem when the skin is tough and uniformly tan in color.
- We had another plentiful harvest of leafy greens, including arugula and basil. Several stems of basil were clipped off towards the center of the plant; even though most of the leaves are mature and ready to eat, a good part of the plant can be left in the ground and continue to grow for the next few weeks.
- Finally, there was an emphasis on picking off Harlequin bugs. Adults and nymphs suck sap out of plants, which results in weakened/malformed buds and fruit. Although insecticides can be used to treat this issue, the gardeners simply picked them off and crushed the bugs as they worked.

Questions From You, Answered by the Extension Master Gardeners!

We've had reports from gardeners about rats scurrying between plots at some of the host parks. We asked the Extension Master Gardeners to explain to us what can be done about rodents in the garden plots. EMG Tim Bowers responded:

*"If you are having squirrel or chipmunk problems the only acceptable method, I know of is some kind of physical barrier that keeps them from your produce.*

*"If you are having rat or mouse problems you will need to eliminate or greatly reduce the kinds of things they like to eat. What we commonly call garbage. I'd suspect that possibly some garden plot'ers may be bringing in items for compost that attract rats and mice. Stuff like vegetable scraps and table scraps can be successfully composted but they can also be real attractants if they're not thoroughly chopped up and mixed in with other compostable materials. Of course, no proteins or other cooked materials should be added to the compost.*

*"Another thing would be to also remove or reduce where rats or mice could live. So, if you have any piles of stuff, lumber, brush, trash, storage sheds/cabinets etc. it'd be best to remove it or clean it out removing any nests."*

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When dealing with rodents in the garden, especially rats, the EMGs recommend using primarily preventative methods. It's important to minimize their food source; rodents are opportunists and will take advantage of any and all food scraps left in the garden for too long. Remember to keep your plot tidy and get rid of any garbage as often as possible. Barrier methods, such as fencing below the soil line and netting, may help protect your crops. Fruits and vegetables should be harvested and taken out of the garden on a regular basis.

For questions about your garden, please contact the Master Gardeners Help Desk, open Monday-Friday from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM or refer to their website <https://fairfaxgardening.org>. Contact 703-324-8556 or [mgfairfax@vt.edu](mailto:mgfairfax@vt.edu)

**July 27, 2021**

*“This morning at the Edible Garden (Tuesday July 27, 2021), the Extension Master Gardeners and I collected one of the biggest harvests to date! Keep reading to learn what exactly we’re facing as we approach the end of the month.” – Margot*

### Catching Up

- The bed with **Romaine lettuce** is scheduled to be cleared out sometime this week. Even though some small clusters began to show, not enough of the seeds reached germination by the end of the month. The second round of **arugula**, on the other hand, is ready to be harvested and eaten!
- **Lima beans** have started fruiting for the first time this week. This crop will be ready to harvest when the pods are bright green in color and the beans inside are about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cm – 1 cm long. Instead of measuring the beans every time you think they’re ready to harvest, Extension Master Gardener Tim recommends comparing them to what you might buy in the store.

### Feature of the Week – Cucumbers

Cucumbers are one of the most popular crops to grow in any vegetable garden and for a good reason! It is a truly versatile fruit that has been cultivated by various cultures for many centuries. Being mostly made of water, snacking on this fruit simultaneously helps the body feel full and hydrated. In my experience, cucumber flesh applied topically can ease all kinds of swelling, including sunburn. As a child, my mother taught me that taking discarded cucumber peels and rubbing them on your face creates a cooling sensation and hydrates your skin!

In the Edible Garden, Straight Eights are one of the two types of cucumber that the EMGs planted as seeds. This classic grocery store variety highly recommended to any gardener, experienced or not, due to its fresh taste and crispy texture, perfect for any summer salad recipe.

**July 27, 2021**

Today’s Activities

Tuesday's harvest menu (July 27) included: **Pattypan squash, Yellow squash, White Carson beans, Green beans, onion, spinach, kale, basil, arugula, peppers, cucumbers, okra, zucchini, and tomatoes.**

- A couple beds were fully harvested and cleared today, including the Dutch onion and New Zealand kale. Onion is ready to harvest when the neck closest to the base of the bulb feels soft and easily "flops" over. The kale, on the other hand, was taken out because its yellow and wilted leaves indicated that it was at the end of its season. We clipped off whatever leaves were still good to eat and composted the rest.
- While harvesting the Yellow squash, Tim showed the other EMGs a lesser-known but easily identifiable feature in the plant's fruit. Female squash flowers have a swollen base, which will actually grow into fruit if the flower is pollinated properly, while the males have long skinny stalks at their base and will not develop into fruit. If you see a female flower that appears to be rotting and moldy-looking, that just means the flower was never pollinated!
- Finally, we had another plentiful harvest of both Green and White Carson beans.

