

Community Garden Locations

Chaverim Garden (Eastside)

5901 East 2nd Street
Site Coordinator—Signa Roswall
520-750-8439; alamo@dakotacom.net

Corbett Garden (Eastside)

5948 East 30th Street
Site Coordinator—Naniiloa Smith
520-760-8579; naniiloasmith9@msn.com

Presidio Garden (Midtown)

Off Fort Lowell and Country Club
Site Coordinator—Sally Coulthard
stan@coulthard.net

Wilson Garden (Midtown close to UA)

3331 North Wilson
Site Coordinator—Melissa Urreiztieta
520-320-9814; melissa.u@earthlink.net



Garden Photo



Peas are making their last hurrah at Chaverim before the heat arrives.

Community Gardens of Tucson

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Community Gardens of Tucson



a bimonthly guide to community gardening activities in the Greater Tucson area

March/April 2006

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It's Cucurbitaceae Time

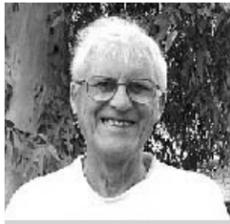
One of the many treats of gardening in our desert heat is growing and harvesting the fruits of the Cucurbitaceae family. This is a large botanical family that includes cucumbers, squash and melons. Originally from Africa and Southeast Asia, melons were introduced to the Americas by Europeans during the 15th century. Their adoption into Native American farming spread quickly as tribes traded seeds throughout the Americas. Due to expansive indigenous trade routes, melon seeds even arrived to some regions before the arrival of European explorers to those areas.

Melons are quite easy to grow and provide the gardener with a delicious fruit when ripe. Due to the fact that melon flavor is the result of intricate processes between sugar, pH, texture and volatile compounds, vine-ripened melons will have the highest sugar content and thus the best flavor and texture. The taste of store bought melons, harvested before they are fully ripe, will never compare. Another benefit of growing one's own melons is the ability to select heirloom varieties, rather than the very limited selection available at the supermarket.

Fortunately for desert gardeners, plants in this family like the summer heat and it is possible to successively sow seeds throughout the summer. The large seeds are easy to plant and grow quickly. Choose seeds for smaller varieties that will mature in a shorter amount of time and follow planting instructions on the package. These plants thrive in deep rich soil and once established will benefit from some form of trellis, however it may be necessary to shade and/or support larger fruits.

Pests to watch out for are the infamous squash-vine borer, aphids, red spider mites and cucumber beetles. The best way to approach these potential problems is to watch your plants carefully and look them over frequently for visual signs. The small light-colored eggs of the vine borer can be seen on the stems of plants and rubbed off before the attackers begin to devour the plant. Aphids and spider mites can be deterred with a spray of soapy water. Introducing beneficial insects such as mantids and ladybugs can also help reduce pests. Some gardeners also sprinkle diatomaceous earth around their plants to kill slugs and apply Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) to kill caterpillars.

The plant members of this family all have male and female flowers on each plant. The male flowers appear only as flowers, while the female flowers appear with small fruits behind them. In order for a fruit to form, the female flowers must be pollinated. If a female flower is not pollinated, the flower and small fruit will wither and fall off. (continued on Page 4)



George Says . . .

by George Brookbank

All the gardens are looking good. They are fully planted and there are no pests and the weather is favorable. Plants grow best with warm days and cool nights, and that's what we've been getting.

But it won't last much longer. Hot weather is around the corner and will go on until September. Your Site Coordinator will adjust the watering schedule so you should not need to hand water, even if you sow seeds. There's not much to sow except squash, watermelon and Chinese Pole Beans, all of which have large seeds. Of course, if you have room, you could set out plants of pepper and eggplant and that's about all.

In other words, you've done your hard work and there's not much to do except control the weeds and watch out for insect pests. And wait for the harvest.

Onions won't be fully grown for another month or two but you could harvest some and enjoy them anytime now. Those that stay in your plot will be getting all the water they need but perhaps will benefit from a light dressing of fertilizer. Ammonium sulfate is what you use but several gardeners swear (gently) by Mac's Magic Mix, that contains quick-acting urea as well as blood meal and other organic stuff. Let two plants share a teaspoon of fertilizer and scratch it in. If your onions start to send up flower stalks, snap them off to prevent nutrients going to seed heads instead of bulbs.

