

Words of Experience from Bloomington's 2013 Community Gardeners

November 1, 2013

Bloomington Parks and Recreation staff gathered this from our 2013 year end survey. We believe much of it may helpful to other gardeners or individuals thinking about renting a plot with us. Bloomington Park & Rec does not require that you follow any of the suggestions, we are simply sharing this information for you to use as you see fit.

Suggestions on fencing:

- Whether gardeners used 2' or 4' high fencing, most felt it was adequate.
- "My fence has smaller openings at the bottom, graduating to larger at the top. The smaller openings must keep out the smaller animals – I haven't had a problem with them." (Sandy at Smith)
- Gardeners mentioned that they've used chicken wire or plastic fencing
- "Plastic fencing is easier to store in the winter, more flexible." (Sue at Smith)
- "2' chicken wire fencing is sufficient but stake it down around the bottom" (Rick at Harrison)
- "Be sure to have an opening gate that is easy to open and shut. Lifting buckets of water over fencing hurt my back" (Sharon at Harrison)

What worked best in regards to watering:

- Although many gardeners wish that hoses could be attached to the water tanks, most used 3 to 5 gallon buckets and some used watering cans. Many took water to their plot in the larger buckets and then transferred it to watering cans
- "I used two 3 gallon watering cans. It gave good balance without too much sloshing. I watered mostly evenings but next year will try to do more in the morning as fungus was a problem and evening watering can exacerbate this." (Julie at Harrison)
- "...water the base of the plants, not the leaves, to help with disease control." (Anonymous at Harrison)
- More gardeners stated that they chose to water in the evening than in the morning but most did not mention if they did that because of best gardening practice or their personal schedule. Two of the Harrison gardeners did say that they felt that morning was the best time for watering.
- Depending on how far away from the tanks [your plot is] you need a strong back to lift the 5 gallon buckets to fill the smaller pitchers – because plants (especially tomatoes) want water at ground level." (Sandy at Smith)
- "...carrying the water was great exercise" (Michele at Harrison)

Crops that grew well:

At Harrison –

Beans, green
Beets
Broccoli
Carrots
Cabbage
Celery
Collard greens
Eggplants
Flowers (Zinnia/Cosmos)
Lettuce
Peas
Peppers, green
Potatoes
Radishes
Spinach
Squash
Sunflowers
Tomatoes

At Smith –

Beans, green
Beans, purple bush
Cabbage
Corn
Cucumbers
Flowers
Herbs (dill, parsley, basil)
Lettuce
Pea pods
Peas
Peas, snap
Peppers
Peppers, spicy
Popcorn
Radishes
Sunflowers
Tomatoes

Crops that grew poorly:

At Harrison –

Beets
Cantaloupe
Cucumbers
Lettuce
Pumpkins
Radishes
Tomatoes
Zucchini

At Smith –

Cucumbers
Eggplant
Greens
Peanuts
Peas
Peppers
Spinach
Tomatoes
Zucchini

Several crops are on both the "grew well" list & the "grew poorly" list – even within the same garden. (A simple difference in timing, watering, or other gardening techniques perhaps?)

Regarding insects or animals causing destruction to gardens/crops:

- Damage caused by animals was only reported by one Harrison gardener who said that deer ate his tomatoes and Swiss chard. Another Harrison gardener commented that the tops were chewed off of his beets (he did not note if he thought it was caused by an animal or insect/bug)
- Insect issues included ants, Japanese beetles (One Harrison gardener commented that a spray of mild soap and water took care of the Japanese beetles), worms (which ate a Harrison gardener's collard greens)
- 10 of the Harrison gardeners reported squash bugs/squash borers/cuke beetles/soft bugs/eggs on the underside of leaves. All of the above were reported to have affected squash, zucchini, pumpkins, cucumbers, and cantaloupe – all “vining plants.”
- Possible disease related issues included concerns regarding a powdery mildew “attacked” zucchini, pumpkins, cantaloupe and cucumbers and some sort of fungus on tomatoes.

Bloomington Parks and Recreation is planning to have a Master Gardener come to one/both of the Bloomington Community Gardens in the spring and/or summer. We will share your feedback in hopes that he/she can give advice to assist you in some of the areas of concern!

Master Gardeners also attend many of our Bloomington Farmers Markets over the course of the summer (Saturdays from mid-June through early October). They are always happy to answer any specific gardening questions you may have. The 2014 Master Gardener schedule is not yet set but it will be posted as part of the Calendar of Events 2014 posted on the Bloomington Farmers Market page of our website

(<http://www.ci.bloomington.mn.us/cityhall/dept/commserv/parkrec/bca/market/market.htm> or www.ci.bloomington.mn.us Keyword: Farmers Market) as soon as it is set.

Comments on the benefits of gardening in a Community Garden:

Michele from Harrison – “[other gardeners] encouraged me and gave me some gardening ideas.”

Anonymous – “It is always nice to visit with the friendly gardeners and share ideas

Paul and Donna from Smith – “[Other gardeners] advice was very helpful (tomatoes).”

Peggy from Harrison – “I loved seeing the different styles of gardening, staking, etc., and the variety of veggies planted.”

Linda from Smith – “We met someone unknown to us every other visit to our plot...”

Anonymous – “I chatted with 3 or 4 [other gardeners] mostly about the crops”

Sharron from Smith – “[taking to other gardeners] made it more fun and I learned things about gardening from some

Christina from Smith – “[talking to other gardeners] I discovered a better way of planting in sandy soil – use ditches.

Anonymous – “We talk [with other gardeners] about what works – what doesn’t”

Anonymous – “It was fun to exchange ideas.”