#### Questions From You, Answered by the Extension Master Gardeners!

*"What kind of perennial plants/flowers can be planted around the edges of a garden plot in order to help combat weeds growing and taking over the space?"*

The EMGs recommend putting in companion plants, which will complement the crops you have growing inside the garden in terms of growth and production. Nasturtium is a good companion flower while marigolds allegedly act as insect deterrents. Also, using heavy mulch can help prevent weeds from growing in the first place.

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**July 13, 2021**

*"Short and sweet report coming up! The Green Spring Edible Garden didn't see much activity outside of the harvesting and watering being done this morning. The schedule was to get out nice and early, pick*

*what needed to be picked and get out of the heat as soon as possible, a feat that the EMGs successfully and enthusiastically completed.” – Margot*

### Catching Up

- The first **basil** and **carrots** of the season were harvested last week! Today, they were given time to recuperate.
- **Lima beans** and **Jalapeños** are starting to flower! They won't have any crops to harvest for some time.

### Today's Activities

- Tuesday's harvest menu included: **Banana peppers, Bell peppers, Thai Chili peppers, Pattypan squash, Yellow squash, White Carson beans, Green beans, Dutch shallot, eggplant, okra, and zucchini.**
- We had a few newcomers today aside from the usual suspects. With some of these crops, it's crucial to pick them before they grow too large or else they become inedible.
- Okra is one of these crops. Okra should be about 3 inches when it's ready to harvest. If it's longer, you run the risk of harvesting okra that is hard and woody. Since harvesting this vegetable needs to be done often, you can put extra pods in the refrigerator where they will last about a week or store them in the freezer.
- If you let zucchini grow too big, the seeds will take up more space and the flesh becomes less tender. However, the difference between okra and zucchini is that the latter will still taste good, even if it is harvested late!
- Both varieties of bush beans are growing like crazy! At some point, we had a team of 4 working on harvesting the White Carson beans alone and managed to get several bags full of pods.

### Questions From You, Answered by the Extension Master Gardeners!

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**July 7, 2021**

“We are officially entering the peak harvest season for the summer here in Virginia, and nothing in the garden brings me greater joy than a diverse and bountiful summer harvest! This morning, the Extension

Master Gardeners picked off and dug up a variety of firsts in the Edible Garden at Green Spring, including beans, squash, shallot, and zucchini, all of which are displaying healthy growth and plentiful fruit for gathering in the next few weeks to come.” – Margot

### Catching Up

- **Spinach** has come out of its peak growing season and now needs a little more time in between harvests. The gardeners held off on clipping it today, so instead a few more stems will be harvested in the next few days.
- Our single yellow **tomato** plant is fruiting, however the leaves of the plant are wilting and turning brown. The gardeners think this may be some kind of blight, so they plan to harvest the fruit next week and take out the plant altogether.
- **Pole beans** have not started flowering yet and some of the leaves are chewed through, possibly by Leaf Miners. These were sprayed down with soapy water and will be treated with neem oil next week if they do not improve.

### Feature of the Week – Donating Fresh Produce to Local Food Banks

Not all food banks can accept fresh produce. However, the Urban Agriculture Working Group (part of the Fairfax County Food Council) has developed a list of food banks that can accept fresh produce. Patricia has included an attachment with this list. If you ever harvest any excess food from your garden that you do not have space for, consider donating it to a food bank near you.

As you may know, all of the crops that are harvested from Green Spring’s Edible Garden are taken to a local food bank. The EMGs were given large plastic bins by Food for Others to be filled up with freshly harvested produce, which is weighed upon arrival to the food bank. Today, for example, we harvested and donated 47 pounds of vegetables, which are to be given to local food insecure households.

