

CCG Spring Newsletter



February 2016

The Second Season

Most of us learned to garden in another part of the country, where we could grow vegetables just a few months a year. In Sarasota, we're able to garden nearly year round, and that's a way of life we embrace at CCG. Happy Spring!

Getting Ready for Spring

When pulling out your spent and dying plants, you may see that sand has come to the surface of the soil. The nutrients you put into your plot last fall have been depleted. Before planting your spring garden, turn over the soil and amend it just as you did in the fall. In addition to top soil, please consider adding compost, fertilizer and composted manure.

Warm season vegetables are heavy feeders, and our sandy soil has few nutrients in it. If you are used to planting in clay, this may be a change for you. Look for a fertilizer developed for tomatoes, eggplants and peppers.

We're in Zone 9

Here at CCG, we grow a wide range of vegetables. That's because we are located in USDA Growing Zone 9. On the West Coast it starts at the San Francisco Bay Area, runs down the Pacific Coast, across to Texas, along the Gulf Coast to the Tampa Bay Area and up the Atlantic Coast to the Carolinas. This climate also has a lot in common with Italy, Mexico and Asia. We'd

like to encourage you to plant vegetable varieties that you can't find at the local supermarket. Think globally.

For instance, instead of planting green zucchini, try a variety from Mexico called *Tatuma*. It's creamy, sweet and easy to grow. Or, *Japanese Eggplant* instead of globe eggplant. You slice it in half and toss it on the grill. How easy is that? Look for heirloom varieties when shopping for seeds and seedlings. Your dinner table will be transformed.

Heat-Loving Plants

In March, we get a second and more reliably warm season to plant the following vegetables: *beans, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, okra, peppers, squash and tomatoes*. March is also the last time to plant *beets, carrots, collards, kohlrabi, lettuce and radishes*.

For the Love of Tomatoes

Several varieties of tomatoes were planted at CCG this year. Thanks to all the taste testers!



The winners are: *Black Cherry, Black Prince, Cherokee Purple, Eva Purple Ball, Italian Red Pear, Sun Sugar Cherry, Yellow Pear Cherry and Yellow Taxi.*

The cherry tomatoes and the Cherokee

Purple were available locally as 4" transplants. These varieties had a true tomato taste and thrived in the heat and humidity. Other varieties to try: *Radiator Charlie (Mortgage Lifter), Cherokee Chocolate and Black Krim.*

We discovered that a fertilizer developed for tomatoes worked best. It was low in nitrogen (N), very high in phosphorus (P) and high in potassium (K). The ratio to look for is 1:4:2. We used *Jobe's Organic Tomato* and *Happy Frog Fruit and Flower* fertilizers, but any organic tomato fertilizer can be used.

Growing Vegetables from Seed

Nothing is as rewarding in the garden as growing plants from seed. Some of us are devoted to heirloom varieties, and these are the companies we have had success with: *Botanical Interests, Franchi, Renee's Garden, Southern Exposure and TomatoFest.* *Botanical Interests* is available locally at Farm & Garden. You can find the others online at their websites or at Amazon.

Bees & Ladybugs

Here at CCG, we like beneficial insects. They go after destructive bugs and pollinate our veggies. If you'd like to help in this effort, please think about including *alyssum, blanket flower, coreopsis, cosmos, coneflower, sunflower and lavender* in your plot. Up to 25% of your plot can be devoted to county approved pollinator flowers.

Bug & Disease Control

One of the most effective pest controls isn't a spray or pellet, but good garden hygiene.



In February, we tend to see plants that are past their prime and going to seed. Are your plants thriving or dying? Please pull your dying plants *before* the

whiteflies and aphids arrive and come looking for weak plants to set up shop.

When your best efforts are thwarted, use *Neem Oil* for aphids and whiteflies. For worms and beetles use *BT* or *Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew*. *Bonide's Bug & Slug Killer* is effective on cutworms and ants. For powdery mildew and other fungal diseases use *Copper Sulphate*.

Thanks for helping keep our beloved garden bug and disease free.