

The Belmont Victory Gardens



HANDBOOK

Version 2023.3.1

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INTRODUCTION

The Belmont Victory Gardens are one of the largest and oldest continually active community gardens in the Boston area. They cover two acres of land, with 137 plots ranging in size from 12 by 12 feet to 50 by 50 feet. There is no residency requirement, so anyone may garden here.

The Gardens are located in Rock Meadow Conservation Area along Mill Street, which spans 70 acres of meadow, wetlands, streams and woods. This area is part of the Western Greenway, a corridor of undeveloped green space linking Belmont, Waltham, and Lexington. Rock Meadow has been designated by the Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife as “an important grassland conservation area” that provides significant habitat for plants and animals. As a part of this Greenway, the crops and flowers grown in the Gardens benefit from and support the rich biodiversity of the area.

MISSION OF THE VICTORY GARDENS

The mission of the Belmont Victory Gardens is to provide accessible space for gardeners that is part of an active, supportive, gardening community. We are also a contributor to Rock Meadow conservation and committed to the education of gardeners on sustainable organic methods.

GARDEN RULES

Rules and etiquette enable community gardens like ours to function & thrive. The rules on the next page were established by the Belmont Conservation Commission and Garden Board. If you are not following the rules, a board member or the Garden Commissioner will contact you. If you continue to be non-compliant, you will lose your plot.

The number of violations required to lose your plot is at the discretion of the Commissioner. The Commissioner and the Garden Board may add rules or guidelines as situations come up.

Garden Rules

- 1) Gardens must be actively gardened and well maintained during the entire growing season.
- 2) Attend the Spring Community Work Day or do 2 hours of alternative service
- 3) Do not expand your plot. Keep paths clear and keep personal items within plot.
- 4) Keep your fence in good repair; replace unsafe and unsightly fences.
- 5) Regularly remove invasive plants from your garden and fence
- 6) Be respectful of your garden neighbors and fellow meadow users
- 7) Conserve water.
- 8) Use certified organic pest and disease controls in the Gardens.
- 9) Gardeners must obey Town of Belmont laws while in the meadow
- 10) Do not install bird boxes/houses or feeders in the gardens.

Explanation of Rules

- 1) **Gardens must be actively gardened and well maintained during the entire growing season.**

Your plot must be worked by June 1

The plot must be cleared of trash and show visible and recent signs of spading, sowing, planting, weeding, etc. **Gardeners that miss this deadline will be contacted and risk losing their plot.**

You must maintain your plot during the whole season.

The plot must show visible signs of ongoing efforts to remove and suppress weeds. Produce should be harvested or taken to the compost bin, not left to rot. After the first frost of Autumn (usually around Oct 15), fall crops are optional, but plots should

at least be cleared of weeds and trash in preparation for the next season.

Gardeners that fail to maintain their plot for the entire season will be contacted and may not be allowed to renew the next year.

If you have a condition or situation that prevents you from maintaining your plot, contact the Board for help.

2) Attend the Spring Community Work Day.

Attendance at the annual work day is the main event where all gardeners get together to work on community projects. If you are unable to attend the work day, you must complete 2 hours of garden service during the growing season.

Information about the workday and service opportunities is send in the e-newsletter.

Gardeners that do not attend workday or complete service hours are not allowed to swap plots in the next year

3) Do not expand your plot. Keep paths clear and keep personal items within plot boundaries.

- Maintain fences so there is no protruding material (see Fence Policy).
- Fences tend to lean and creep outward after cold and snowy winters. Gardeners must shift fences that have crept outward to maintain path accessibility.
- Prune any plants growing on fence so they do not stick out into the paths.
- Do not plant anything in the paths.
- Do not store personal things in the paths or communal spaces. Personal compost bins may not be kept outside of a plot, for instance in the garden perimeter or next to the communal compost bins.

Note the following exceptions:

- Hoses can be left running at the edges of paths. (However, they run the risk of being damaged by mowers. Hose repair kits are in the shed and it is the hose-owners responsibility to use these, not the path mower.)
- In a board-approved case, a gardener has agreed to “host” the compost bins of their neighbors within their plot perimeter. This is fine, as long as the bins do not block the path, are well-maintained, and the host remains happy.

*If you are unsure of your plot boundaries or believe there is good reason to expand your plot area, contact the garden board for approval **first**.*

4) Keep your fence in good repair; replace unsafe and unsightly fences.

- Replace protruding and rusty fences as they pose a safety hazard.
- Do not use plastic fencing, bird netting, or window screens; it tangles mower blades and pieces end up scattered in the Meadow, posing a hazard to wildlife.
- See our Fence Policy on page 7 for more info.

5) Keep your garden and fence free of invasive plants.

Invasive plants, for example: garlic mustard or vines like black swallow-wort and bittersweet, spread quickly to other plots. **Invasive vines can quickly destroy a fence.** Birds eat the berries of invasives and drop the seeds wherever they fly, spreading invasives far and wide. Invasive plants crowd out important native plants in the meadow.

6) Be respectful of your garden & meadow neighbors.

- Avoid planting crops that can shade neighboring plots.
- Don't plant "garden thugs" (potentially invasive or hard-to-remove plants.) These include plants like mint, Jerusalem artichoke, lily of the valley, purple loosestrife, and various groundcovers.
- Raspberry or blackberry plants must be vigorously pruned and meticulously maintained. If your berries spread to a neighbor's plot or start appearing in paths, you may be asked to remove the entire plant. Choose thornless varieties for easier pruning.
- Cultivate good relations with your garden neighbors and fellow meadow users.
- There are animal husbandry activities in the Belmont Victory Gardens and in Rock Meadow that have been approved by the Board (in the case of the Gardens) and by the Belmont Conservation Commission and Health Department. These activities should be respected. Do not feed the animals or attempt to enter their enclosures unless invited to do so and in the company of one of the caretakers.