**July 7, 2021**

### Today’s Activities

- Tuesday's harvest menu included: **Banana and Bell peppers, Red Russian kale, Pattypan squash, White Carson beans, green beans, Dutch shallot, tomatoes, eggplant, and zucchini.**
- To start off, the first eggplant was harvested today! It was just the one that was taken off the stem, since the gardeners want to wait another week or so until the other fruit are about the size of what you'd find at the grocery store. More specifically, harvest eggplant when it is about 10 inches long.
- Three plastic cartons were filled up with small red and orange tomatoes this morning, some of which were split open along the center. This is an indication that the fruit contained too much water and burst, however they are still perfectly good to harvest and eat.
- A quarter of a plastic grocery bag was filled up with green beans, and another half with yellow wax "White Carson" beans. You'll know these are ready to pluck off once the pods are tender and snap easily when bent in half.
- Peppers, zucchini, and squash are coming in hot! All three added on significant weight to our total harvest poundage this morning.
- Clumps of Dutch shallot were harvested this morning by digging out the heads and separating them. Although the bulb is considered the best flavored part of the plant, and usually the only part you will find in the grocery store, the shoots are also perfectly edible and taste similar to spring onion.

#### Questions From You, Answered by the Extension Master Gardeners!

*"I've found Harlequin Beetles on my Kale crops and it looks like they're killing it. Do the master gardeners have any remedy besides just picking them off by hand?"*

If you want to avoid using pesticides in your garden, then picking them off by hand is in fact that best solution for you! The EMGs suggest taking them off the leaves and dunking them in a bucket of soapy water, like with snails.

*"Do you have any suggestions on what to plant this late in the season? What kind of vegetables would be able to grow quickly and/or tolerate this weather?"*

The Master Gardeners suggested planting vegetables that are quick growers, like bush beans and green onion stalks. Arugula, lettuce, kale, spinach, and other leafy greens are also quick growers that can tolerate hot and cool weather alike and can even be harvested early as microgreens. Root vegetables like carrots are slow growers but can be planted late in the summer and sometimes taste better the longer they are left in the ground.

Remember to always check your seed packets and seedlings for the proper growing window as well as information on how well the variety handles hot weather!

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**June 22, 2021**

*"On this cool and rainy Tuesday at Green Spring's Edible Garden, the Extension Master Gardeners and I faced a morning of mulching, fertilizing, harvesting, and most importantly weeding. This is a crucial time*



*for keeping your garden in good shape so as to best allow the crops to flourish in an organized manner. A little bit of work every day will prevent it from accumulating and help keep gardening a relaxing activity for you!” – Margot*

### Catching Up

- The **Pinto bean** plants have been developing yellow tips on their leaves for the past week or so. This may be the result of a Nitrogen deficiency, so the beds were fertilized with Garden-tone. Fertilizer and dehydrated manure were also added to a freshly turned bed where Pinto seeds were planted last week as an effort to prevent Nitrogen deficiencies in the near future.
- **Cucumbers** in the garden have been developing much slower this year, most likely as a result of the cooler weather we had in May. These plants have been strung through the fence in order to get them out of the shade and into the heat, which they flourish in.
- If you'll recall the write up from last week, the **Eggplants** that were sprayed with neem oil seem to be free of the spider mite infestation and are doing much better this morning! This time around, it was the **Tomato** plants that looked infested. This was indicated by the curled up state of their leaves, which is the result of aphids sucking out the nutrient rich sap. Once again, neem oil was used to combat this issue.

### Feature of the Week – Slugs

While weeding in the carrot bed today, I overheard EMG Bob talking about an interesting predicament he discovered in his garden: slugs! This common garden pest is known to cause damage from spring to fall on all kinds of plants, ranging from a preference to peppers and beans to tomatoes, eggplants, and various flowers. Bob said he's been finding and controlling the slug population in his garden for the last 10 days or so. Both to me and to the intern gardener, he explained exactly what needs to be done in order to get rid of this issue. When it gets dark at night, he'll go out into his garden with a flashlight, a pair of plastic gloves, and a big tub of water mixed with dish soap. It's a rare occurrence to discover slugs on your plants during the day, since they hide under rocks and other small objects to escape the heat, so Bob advised to go out around 9:00 pm. Once he's out in the garden, he'll pick off slugs individually and dunk them in the soapy water, which apparently terminates them pretty quickly by removing the protective film around their body. The first night he did this, he managed to get over 100 slugs! But by now, the numbers are diminishing from his efforts so that number is closer to 40-50 a night.