Tomatoes need some support because we don't prune them as gardeners in the east do. We let them bush out and this beneficially hides the fruit from sunshine. The best framework is the large-meshed construction wire that can be made into a circular cage some four feet across and five feet tall. If you like those flimsy cone tomato supports I suggest you wire three of them together. Singly, they get top-heavy and fall over.

If you've stayed with this newsletter this far, here is the one bit of good advice you need to think about.

Make a mulch.

You can use any material (except plastic) that covers the soil. Straw and alfalfa come to mind as the best, but gardeners use carpet, wood chips, dead weeds, leaves, stalks, palm fronds, in fact anything that covers the soil. The best way to use straw or alfalfa is to break open the bale into flakes that are three or four inches thick and lay them down. If you tear open a bale and scatter straw all over, you'll lose a lot of it when the wind blows. As well as keeping the soil cool and moist (because the sun can't reach it) you'll be hiding the drip lines from thirsty birds and you'll be preventing evaporation that leads to salt build-up. Don't use old cooler pads that are full of salt after a summer of use. Fresh new cooler pads are good, though.

Birds will soon be feeling the heat and come looking for water and, in the process, possibly damaging the drip lines. If you see a leak in a plot, call the gardener that you've turned off their lines in order to save water and water pressure for the other gardeners, and tell them to "get down quickly" to fix the leak. It would be a good idea to also call your Site Coordinator who can assess the situation. The leak may not be caused by birds but by a tired and failing irrigation line that needs to be replaced.

Keep up the good work! Visit your plot to see how the plants are standing up to the mid-day sun. Don't be alarmed by a noontime wilting squash plant. With such large leaves there's not much a squash plant can do in the afternoon except wilt.

Don't wait for your squash fruit to get enormous, eat them while they still have the dead flower on the end. At that stage they're called Courgettes and cost much more in the markets. And the more you pick the more the plant will produce.

Asparagus Beans *by John Swanson*

Many of us who are used to enjoying fresh green beans as traditional summer crops are disappointed in lower desert elevations with their summer production. High summer heat resulting in poor pollination is most likely the culprit.

But there is an alternative green bean for Tucson gardeners and its name is Asparagus or Yardlong Bean. It is named for its slightly different taste and unusually long length. This bean rarely disappoints us.

Lots of sun and vertical support up to eight feet, along with an improved garden soil and adequate moisture are the keys to success. Plant from seed when the soil is warm (70 degrees and up). Allow time for the vines to develop and you will be rewarded.

There are many varieties some even red. Pick them when they are pencil size and from 12 to eighteen inches long. Use them as you would green beans. They are great stir fried in olive oil with garlic. Enjoy.

What Is It?

Sisters in the garden; two climb as the other stretches out on the ground. Phaseolus, Cucurbitae, and Zea all work together in the summer to fill a garden row. One provides a ladder, one provides nitrogen, and the other keeps the weeds at bay.

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As always, we extend our warm thanks and appreciation to our friends at AlphaGraphics who not only make the publication of this newsletter possible, but make it beautiful as well.

Kick Off Great Tomatoes *by Gwen Curiel*

I simply love tomatoes, and last year I learned just how to grow wonderful tomatoes from Signa. It is very easy if you follow these steps.

