
NYACK COMMUNITY GARDEN

MARCH-APRIL 2017

Want to be a good neighbor in the garden?

Never ever give a weed a chance!

The Nyack Community Garden strives to be a weed-free zone. No, not *that* kind of weed, but that too, of course! Each year, when we submit a signed copy of the Rules & Regulations as part of applying or re-applying, we promise to live by them. Strict adherence to Rules 10, 11, and 12 will assure a happy life in the garden. Serious consequences can arise if you are not “all over” these three, the most common being banishment and the loss of your plot. So in case you haven’t yet memorized all the rules, here are three key ones: we maintain our garden throughout the season; we keep our plot and path in front of it as weed free as humanly possible (mandatory); and NO vines or climbing plants allowed on the fence even if they are kind of pretty. That means you, morning glories. We have promised to rip you out!

The Garden has good rich soil. What could be the downside? Weeds love it, too. They sneak in uninvited to steal away the very nutrients that the seeds or seedlings we planted need if they are to grow and thrive. What you do about the weed problem is up to you, but you must do something. The good news is that you have choices. Here are some strategies that garden members have used against weeds, in no particular order.

Landscape Fabric -- because weeds can’t grow in the dark

Before they plant anything, many gardeners, after moving any large stones or rocks and leveling the soil, pin down enough landscape fabric to cover their entire plot. There are many fabric qualities and a few color choices – usually black, dark gray or brown. The fabric must let water through and needs to be opaque enough to block the light and strong enough not to rip where pinned.

Robin Brown has used several brands and her preference is a black fabric by Dewitt Weed Barrier. It comes in a 4 x100 feet roll and costs about \$41. Dewitt makes many fabric products so if you want to find this one, go to Amazon and enter Dewitt PBK4100. Robin notes that no landscape fabric will work well with mounds or raised rows; landscape fabric requires a level plot.

*When pesky
invaders appear,
you have
options...*

Duncan Bell goes with a sturdy brown landscape fabric. He credits fellow gardener Chris Randolph for letting him know about his favorite -- Sta Green Ultimate Landscape Fabric. Available at Lowes in Orangeburg, it is 3 x 50 feet, and costs \$20 a roll. Two rolls are more than enough for a full plot. Duncan says that he and Jennifer have tried other brands but nothing has compared for light blocking and strength. Watch out, because Sta Green also makes a “Premium” fabric, which is a little cheaper but not as sturdy as the “Ultimate.”

Organic gardener Brian Osborn suggests that you consider Bio 360 Biodegradable Mulch if you want to get the weed-blocking advantages of landscape fabric with a biodegradable product. It comes in rolls like regular landscape fabric but decomposes slowly over the season, adding nutrients to the soil. For more about the various ways to mulch and their pros and cons, see Brian's post on mulch on the Garden website blog.

Installing Landscape Fabric

If you decide to use fabric, you will need U-shaped metal pins or garden staples, sold wherever landscape fabric is sold. For a half plot, 75 pins should be enough. You'll also need scissors or a utility knife, a tape measure, and small stakes and string for laying out your plot. A rubber mallet or hammer will come in handy, and so will a second person to help unroll the fabric and pin it down. And you will want a wind-free day.



Plot with landscape fabric in June.



Plot with landscape fabric in August.

Robin suggests that you install your fabric in early spring before any weeds begin to grow. Unroll fabric and turn under about three inches at fence and path ends. Install a pin every foot along outer edge but space more widely on the other side just to hold in place temporarily until you pin the next sheet down. Robin overlaps the sheets about four to six inches so weeds can't grow in between. If your final sheet is wider than needed, cut it or double it under. Don't skimp on pins! Keep the fabric down, especially on the corners.

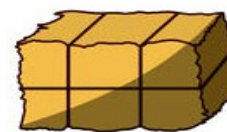
When ready to plant, Robin cuts holes with a minimum of four inches around each young plant, and cuts long rectangular openings for planting rows of seeds. She then pins around the openings. She installs tomato cages and other support systems immediately after planting when it's least likely to damage the plants. She mulches around the plant. If you are growing plants that like cooler temperatures or don't like the appearance of the

landscape fabric, you can spread three inches of mulch more broadly.

At the end of the season, we will leave our plots as we found them. So the fabric you use and all the pins that held it down must be removed. Pins are reusable from season to season. There are some helpful YouTube videos on installation of landscape fabric. Check them out!