On that note, I'd like to briefly remind you that the garden plots, along with their host parks, are open only from dawn till dusk. If you are interested in combating a slug infestation in your plot, try these tips from Bob early in the morning after your park has opened! If you prefer gardening during the day, try preventing the infestation from spreading in the first place by checking under any rocks and other objects you have in your plot.

**June 22, 2021**

### Today's Activities

- Tuesday's harvest menu included: **Spinach, Kale, and Peppers**
- The New Zealand Spinach as been harvested a whopping 5 weeks in a row by now! Every Tuesday morning, the gardeners use clippers to take off either small stems from the top of the plant or large individual leaves from deeper with. This is the first week that some of the leaves have begun to yellow, so they expect only one or two more harvests to come from this bountiful bed.
- Another productive harvest came from the Red Russian kale bed today. The side leaves of this plant are to be clipped off from the bottom of the stem when they measure about 6"-8" in length. Like the Spinach, Kale has been growing like crazy recently from all the rain and is expected to provide a couple more harvests until its out of season.
- Romaine lettuce seeds have been planted in a bed that was freshly turned over this morning. As instructed on the packet, we planted 2-3 seeds spaced out at intervals of 10"-12" in a depth of 1/8". The plants are to be thinned out when they start coming in.
- To finish up, a couple dozen Banana peppers and a handful of Bell peppers were harvested. These are to be dropped off at Food for Others along with all the other crops.

#### Questions From You, Answered by the Extension Master Gardeners!

*"When I was checking my tomato plants today, I noticed that some green fruits have black coloring on the bottoms. Can you tell me what this problem is and how I can solve it?"*

EMG Response: This is called blossom end rot, a malady found on tomatoes most often when they are lacking calcium. One easy way to solve this problem is to crush up eggshells, which are rich in calcium, and add them directly to your soil.

*"Is it too late to plant carrots and beets? Should I plant Romaine lettuce in the shade?"*

EMG Response: There's still time to plant carrots and beets but it is no longer the best time to do so. They are both slow growing vegetables and can be enjoyed at a smaller size or at a younger age if they don't have time to reach full maturity. As for the lettuce, all vegetables need full sun!

*"Where can I buy arugula? Should I buy arugula seeds or plants?"*

EMG Response: Arugula, or Rocket as it is sometimes referred to as, can usually be purchased at Home Depot or Merrifield Garden Center. It can be bought in either seed or plant form.

**June 15, 2021**

*“This Tuesday morning at Green Spring’s Edible Garden was a time of beautiful growth and plentiful harvest. Nothing major was planted, but a productive session of weeding, collecting, and mulching had each gardener in high spirits, ready to take on the day. Here’s some information about Tuesday’s activities for you to soak up!” – Margot*

### Catching Up

- Some **Winter Squash** was planted and covered with a bean arbor last week for better, more organized growth. Trellis-like structures are a good way to help keep your crops contained.
- Diluted neem oil has been sprayed on the **Eggplant** leaves as a form of organic pest control for treating spider mites. Extension Master Gardener Tim used 3 tablespoons/gallon of water for the first application mixed with an equal amount of Casteel soap to help keep the oil in an emulsified state. Little fruit continue to develop but are not ready to harvest just yet.
- Lastly, the **Carrots** needed to be thinned out. Pulling out undesirable roots and leaving about one inch between each stem helps foster healthier growth.

### Feature of the Week – Garlic

While we were filling up a large bin with fresh Spinach this morning, Extension Master Gardener Cynthia spoke to me about growing garlic in her front yard. This is one of the easiest crops to grow, so we decided to rank it as level 1 on the scale of gardening difficulty. In the beginning, she started out by simply buying her garlic heads from the grocery store, separating the cloves, and planting each individually. But more recently, Cynthia has been buying the bulbs of “two major categories of garlic: Softneck and Hardneck.” All garlic is planted in November and harvested anytime from May to August, depending on the variety. “Softneck garlic,” Cynthia told me, “has a stem that naturally bends to the ground. It has a long shelf life and is usually the same type that you get from the grocery store.” She specifically likes Transylvania Softneck, joking about the name and noting its sharp flavor. Hardneck, in contrast, produces more of a sturdy, woody stem with a scape that curls like a pig’s tail. Cynthia said that “the scape needs to be harvested in order to prevent seeding, which could impede the bulb’s growth. If you harvest it when it’s still tender, you can use it in various dishes and spreads like pesto!” When I asked her about harvesting the actual bulbs, I found out that its done when the leaves of the garlic plant begin turning yellowish sometime in the summer. After that you take 5 or 6 bulbs, wrap them in twine, and hang them somewhere that’s dry with plenty of air circulation. The garlic then cures for about 2-4 weeks.

