Manhattan Community Garden Newsletters - October 2025

The weather continues to be favorable for late season gardening. We are actually past the date when we could have had our first frost, so these are “bonus” days for summer crops. In fact, the recent spell of very warm days has been best for the warm season crops that are still hanging on and maturing late-set fruits. It has actually been a bit warm for some of the fall garden crops, but overall, the fall gardens continue to look wonderful. I’ve even had an outbreak of spider mites, a pest that is normally associated with mid-summer’s hot, dry weather. We have received a bit of rain here in Manhattan this week that has provided some relief for the generally dry fall that northeast Kansas has been experiencing.

Mark Your Calendar for Annual Meeting and Potluck: The Manhattan Community Garden Annual Meeting and Potluck Dinner will be held on Sunday, November 2, at 1:00 pm at the Collins Lane gardens (1435 Collins Lane). All gardeners should plan to attend. The meeting will be very short, and the dinner and hospitality are the primary focus of the event.

Sweet Potato Harvest: There are still a lot of sweet potatoes in the gardens, and they have grown extremely well this season. It should be a great harvest. Please check the last newsletter for details on digging and storing sweet potatoes if you are not familiar with this crop. Don’t wait too long if your crop was planted on time and has had good growth. Rodents can damage roots and sweet potatoes will be killed by even a hint of frost, so you will not get much more yield by waiting.

Frost vs Freeze: Although the weather has been unusually warm this fall, and it is expected to continue above average for the next couple weeks, the first frost and freeze will likely be here sometime in October. For Manhattan, the median date when there is a 50% chance of the first frost is October 5th, and for the first freeze is October 15. So, we need to be making plans for when it happens.

Exactly what goes on with a frost warning, a freeze warning or a hard freeze warning? A frost warning is issued when atmospheric conditions are suitable for temperatures to fall below 36 degrees. Will this injure most plants? Answer: NO. However, cold air will move into low lying areas and may cause frost even in your garden if the officially recorded temperature is several degrees above 32. Areas with a lot of buildings or other structures may absorb heat and keep the temperatures up. However, at Collins Lane, there is little ‘superstructure’ and it is in a low-lying area, so temperatures may reach 32 or below in some spots. It is also highly dependent on wind and clouds. Calm and clear, especially in the early morning hours before sunrise, will lead to the greatest chance of frost. Also, there may be injury on the upper areas of plants where lower portions are warmer due to heat being released by soil. Think of a frost warning like a tornado warning. A tornado warning doesn’t mean a tornado will occur- just that there is a potential so be alert.

A freeze warning is issued when conditions are such that temperatures may fall to 32 degrees. Will that damage plants? Answer: Some but not all (see next section). However, if temperatures reach 30 to 31 it will damage all sensitive warm season crops. Again, the lowest temperatures will be in low lying, open areas. Covering plants with a tarp or plastic sheeting can generally protect them from the first freeze and may get you a couple more weeks for late fruits to continue developing. Be sure to secure the edges of the covers so they do not blow off, and remove them immediately the next morning after the sun comes up or it may get too hot very quickly.

Finally, a hard freeze warning is issued when temperatures may reach 28 degrees. Will this damage plants? Answer YES, all but a few hardy and semi-hardy cold tolerant crops. Under these conditions, you may still be able to protect sensitive plants with covers, but it is more risky. Last fall was such a year - covers did not protect my peppers and tomatoes from the first hard freeze. It is probably time to pick produce that you can the day before, or move things indoors.

When will these warnings come? I have no idea. If historical conditions prevail, it could be any time now. So, we will just have to wait and see. Cloud formations and rainfall can have some dramatic influences as well. One thing you can do when cold weather is forecast is to water things well. Wet soil holds heat better than dry soil and will radiate that heat upward. A cloud cover is also your friend as far as cold damage is concerned. Remember, the greatest chance for plant damage occurs with a cold, calm, clear night.

Sensitivity to Cold Temperature: As discussed in the spring newsletters, there is quite a difference among vegetables as to their sensitivity to cold temperatures. Here are some crops that you need to focus on in protecting from cold temperatures:

Very Sensitive: Sweet potatoes (almost in a class by themselves – can be injured by temperatures in the 35-36 range), Cucumbers, Muskmelon, Okra, Peppers, Squash, and Watermelons

Sensitive: Beans, Sweetcorn, Tomatoes

Semi-Hardy: Beets, Carrots, Cauliflower, Chinese Cabbage, Lettuce, Potatoes

Hardy: Asparagus, Broccoli, Cabbage, Kale, Mustard, Radish, Spinach, Turnip

The ‘semi-hardy’ group can withstand temperatures below 32F probably to the 28F range while the ‘hardy’ group should be able to withstand temperatures into the mid to low 20s without serious injury.