1. Purchase or grow from seed tomato plants about 4" to 6" in height.
2. Prepare your soil. Add steer manure, and sprinkle with soil sulfur and ammonium phosphate.
3. Plant these as close to March 15th as possible. (This will give these plants plenty of time to develop lots of flowers, before the hot season).
4. Purchase Walls-of-Water and place these around each tomato plant for 2 - 3 weeks or until they reach the top of the Walls-of-water. (This will incubate the young plants, keeping them very wet and moist). If you take the time to do this your plants will more than double in size in three weeks. I planted my tomato plants on March 15th. I removed the walls-of-water in three weeks. When planted the tomato plants were six inches tall. One month later on April 15th these same plants were over two feet in height with plenty of flowers already. The stems are as thick as my thumb. All of this new growth occurred in just four weeks.
5. After removing the Walls-of-water place a 6 foot stick next to your plant and tie your tomato plant to the stick so it will grow up high and straight.
6. Next add a wire cage so plants will grow tall. I like my tomatoes off the ground. This is also easy to cover with sheets in the summer months. (this wire is optional if you want your tomatoes to grow on the ground.)
7. Most important is to purchase Magic Mix at Catalina Heights nursery. This can only be found there. You can purchase a 10 pound bag which will last you a year for under \$5.00. If you sprinkle the Magic Mix on your plants, every 3 - 4 weeks regularly, I will guarantee you perfect tomatoes. I just sprinkle it on the ground and water to help it soak into the soil.

I need to tell you that three years ago I did not know how to garden, and killed everything that I tried to plant. So if I can grow perfect tomatoes now, anyone can.

I wish luck to all.



Director's Cut

A few of us snuck out to the Chaverim garden recently for the spring potluck. I pity all who missed it. We had a great time. Shirley did a wonderful job with the table settings that doubled as raffle gifts and Signa performed equally as well at 'wrangling cats' to get everything set up and organized. Thanks to all who helped with the setup and teardown. Your editor and I really enjoyed getting to enjoy the good food and good company. Many thanks also for the gift for our little one.

Summer is almost here and with it have come some changes. We have some new gardeners at Corbett and at Presidio and they are welcome additions to our little program. We hope that they will stay and grow with us. Be sure to follow George's advice when it comes to heat preparation. I recently learned that since the newspaper that carried his column made a format change, we are pretty close to being the sole recipients of his articles which transfer not only his vast knowledge, but his sharp wit as well. I would encourage all of you to take advantage of this. Opportunities for gaining the undivided attention of a true master gardener are few and far between.

I recently fielded a call regarding a district meeting of garden clubs in the state from a member of the Indian Ridge Garden Club, which regularly supports the Community Gardens of Tucson through monetary contributions. They wanted information about our program to share at the meeting. We recently received a donation from the Tucson Garden Club, and I feel that it is due in part to the positive representation we were afforded by the Indian Ridge Garden Club at this district meeting. I feel that our program does good things and it's good to know that others outside our gardens think so as well.

~Andy Stevens

Fennel

by Naniloa Smith

I wanted to try a new plant for the winter garden. George had left us various seeds to try and I chose fennel. I planted the seed in October after rotor tiling and adding amendments. The plants produced several stalks of fennel. The plant looked a bit like stalks of celery with light wispy green leaves. I decided to harvest this stalk and share with fellow gardeners. We weren't sure how to cook this beauty. Luckily a PBS show shared a recipe with fennel. I tried it for our April Potluck and found it to be quite tasty.

Pasta with Sausage and Fennel

1 onion cut in pieces	1 fennel cut in pieces
2 garlic cloves	1 1/4 pound of sausage
1 box of pasta (Penne or Ziti)	2 Tablespoons of tomato paste
herbs to season	Pecorino cheese

Prepare pot of boiling water for pasta. Brown sausage and set aside. Using a bit of Olive oil saute onion and fennel adding garlic at end. Add salt and pepper and herbs to season. Return sausage to skillet. Add pasta water to mixture. Add the tomato paste and pasta. Pour into serving dish and top with Pecorino cheese.

Other ways to cook: Quarter bulb and steam or add to other vegetables or soups. Chop and add as onion or celery to soups and other dishes.

A bit of research follows:

Fennel yields both a herb and a spice. All plant parts are edible: roots, stalks and leaves, with the spice coming from the dried seeds. A native to the Mediterranean, Fennel is an ancient and common plant known to the ancient Greeks and spread throughout Europe by Imperial Rome. It is also grown in India, the Orient, Australia, South America and has become naturalized in the US. It has been called the "meeting' seed" by the Puritans who would chew it during their long church services.