**June 15, 2021**

### Today’s Activities

- Tuesday's harvest menu included: **Arugula, Spinach, Peppers, and Kale**
- Same as last week, we used clippers to pick off the Arugula and Spinach leaves individually instead of taking entire plants out of the beds. Smaller leaves will continue to grow throughout the season and provide a bountiful harvest.
- Large leaves of Kale were harvested this morning as well, using the same method as described above. This crop has been flourishing in the moist soil, so the gardeners managed to fill up two bins!

Finally, a few dozen Banana and Red Thai Chili Peppers were plucked fresh from their stems. According to one of the gardeners, the latter may be very small but packs quite a spicy punch.

**June 8, 2021**

*“On this beautifully sunny Tuesday morning, Green Spring Gardens saw a productive and bountiful session in the demonstration vegetable garden. The master gardeners were motivated, the birds were singing, the cicadas were flying, and the crops were flourishing. This was my very first time working with the team, and the occasion proved to be an excellent hands-on learning experience. For the next few months, I look forward to spending my Tuesdays taking notes in the vegetable garden as a way of providing you with all the most recent plant tips and garden knowledge!” – Margot*

### Catching Up

- **Arugula** is doing well in the moist soil we’ve been seeing lately as a result of last week’s rain. The large leaves indicate that it is ready to harvest off the main plant.
- **Carrots** are looking good! Master Gardener Tim pointed out that you have to be careful when weeding around them, since smaller greenery may be mistaken for harmful plants
- Although one bed of the New Zealand **Spinach** didn’t come up this year (probably due to old seeds), the other side is doing great because it loves water! The garden has already produced two harvests just out of the one successful bed.
- Red Russian **Kale** plants look like the leaves are ready to be harvested again, even though they were just harvested last week.
- The bed containing **Yellow Squash** was divided into two sections, one which was covered with green mulch last year and one which was not. Interestingly enough, the Squash planted in the bed containing green mulch remnants is growing much better.
- **Eggplants** are showing great flowering. A couple of small fruits have already formed and begun to grow! These plants are to be fertilized next week.
- Since **Broccoli** is a cold weather plant, the leaves at the bottom of the stem have begun to yellow from the summer heat. These were taken out of the beds in their entirety this morning.

### Feature of the Week – Broccoli

One gardener volunteered to harvest the broccoli plants this morning. Notice how earlier I said it had to be taken out in its entirety as a result of the heat, which it has a low tolerance for. However, nothing went to waste! Birgit, one of the gardening interns, saw more than just a failed attempt. She began cutting off the flowers at the top and assembling them into a bundle, noting that they are edible and delicious. “I also eat the tender shoots,” she said as she began uprooting the entire bed, “they’re good in stir fry.” She handed me a piece to try.

**June 8, 2021**

## Today's Activities

- Today's harvest menu included: **Arugula, Spinach, Bok Choi, and Collard Greens**
- For the arugula, we used clippers to harvest the leaves off individually instead of taking the whole plant out of the soil. This will help smaller leaves continue to grow so you can harvest them in a couple weeks.
- The same was done for spinach, which has yielded a fantastic amount of harvest these past few weeks. This morning alone two gardeners and I managed to fill up a large plastic bin to the brim with short stems of tender spinach tips that we clipped from the tops of the plants! This spinach, along with other crops from the vegetable garden, will be delivered to a food bank in Fairfax.
- In the tomato bed, a group of gardeners were weeding the soil and suckering the plants, which have begun to produce their first tiny fruit. With both eggplants and tomatoes, it's important to remove any blight leaves, indicated by their yellow color and limp condition.
- Meanwhile, Tim began working on the potato beds. It's important to shade the tubers from the sun in order to prevent the crop from becoming green and toxic, so the beds are raised and covered with straw in order to promote a dark and cool atmosphere.
- Last but not least, some plants were treated with dish soap in order to control aphid populations. These plants included the pinto beans, eggplants, and tomatoes.