

## TIPS FOR GARDENERS

Having a plot in a community garden brings a unique set of benefits and challenges, and our physical location at Mitchell Field has its own specific characteristics. These tips are based on several years of growing and observation, and may help you get off to a good start.

**The Climate:** It's cooler near the ocean than inland and it's windy, particularly in the spring. An onshore breeze occurs almost every afternoon and it's sometimes quite strong. Prepare to stake tall plants and securely fasten down any row coverings/plastic mulch. Bring an extra layer to wear. Crops grow into October so succession plantings can give you a longer season.

**The Sun:** It's wonderful, full sun throughout the garden until very late afternoon. Summer sun is primarily in the south (towards Rte. 123) and west, so planting taller crops on the north or east sides will prevent shading shorter ones (but don't shade your neighbor).

**The Soil:** We have amended the soil with literally tons of organic compost so it's rich and full of nutrients. The original subsoil is heavy marine clay with poor drainage, so the mixture is dense and holds water well – a blessing in dry spells. To get the most out of this soil, it needs to be aerated. Don't work it when wet because it will turn into hard clumps and stunt your plants. Turn it over lightly in the spring with an inch or so of compost worked into the planting beds (don't overdo the compost) and cultivate it a few times during the season to keep it loose. Building slightly elevated planting beds (like those in the Common Good Garden) has worked well. A little soil prep and maintenance makes a world of difference!

**What Grows Well Here:** Gardeners have had success with most crops depending on the year. Being cooler than inland, crops such as greens, the cabbage family, beans and peas, root crops etc. flourish. Most warmer crops like tomatoes and squash do fine. Heat-lovers like eggplant, melons and peppers are challenging but can work with extra pampering.

**Bugs?** Yes, we have them. This is an organic garden; use nontoxic remedies. Expect to see:

*Flea Beetles* – tiny insects who chew holes in leaves; love cabbage family, radishes and turnips. Can really damage emerging seedlings.

*Slugs* – they enjoy our moist soil and chew on leaves.

*Potato Beetles*: chew the leaves to a skeleton, also like eggplant

**Diseases?** Yes. Given our healthy soil, these are pretty minimal but a couple have been regular: early blight on tomatoes and powdery mildew. Blight causes the leaves to turn yellow and fall off; sets the plant back but doesn't kill it. Mildew appears later in the season and hits pumpkins and squash, leading to stunted fruits and earlier demise. Prevention includes choosing resistant varieties (esp. tomatoes) and removing and destroying infected leaves. Mildew and other airbornes in one plot will spread throughout the garden. Prevent soil diseases by rotating crops frequently.

**Weeds?** Oh, yes. We have perennial weeds that got started by gardeners letting theirs go to seed. Please don't let this happen! Your crops will not grow if overcome by weeds, and the act of weeding aerates the soil. Mulching is also good preventative measure. "Green" mulch or cover crops like buckwheat or POV (field peas-oat-vetch mixture) grow quickly, and can be planted between rows or on fallow soil after harvesting.

**Critters?** The fence keeps deer out and recent upgrades should deter raccoons and porcupines. We do have voles and crows.