Cleaning Up Tomato Vines: Some gardeners still have tomato vines that are producing late tomatoes while other vines are pretty much dead. As we have mentioned earlier, it is not necessary to remove the vines completely if you are going to till your garden this fall. You can

pile them up and chop them with a lawnmower to shred them into pieces. Then till the area to incorporate the chopped vines so they will decompose through the fall/winter months. It is a good idea to till the area several times through the fall months so that all the vine tissue is tilled into the soil to decompose, not leaving any residue on the surface. If this is done, there is much less of a chance that any diseases will be present for next year's crop. However, if you do not plan to do fall tillage, the foliage should be removed and not remain on the surface since foliar disease spores may carry over to next season on the residue.

Planning for Next Year's Garden – As you clean up your garden plot this fall, it is good to take notes or photos to record where each crop was planted this year. That way when you plan your garden for next year, you can be sure to rotate your crops, especially if you are not planning fall tillage. You should avoid planting the same or even closely related crops such as all of the cole crops (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage) or all of the cucurbits (squash, cucumbers, melons, pumpkins) into the exact same area next season. This reduces the chance of some diseases and insects that overwinter in the garden from being as much of a problem. However, do not expect this to prevent all pest problems next year. Many of our most common diseases like tomato blights blow in from wind borne spores, and insects like squash bugs migrate in from various overwintering sites.

Wood Chips in the Garden: We have large piles of wood chips and every now and then someone wants to use them in the garden. Eventually wood chips will break down into organic material that will benefit the soil. However, it takes a long time and the bacteria and fungi that are needed to break down the chips remove nutrients to build up their own populations. Therefore, you will find fertilizer deficiencies until the chips completely break down which may take six months to a year. The nutrient value of wood chips is not very good, so you don't get much fertilizer value when they do completely break down. It is best to use them on paths and not to incorporate them into your garden. Compost, on the other hand, is nutrient rich and is mostly deteriorated when you apply it. The fertilizer value will be much greater and will release sooner.

Moving Asparagus and Rhubarb: Since these crops are perennial, some gardeners are interested in moving them to a new location when they leave the gardens or move them to a new location within the garden. Late fall is the proper time to do so, BUT NOT TOO SOON! Allow them to remain standing until all top growth is dead, which may not be until early to mid-December. You can then dig up the roots and re-locate them to a new location OR place the dug roots in some moist peat moss and store them in a cool location for planting next spring from mid-march till mid-April.

Fertilizing Fall Crops: It may be a good time to apply some additional fertilizer to your fall crops that are growing now. Cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower may still benefit from a late fertilizer application if they are showing deficiencies.

Fall Crops Report: Some fall gardens are really looking spectacular. The mild August allowed them to get established and growing rapidly, and the extended fall has provided great growing

conditions. Leafy greens are doing very well and some broccoli and cabbage are just starting to form heads. The only problem has been our generally dry conditions, and actually excessive heat the last couple weeks for some of the more sensitive cool season crops. But all in all, it has been a great fall season, with even more favorable weather predicted for the next few weeks.

Checking Squash in Storage: If you have harvested your fall pumpkins and squash you will probably find that many of the little surface blemishes have healed over and formed a dense, hard shell. However, every now and then some bacteria or fungi may enter the spots and start to grow allowing a soft, wet rot to start to develop. Take a close look after the squash has been in storage for about a month and make sure to remove any of those that may have soft spots developing. They will often leak and can damage other squash around them in the process. I took a look at my butternut squashes the other day and found 2 that were a little suspect, so I removed them from the others where I'm keeping a close watch on them.

Fall Weed Control Event - Riley County Extension and Blueville Nursery are providing a program on "Controlling Fall Germinating Weeds" this Saturday, October 11, at 10 am. It will be at the Blueville Nursery garden store at 4539 Anderson Ave. All are welcome.

Thanks to the late Dr. Chuck Marr and to the Kansas State University Horticulture Newsletter as the source for many of these newsletter articles.

Kevin Donnelly, Newsletter Editor

—----------

Manhattan Community Garden Newsletter – September 17, 2025

The weather continues to hold very favorable for fall gardens, and there are some really nice crops coming along for those who invested the time to get them started. Leafy greens look amazing. Keep up the good work! The recent return to some warmer days has reminded us of how late summer temperatures usually are in Kansas, and will actually help with ripening of some late summer crops. Watch your soil moisture. Although much of the state has been experiencing some terrible flooding, here in Manhattan we are generally dry, running nearly two inches behind normal rainfall over the past month.