A Planter's Guide

to May and June

Vegetables

- Amaranth Greens
- Armenian Cucumber**
- Asparagus Beans** S
- Blackeye Pea** S
- Beans/Bush S,P
- Beans/Pole S,P
- Corn S,P
- Cucumber S,P
- Dandelion Greens
- Eggplant P
- Melons** S,P
- New Zealand Spinach
- Malabar Spinach
- Okra**
- Purslane Greens
- Pepper P
- Squash** S,P
- Swiss Chard S,P
- Tomato P
- Note Italic**

Herbs

- Basil S,P
- Chives S,P
- Chinese Chives
- Epazote S,P
- Lemon Balm S,P
- Lemon Verbena S,P
- Lemon Grass
- Marjoram S,P
- Mexican Oregano S,P
- Mint P
- Oregano P
- Rosemary
- Sage S,P
- Shiso S,P
- Stevia
- Thyme S,P

May 1-15 May 15-30 June 1-15 June 15-30



Plants that can be grown in full sun.
For others, try afternoon shade or filtered sun.



Note: Quality Herb Production is best achieved with filtered sun/open shade during hot months.

May-June Lunar Phases



Article of Interest

It's Cucurbitaceae Time Continued from Page 1

by Melissa Urreiztieta

This is not a sign of disease or pest damage. Pollination occurs when pollen from a male flower is transferred to a female flower. This process is often carried out by insects, but gardeners are able to help the process along by hand pollinating.

When hand pollinating plants of the Cucurbitaceae family, it is important to work slowly and patiently because melon flowers are fragile. It is wise to perform hand pollination early in the morning soon after the flowers have opened. First, identify a few female flowers to pollinate. Next, pluck a male flower from the plant carefully so that you keep the stem to use as a handle. Remove the petals and ring of sepals to expose the anther. Then transfer the loose pollen from the anther of the male flower to the stigma of the female flowers. While this is a beneficial process, it does not always work. Even bees are only successful pollinating melons about 20 percent of the time.

Because melons (*Cucumis melo*) and watermelons (*Citrullus lanatus*) are of different genera, they cannot cross-pollinate, however, there are no reproductive barriers between the many varieties of *Cucumis melo*, so it is important to give each crop sufficient space. Even this effort cannot ensure that varieties do not mix, so it is also important not to save your seeds. Instead, purchase new seeds each year from growers that farm melons carefully to ensure varieties do not cross-pollinate. Last year, our Armenian Cucumbers (also known as Snake Melons) encroached on the space of our flourishing Muskmelons. We ended up with a number of orange-hued, odd-tasting "cucumbers." This year we will be sure allow more space for each of our melon varieties!

Once fruits are growing, it can be challenging to determine when they are ripe. Melons start to ripen about 30 days after flowering, which is also known as anthesis. This is a great reason to use a garden journal. While varieties in the reticulatus group, which includes the muskmelons, cantaloupes and Persian melons, can be harvested at full slip (when the stem easily separates from the fruit), it is not so easy to determine ripeness in other varieties. For other types of melons, it is advisable to use a sense of touch, as one would do with a peach or pear. Feel the base of the fruit, opposite of the stem, and notice if the skin is easy to depress. Watermelons are more

difficult because the skin is so hard. For varieties of *Citrullus lanatus*, follow the calendar to correlate average days to maturity, and look for other clues such as the tendrils drying and withering, a creamy or yellow color on the ground spot (not white), and a dull (not shiny) rind. Another more time consuming method is to measure the weight of the melons daily. When the fruit stops gaining weight it is ready.

All varieties of melons are considered "coolers," due to their cool, crisp flesh and high water content, making them quite refreshing and enjoyable on a hot, summer day. Many community gardeners have had success with modern, as well as heirloom varieties. The Tohono O'odham Yellow Meated watermelon and the Navajo Red-seeded were popular with gardeners last year and these seeds are available through Native Seeds/SEARCH. Many other mouth-watering varieties of melons, and even some melon recipes, are described in detail in Amy Goldman's book, *Melons for the Passionate Grower*.

Editor's Note: My deepest thanks go out to Melissa for writing this article. I would like to encourage my fellow gardeners to continue to submit their useful and entertaining articles. I feel that we all benefit from them and they not only make us more informed gardeners, but better stewards of the land.