Mulching with Straw or Seed-Free Hay

Covering your plot with straw or seed free-hay will also prevent the dreaded weeds from barging in. You can buy straw or seed-free hay in bales from Home Depot or Lowes or any garden center. Brian Osborne favors straw and says that the key to using it is to put it down thickly. "If you can see the soil through the straw, then weeds will grow." He suggests that if you use straw you need to put down a layer that is at least six inches deep.



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Since straw decomposes, you can expect to use two bales for a full plot over the season -- don't be stingy! And bear in mind that straw is an insulator, so if you lay it down too early, the soil will heat up more slowly. Brian waits until mid-June to put down his straw mulch.



Plot with straw mulch in June.

harvested. Jill gets her straw at Down to Earth in Pomona, and she notes that it breaks down fairly quickly so it needs to be replenished every so often. She hoses her straw down after each application so it does not blow away. Jill notes that while landscape fabric may be more effective at staving off the weeds than straw is, she finds hand weeding therapeutic.

Jill Remaly loves the way pine bark mulch looks but does not recommend it for vegetable gardens because it leeches nutrients from the soil. So Jill uses straw, not hay, because of the chance that hay might still have some seeds or weeds and you could end up with a small field of barley or wheat. Straw is just the stalks of oat, barley or wheat after the grain has been



Plot with straw mulch in August.



Weeding by Hand – we all have to do it

Some gardeners find weeding relaxing. They eschew landscape fabric and straw because they enjoy yanking out weeds while kneeling, bending or squatting. If this is the route you are thinking of taking, please keep this in mind: there will be day after day of hot blazing sun. Lots of days will be sticky *and* 92 degrees. Nevertheless, dear Hand Weeders, you still have to show up and pull up your weeds. Oh, and it's quite time consuming. No excuses!

But in truth, there is almost no such thing as a totally weed-free garden, so everyone will need to hand weed, whatever their prevention plan. Weeds will pop up around your plants even if you have strong landscape fabric or straw or

other mulch. So every-one needs some garden gloves. And a knee pad will help, too. And a hat! There are too many hand tools to cover here, so check out some of those mesmerizing YouTubes on hand weeding. Here's a hot tip from Kerry on Channel iScaper1: it's much easier to weed the day after a good thunderstorm. Genius!

The Bitter End – that is, Rule 15

When you find yourself pulling up weeds, which you frequently will, be sure to dispose of them properly (Rule 15). Unless they are diseased, bag all plant waste materials in compost bags (provided in the shed) and take to the Depew Avenue curb. Oh, and Rule 17: Put any litter or diseased plant waste in the garbage receptacle by Franklin Street or take it away with you.

There are pros and cons to every method of weed control. Feel free to introduce yourself to your fellow gardeners and ask any questions that you may have about what has worked for them. Many Nyack Community Gardeners have lots of experience and are happy to share their knowledge. Many thanks to the gardeners who did so for this story.

News You Can Use

It's your newsletter so send us your garden story or tell us what you want to read about or learn about, please. We'd love to hear from you.

Your Newsletter Team

Linda Watson, linda@watsonpr.com

Elizabeth Cherry, elizcherry@gmail.com

Stephanie Hughes, hopkinshughes@gmail.com

Todd Moore toadman03@gmail.com

Garden's Upcoming Events

April 9	Garden opens
April 9 - Nov. 4	Growing season
May 31	Deadline for planting plots
After May 31	Unplanted or unmaintained plots assigned to persons on waiting list
July 20	Garden Contest

By the way...

Recently the Garden was covered by screened organically-enriched topsoil. And rototilled. No need to supplement the soil, unless certain plants require special nutrients.

Free Veggie, Herb and Flower Seeds. Get yours at the Nyack Seed Exchange, Nyack Library on Saturdays from 10 to 2.

Did you forget to make a copy of the Garden's Rules & Regs you signed and agreed to live by? No problem. They are posted on the shed bulletin board and on our website.

Tomato Tip: Do not plant tomatoes outside until you are certain that the night temperature will not dip below 55 degrees.

Want more information?

Read back newsletters at nyackcommunitygarden.info. Other useful websites with a local gardening focus: rocklandcce.org and piermontcommunitygarden.blogspot.com

NYACK COMMUNITY GARDEN, east side of S. Franklin St. between Hudson Av. & Depew Av.

PO Box 864, Nyack, NY 10960 Email: nyackcommunitygarden@gmail.com Website: nyackcommunitygarden.info

Executive Board: John Dunnigan, co-president. 845-358-9126 Lynda Grant, co-president/secretary, lhgrant1@gmail.com

Marie Dilluvio, treasurer, mvenus1220@aol.com Robin Brown, trbrown@optonline.net Laura Pakaln, lpakaln@verizon.net