Chuck Marr Memorial Dedication - KSU Gardens - Friday Sept. 26: Please plan to attend the September Stroll and Quinlan Society Recognition event at the K-State Gardens on Friday, September 26th from 5:30 to 7:30 PM. In addition to the Quinlan Society Recognitions for donors, there will be three memorial dedications that evening. One of those is the Chuck Marr Memorial Dedication for the Vegetable Garden Boxes in the Cottage Garden, which is located at the south end of the K-State Gardens. During the evening, music will be provided along with light refreshments served. A special "Thank You" to all Community Garden Members that

donated funds for this special memorial for Chuck Marr! From Dan Brown, The Quinlan Society at the Kansas State University Gardens.

Giving Up Your Plot for Next Year? If you are not planning on returning to the gardens next year, the MCG Board would like to know as soon as possible so they can begin to make plans for sign up for returning and new gardeners during the off season. Drop Ann Redmon <annred97@gmail.com> an email if you will not be returning in 2026. Manhattan is somewhat of a transient community with students and military comings and goings so we know that some of our gardeners will be departing our community. If you do have to leave, we hope that you have enjoyed gardening with us and will explore opportunities for gardening in your future locations.

Planting Garlic: Garlic is an unusual crop in that it is planted in the fall, starts growing just a little in the late fall, dies down during the winter, and grows rapidly in the early spring for a late spring harvest. The garlic bulb is coved by a papery skin that holds individual sections called cloves. When planting garlic, you need to remove the papery skin and separate the garlic cloves. Plant a clove every 4-6 inches in the row. Water the cloves in well and apply a layer of mulch in late fall or early winter after there have been a few frosts to insulate the soil. Keep the area weed-free and remove the mulch in mid-spring so the soil will warm up. The reason I'm mentioning this now is that planting time for garlic is best done in early to mid-October. You will need to find some garlic bulbs for planting so get your search going now. Many of our community gardeners are excellent garlic growers and would probably share a bulb or two with you to get started. You can also check local garden centers or on-line sources for garlic bulbs for planting. You CANNOT purchase a bulb from the grocery store and plant it because most of the store garlic is a type called "softneck" that is grown in California. These types are not reliably winter hardy in Kansas. You will have a better chance with what is called "hardneck" garlic which has a stiff center stem that comes up from the bulb. Most of these are quite winter hardy and do well in our climate. So, garlic planting season is quickly approaching so begin your search for supplies. Finally, make sure that you mark the row where you plant the garlic in the fall so that next spring when the tops are dead you will remember where the garlic was planted.

Rotting Squash and Pumpkins: It's been a fairly 'buggy' year so far this year. We have had quite a few insect problems that have developed through the season. Part of the reason for that may have been that we've had some very timely rainfall so that gardens have remained lush, green and growing throughout the season. As pumpkins and winter squash are developing and their skin is gradually toughening, there can be a variety of soil insect larvae that feed under the fruit- eating away the belly of the fruit. When conditions are moist, this can cause these insect feeding points to allow rots to enter the fruit and cause the flesh to rot completely. I've seen several fruits that look good until you pick them up and the whole bottom falls off in a squishy mess. As the fruit skin toughens, it may be a good idea to rotate these fruits slightly so that the area where insects have been feeding is not in contact with the soil. The pumpkin or squash may develop a scab over the damaged surface and protect further rotting potential. Uncontrolled squash bugs and cucumber beetles may also move to fruits once the leaves are

mostly dead and will start to suck juices or scratch the surface of the fruits. If this is happening, get them harvested. Remember to cut the stems as noted in the last newsletter.

Peppers Still Hanging-On and Producing: It's been a challenging pepper year, with hot temperatures in June limiting early fruit set. However, as we mentioned then, if you kept your plants healthy, you should be in business again! The unusually cool August weather has been very favorable for setting a lot of late peppers. We should be able to harvest for another few weeks up until frost.