A Child in the Garden

When to the garden of untroubled thought
I came of late, and saw the open door,
And wished again to enter, and explore
The sweet, wild ways with stainless bloom inwrought,
And bowers of innocence with beauty fraught,
It seemed some purer voice must speak before
I dared to tread that garden loved of yore,
That Eden lost unknown and found unsought.

Then just within the gate I saw a child, --
A stranger-child, yet to my heart most dear;
He held his hands to me, and softly smiled
With eyes that knew no shade of sin or fear:
"Come in," he said, "and play awhile with me;"
"I am the little child you used to be."

Harry Van Dyke (1852 - 1933)

Garden Reports

Presidio Garden

Presidio Garden welcomes new gardeners Dale Carter, Karen Lacey, Darcy French and Darin Arrick to its fertile and promising site. We knew Darin was a pretty hard core when he refused to use the rototiller and chose instead to hand dig the plot that he and Darcy share. George has planted squash and yellow watermelon seeds from Native Seed Search amongst the last of the plants left from his spinach trials. I wonder if he'll be able to harvest those monster melons lying down as he did the spinach. The December onion planting has proved to be a good decision as some are already being harvested. And we're all still enjoying bouquets of Sally's Bells of Ireland.



Chaverim Garden

As a novice gardener I am amazed with the growth process of plants. It is a wonderful thing to plant a tiny seed in the ground and see, in two weeks or so, that tiny buds of leaves appear which then grow into such wonderful plants. I've planted carrots, radishes, spinach, peas, onions and broccoli. I didn't even know what a broccoli plant looked like until I bought one and planted it. I was really surprised to see this leafy plant produce a large flower-like vegetable that looked like a bouquet. The vegetables that we buy from supermarkets are not as tasty as what we can grow with help from the garden and plant nurseries. Gardening is hard work and I'm learning to put up with smelly manure, grubs, and earthworms (which I have learned are good things for our soil) and in order to become a better gardener.

Being outdoors, digging into the earth, finding lady bugs, and getting advice from a variety of people sharing their ideas has been a lot of fun and a great learning experience. I look forward to planting new and different crops in the future in my own home and with this great community of garden people.

Cynthia Benavidez

Corbett Garden

Corbett Gardeners welcome a new member to the Community Gardens of Tucson. Mary Francis and her sisters Joann Fields and Reba Treadaway have joined us. They chose the plot next to the fence as they wanted to grow gourds.

The rest of us are busy planting our tomatoes and squash preparing for the summer garden. Spinach, lettuce and sweet peas have been big harvests for us this past month. We enjoy meeting on our Saturday Meeting and sharing produce. Corbett has room for more gardeners. Invite your friends to join us.

Naniloa Smith



Community Garden

Calendar

May 2006

- 6** Corbett Garden Meeting 8:00am
- 11** CGT Steering Committee Meeting at Darlene Schacht's, 2940 N. Santa Rosa, 9:00am. All CGT members invited.
- 13** Presidio Garden Meeting 8:00am



- 21** Chaverim Garden Meeting 8:00am
- 27** Wilson Garden Meeting 8:00am

June 2006

- 3** Corbett Garden Meeting 8:00am
- 8** CGT Steering Committee Meeting at Darlene Schacht's, 2940 N. Santa Rosa, 9:00am. All CGT members invited.
- 10** Presidio Garden Meeting 8:00am



- 18** Deadline for Newsletter Submissions
- 18** Chaverim Garden Meeting 8:00am
- 24** Wilson Garden Meeting 8:00am

5

Community Garden

Activities



Clockwise from top left: Darlen Schacht unleashes some frustration onto some unsuspecting compost as Sally Coulthard, this garden's coordinator, stands well out of the way and assures her that everything will be fine. It was standing room only recently at the Wilson garden. It was a good morning, but the rabbits must have counterfeited their invitations. This year's crop of onions are getting so big that they're almost too much for one person to handle.

6 Inga gives a mother's helping hand...or two where they're needed. The latest meeting of Our Gardeners of the Order of Fennel was held this past month at the Corbett Garden. That photo is almost too much fun for words..... See you in the garden!