

Organic Growers School
Supporting Sustainable Agriculture
in the Southern Appalachians through
Educational Programs and Outreach



...e-news



MEET CRAFT: Camp Celo Gardens

In September, the CRAFT group visited Camp Celo Gardens, a diversified farming operation at the heart of a summer camp for boys and girls in Burnsville, NC. In addition to supplying fresh, naturally grown produce to the camp's kitchen, Camp Celo Gardens markets heavily to restaurants in the Asheville area, and the gardens are used as an educational and community building tool for kids at the camp. As part of the CRAFT tour, farmers learned about the challenges and opportunities of farming in a community, and strategies for marketing to restaurants. You can learn more about Camp Celo Gardens by visiting their blog at <http://campcelogardens.blogspot.com> or calling at 828-675-1639.



Farmer's Corner: Ask Tom

Tom –

How important are soil tests for organic farms?

- Bill

Commercial Farmers: Got a question for Tom? [Email it to the Organic Growers School](#)

Bill –

We take about twenty soil samples on our farm each year – ideally in late summer or early fall. In some ways soil samples are even more important for organic farmers because our supplements tend to release nutrients slowly. If we get behind, it is harder to catch up than on

true nature
country*fair

True Nature Country Fair Wraps up the Season

Attendance and spirits were high at the third annual True Nature Country Fair, held September 26 and 27 in Barnardsville, NC. 1000 attendees visited farmers' and trade show exhibits, purchased local food and wares at the Country Store, and learned about sustainable living by attending classes on topics from gardening to primitive skills. On Saturday evening, the first annual True Nature Farm to Table Dinner fed more than 60 people a fantastic menu of local foods from over 30 farms and individuals in Western North Carolina. Sunday's bright weather brought even more people out to the Big Ivy Community

soil in hands

conventional farms where fast-release supplements are typical.

I use soil test results mainly to keep track of multiyear trends in our soils. I particularly focus on pH, phosphorus, and potassium. I track those levels in each field and add supplements in the fall if they seem to be dropping outside acceptable ranges. My favorite supplements are high calcium limestone for pH, colloidal clay phosphate, and potassium sulfate. These are all mined, naturally occurring materials. Decaying geologic deposits will eventually provide P and K but they rarely keep up with intensive production and the nutrients that we haul off in the crops that we sell. Most mountain soils are acidic so limestone is critical for pH adjustment and as a calcium source. Acid rain, mostly from coal burning, also makes limestone addition needed more often than might otherwise be required.

North Carolina farmers have a real deal on soil tests – they are provided at no cost by the NC Department of Agriculture (NCDA). If you avoid spring when every gardener in the state is sending in tests, results are usually back in a week or two. Results are also available on-line if you don't want to wait for the mail. The computer printout looks as though no humans are involved but expert agronomists manage the process. I usually mention that we prefer organic recommendations when we send in the samples and NCDA will make suggestions for organic supplements. They have also run special tests to address particular needs. One year our certifier decided they wanted proof that our tomatoes needed boron supplements. Between soil tests and tissue tests we were able to make the case for continuing to add pre-plant boron.

You did not ask about tissue tests but they are another tool that comes in handy in crop nutrient management. If soil tests are for 'steering the ocean liner,' tissue tests are more like guiding a speed boat. Tissue samples are from the most recent fully expanded leaf (in tomatoes for example) so they tell us what nutrients the crop is using right now. Most farmers can look at a crop and tell that something is not right but the tissue test will help narrow down the problems. For indeterminate (long season) tomatoes we normally need to gradually add nitrogen through the season. Leaf yellowing and wimpy stems are one way to decide when to side-dress your tomatoes but tissue tests help to know when those symptoms are about to appear. Hydroponic growers often do tissue tests weekly but we find that samples every few weeks work well with organic supplements.

Center for children's activities, more educational opportunities, and celebration. The Organic Growers School thanks everyone who contributed to this wonderful community event, and we hope to see you next year. [Stay tuned to our website](#) for dates and information about the 2010 True Nature Country Fair. [Contact Program Manager Karen Vizzina](#) if you are interested in sponsoring, or otherwise getting involved with this event.

This Month's Picks

Each month, we love to feature reader-submitted photos, websites, and recipes that are worth sharing. If you have submissions, [please send them our way!](#)

Sweetest Spiced Pumpkin Cookies

- 1 C. butter, softened
- 1 C. sugar
- 1 C. baked, mashed pumpkin or winter squash
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 t. pure vanilla extract
- 2 C. flour
- 1 t. baking powder
- 1/2 t. baking soda
- 1 t. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 t. ground allspice
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1 C. chopped nuts or chocolate chips (optional)

There is a small charge (less than \$10) for tissue analyses but they are well worth the price if you have a problem to solve.

While I am on the topic of nitrogen, the soil sample test results for nitrogen come from literature for your intended next crop and not from your soil sample. Since nitrogen changes form easily and can move out of the root zone between when you take the soil sample and when you plant, the NCDA agronomists decided to provide a book value. I wish they would note that policy on report, but I would rather have the information than not have it. Another good source for nitrogen recommendations is [Knott's Handbook for Vegetable Growers](#) that lists the NPK content of most crops.