Sweetpotato Digging and Storage Techniques: We have some really healthy sweetpotatoes in many gardens, so hopefully it will be a good crop. It is time to do some test digging to see if you have good sized roots developed and they are ready to harvest. The vines do not give us a good indication of when to dig, since they will generally not stop growing until the first frost, and that may be too late. Leaving sweetpotatoes in the soil too long may result in rodent damage or root rot diseases. Here are some important tips for digging and storage. Since the vines are very dense and large, it works best to cut away the vines carefully at the soil level and pile the vines to the side of the planting. It will take a number of days for the vines to become dry and brittle since the plants contain a natural latex which slows the drying process. Now that you can see the top of the hill, carefully place a spading fork to the side of the hill and pry upward to dislodge the fleshy roots. After you feel the roots dislodge, it works best to wear a pair of cloth gloves and gently pull each root up and lay it on the surface of the soil. The skin of freshly dug sweetpotato roots is very tender and easily scraped. Placing the roots on the soil surface for a short period of time to allow the skins to dry before you attempt to pick them up. This will usually happen in 15-20 minutes after digging. Wearing a pair of cloth gloves, pick up the roots and gently place them in baskets or boxes. The next step is to move them to a warm, humid location for 7-10 days to cure. Leave them in their baskets without handling them during this process. After the curing process the skins will be tightly 'set' and the sweetpotatoes will not bruise or scuff when you move them around. You can now remove the roots and wash them if you want before placing them in a storage location. Remember, keep them in a well-ventilated location that will not drop below 50 F for their storage life.

Starting the Fall Cleanup: I've seen several gardeners starting the fall cleanup which is a good thing. It is great if you can get your garden residue chopped and tilled into the soil as soon as possible. This will allow it to start to decompose and you can add another 'batch' in about 2 weeks. When your leaves start to fall, bag them up, chop them and till them into your garden. If you have extra produce still on your plants when you are ready to clean up, consider picking it and placing it in the donation boxes by the sheds at the gardens. It does not have to be perfect to still be usable!

Garden Debris - the Rest of the Story: We've already mentioned chopping or shredding garden debris and adding it to your soil as a source of organic matter. One 'mantra' that many educators say when talking about garden plants is to remove seriously diseased or insect ridden plants and not compost or chop/shred them. This often misleads people to think that they should discard all garden plants, so they won't get diseases or insects. Not exactly true. There

are a FEW disease and insect problems that are soil-borne and can remain and build up in the soil- affecting next year's crop. However, by far most of both insects and diseases are not soil borne but migratory- moving into the area from nearby locations, being carried on air currents, and other means. Incorporating the debris will allow the disease and insects to be broken down by soil bacteria and fungi just like the plant residue is. For example, the tomato foliage blight diseases that we usually experience blows into the area and if you clean the plant debris off your cages and till in the plant residue you won't be more prone to have diseases next year. Another example is our old friends- squash bugs. They will hide under plant debris that is left intact on the soil surface but if you chop and shred the residue and till it in, squash bugs will not remain in your garden (they might remain in your neighbor's garden that leaves the debris out all winter). So, don't use the excuse that you are preventing diseases and insect problems by putting your plant debris in the dumpsters this fall. The benefits of the tilled in debris far exceeds any risk you are taking with disease or insect problems. If you are cleaning up your plants, chop and shred the residue with a lawn mower, allow it to dry a few days, then till under the residue as a source of organic matter for next year.

Saving Seeds: Although I'm not a big fan of saving my own seed since many of the varieties I plant are hybrids and I would just as soon purchase new seed for those open pollinated things I grow, I know that some gardeners like to keep some heirloom varieties going. Here are some general suggestions. Allow the vegetable to mature completely so that the seeds are fully formed. For melons, cucumbers, pumpkins and squash, you can scoop out the seeds if they are loose or spread the pulp containing seed on some paper towels for several days to dry and the pulp will easily crumble. For watermelon seeds which may become covered with a sticky syrup, mush up the watermelon pulp in a pail with some water and let it stand for 2-3 days. The mixture will ferment and the seeds settle to the bottom. You can then discard the pulp and gather the clean seed in the bottom. Do the same thing with tomatoes and you will collect a layer of clean seed in the bottom of the container without any jelly-like covering around the seed. You can allow beans to fully develop on the plant and pull off and shell out the beans. The same is true with okra. Pepper seeds are easy to collect from the pods. Things that are hard to collect are lettuce, spinach, and all the cole crops. It takes special conditions to let them go to seed and collecting seed can be difficult without it shattering and falling to the ground. After allowing the seed to dry for about 2-3 weeks in a warm, airy place it should be placed in a cool, dry location for storage. Most people like to keep seeds in an airtight container such as a glass jar or medicine bottle. The little plastic 'humidity removers' in medicine bottles work well with seeds too.

Thanks to the late Dr. Chuck Marr and to the Kansas State University Horticulture Newsletter as the source for many of these newsletter articles.