To understand more uses for your soil sample report, check with your Extension agent or the NCDA agronomist for your area. The Organic Growers School each spring and fall often offers classes on soils so check the web site for upcoming classes or to review soils presentations from the archives.

Thanks for your question.

-- Tom

[Link to the NC soil testing website](#)

Commercial Farmers: Got a question for Tom? [Email it to the Organic Growers School](#)



Gardener's Corner: Ask Ruth

Dear Ruth,

I heard that the time to plant garlic is in the fall. If that's true, how do I plant it?

Roger
Asheville, NC

Dear Roger,

I planted a number of different garlic cultivars last fall. It was quite a thrill to harvest three different kinds of garlic, and know that I would be eating my own homegrown garlic all year. **Garlic is usually planted in the fall** and harvested the following summer around

Preheat oven to 375. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar. Add pumpkin, egg, and vanilla and mix well. In another bowl, combine dry ingredients and then add this mixture to the bowl of wet ingredients. Mix well to form a batter. Stir in the nuts or chips if you are using them. Drop in rounds onto ungreased cookie sheet and bake for 10-15 minutes. Cool on a rack and then store in an airtight container.

Note- these cookies can easily be made vegan by substituting 2 T. arrowroot starch for the egg.

-Submitted by Carol Foil, Johnson City, TN

OGS SPRING CONFERENCE 2010!

Mark your Calendars!

The 2010 OGS Spring Conference is scheduled for March 6 and 7, 2010 at University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA).

Join us for a weekend of workshops on all aspects of sustainable living. Classes are for everyone, from beginning gardeners to advanced commercial growers. Also enjoy the kids program (ages 7-12), silent auction, trade show, and more. For sponsorship, exhibitor, and other information please visit our website at

<http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/1505>

Want to help coordinate our Kids Program for 2010? If so, call Conference Coordinator Meredith Leigh McKissick at 828 582 5039.

mid-July. Spring-planted garlic will not be as big. In Western North Carolina, garlic is best planted from about mid-October to mid-November. Plant in well-drained, fertile soil that has plenty of organic matter. Locally-grown garlic makes the best seed because it will be regionally adapted, but you can even plant the garlic found in the grocery store.

To plant Pull the garlic bulb apart into individual cloves. Ideally, use only the largest cloves for planting (the smaller cloves can be eaten, or planted thickly to produce an early harvest of garlic greens.) Eliminate any cloves that look moldy, damaged or diseased. Plant individual cloves point side up, about 4" apart, with 30" between rows. You can also plant in double rows that are 6" apart, with 30" between rows. Avoid planting garlic in areas where onions have been planted during the last few years.

Growing on Little or no top growth will be seen over the winter. Usually you begin to see top growth in early March. Mulch generously over winter to suppress weeds and maintain moisture levels in the soil. When leaf growth becomes evident in spring, you can start fertilizing (with something like Neptune's Harvest Fish/Seaweed Blend) every two weeks. Keep your eye on moisture levels; they should remain even. As the days become shorter following the summer solstice, the bulb begins to form. During the last stage of growth, garlic can quickly double in size.

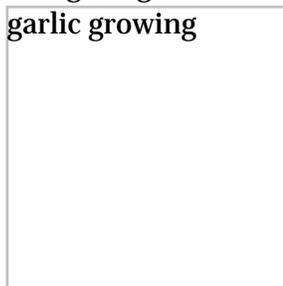
To harvest Harvest when 1/2 of the leaves have turned brown. If you dig it too early, the garlic will not have achieved its full size potential. If you dig it too late, the outer skin starts to disintegrate and the bulbs begin to break

apart. It is best to dig down in the soil and check the bulbs progress. The outer skin should be tight and the bulbs should be plump and fully developed. Loosen the soil with a garden fork and the bulbs will easily release for harvest. Leave the tops on, bunch the bulbs together and hang to dry. After about a month you can cut the greens off. Leave the tops on if you plan to make garlic braids (use softneck garlic for braids). If you rinse the soil from bulbs, be sure they are completely dry before storage.

Next year's seed Save the biggest, fattest bulbs for next year's seed, and leave them unwashed. Next year plant the biggest cloves from the bulbs you saved.

Three types of garlic *Softneck Garlic* The necks

garlic growing



of this garlic are soft when mature. Softneck garlic is the type that is braided. It is widely adaptable, makes the best storage garlic, and has the strongest flavor.

Hardneck Garlic This garlic sends up a scape (flower) that is edible and makes a decorative dried flower. To harvest bigger bulbs, it is best to remove the scapes. This garlic is very cold hardy, it has a milder flavor than softneck, and the cloves are easier to peel. Doesn't store as well as softneck.

Elephant Garlic ~ More closely related to leeks, elephant garlic has a mild flavor and produces very large cloves that are easy to peel. Mulch heavily, as it is not quite as winter hardy. Stores about one year.

Garlic is a great crop. As long as you keep it weeded, it requires very little attention. It is renowned for its healing properties, and can be used as a bug repellent in the garden. Industrious gardeners can make garlic braids for Christmas presents (you need a least 10 garlic bulbs per braid which means planting a good bit of garlic). Worst-case scenario, you will enjoy eating it all year long!

Best of luck,

Ruth Gonzalez

Gardeners: Got a question for Ruth? [Email it to the Organic Growers School](#)

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