7) Conserve water.

Water is our biggest garden expense. Over 100 gardeners share the water at the Gardens, so conserving and using water equitably is a priority.

- Unattended watering devices (sprinklers, sprayers, and soaker hoses) are not allowed.
- Ensure that water faucets are turned off when you leave your garden.

- If water pressure is low, check to see if other gardeners are watering. If not, a spigot may be running. If possible, take a moment to check the garden spigots. Thank you!
- Always turn the water off at the spigot, even if your hose has a nozzle that controls water flow. Closed hose nozzles put a lot of pressure on the spigots and can cause them to leak.
- 2-way spigot splitters are allowed, but should only be used when the gardener is present.
- replace or repair leaky hoses - there are repair supplies in the shed, including rubber washers.
- Cistern-drip systems are allowed, but the gardener must be present when filling the cistern.

8) Use certified organic pest and disease controls in the Gardens.

BVG promotes the principles and practices of organic gardening and limits the use of chemical pest controls or herbicides that are deemed harmful by the USDA. If you feel you have a situation that requires a non-organic product, contact the garden board for approval before using.

9) Gardeners must obey Federal and local laws and ordinances while in the garden. For instance, dogs must be on leash in the Meadow and gardens. Violation of laws can result in the loss of your plot.

10) Do not install bird boxes/houses or feeders in the gardens.

A Bluebird Nesting Program is underway in the meadows. These are professionally designed, positioned, and managed so they are appropriate for bluebirds (and swallows). House sparrows and house wrens are aggressive and successful competitors for nesting sites, and ordinary birdhouses in the Gardens encourages these birds.

Fence Policy

Ever since the Federal project in Rock Meadow was completed, which included the removal of many trees and shrubs between the Victory Gardens and Mill Street, the Gardens have been highly visible. The lack of uniformity and quirkiness of our fencing has led to some complaints from local residents. In addition, safety is a priority for fellow gardeners, passersby, and mowing personnel. Preventing damage to mowing equipment is also important. This fence policy has been set up to address these issues.

Garden plots do not have to be fenced, but adding a fence will help keep out local wildlife and reduce human theft.

Fencing Requirements

- Keep your fence in good repair.
- Replace unsafe and unsightly fences, as well as fences laden with impossible-to-remove invasive plants. Protruding and rusty fences pose a safety hazard to other gardeners.
- **When replacing fences, stake out the intended new fence line and get approval from a board member. Plot increases are not allowed and paths must be maintained.**
- Be sure your fence does not encroach on the path. There should be enough room for lawn mowers and wheelbarrows to easily navigate the paths.
- Plastic fencing, bird netting, and window screens are not allowed as fencing material.

We recommend a 4-foot tall metal wire fence. A 3 or 5-foot is fine too. To keep out the woodchucks, rabbits, and voles, trench the borders of your plot and install hardware cloth at the base of the fence (on the inside is best), with 6 inches buried when possible and at least 6 inches attached well to your fence. Chicken wire is less expensive but rusts out faster and young rabbits or voles can fit through easily.

Prepared by the 2014 Fencing Sub-committee: Catherine Stalberg, Judy Otto, Nigel Kraus, and Janice

Communal Compost Bins

- only compost disease-free garden waste
- Read the signs and try to put new material in the correct bin
- do not put sticks, logs, lumber, trash, rocks, plastic, metal, etc in the compost bins
- do not compost food scraps or paper from home (our communal bins do not get turned often enough to handle household compostables, you can try composting these in a personal bin within your plot)
- diseased or invasive plants must be bagged and taken home for curbside trash pick-up

Finished Compost: take some for your garden, leave some for others.

OWNERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

The Belmont Victory Gardens are a part of the Rock Meadow Conservation Area, which belongs to and is under the jurisdiction of the Belmont Conservation Commission and the Town of Belmont. The Town purchased this 70-acre parcel of land in 1969 with Belmont tax money and significant support from state and local grants.

Belmont Conservation Commission

The Belmont Conservation Commission has jurisdiction over Rock Meadow Conservation Area and the Gardens. It sets policies, including fee hikes, budget allocation, and approves any changes in infrastructure on the property.

Garden Commissioner

The Commissioner, Mary Trudeau, is a wetlands expert who was worked as the Town's Conservation Agent since 2006. She works under the Belmont Conservation Commission and oversees the Victory Gardens. Her responsibilities include setting and enforcing garden rules, overseeing applications and plot assignments, collecting fees and managing the budget, working with the Conservation Commission to set and allocate Garden fees, and coordinating with the Garden Board in the daily operation of the Gardens.

Mary Trudeau, Office of Community Development, Homer Municipal Building, 2nd floor, 19 Moore Street, Belmont, MA 02478
Phone 617-993-2667 Fax 617-993-2651
Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 8:00 am - 2:00 pm.
Email: mtrudeau@belmont-ma.gov

Garden Board

2017 was the first season in which the garden coordinator position was replaced by a board made up of seven gardeners. This first board was appointed by the Commissioner. All board members contribute according to their talents and share equally in leadership and decision making. In 2018, six board members will continue to lead the garden and work to recruit new board members for future openings.

2018 Garden Board

Amelia Fannin, Steve Pinkerton, Sarah Richards, Nigel Kraus,
Brian Guilfoyle, Steve Klionsky

2019 Garden Board *In Progress*

Email: belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com

PLOT ASSIGNMENTS

Prospective gardeners should email Mary Trudeau, mtrudeau@belmont-ma.gov to be added the waitlist

The standard procedure is that plots are assigned in the order of the waitlist. Persons on the waitlist will be contacted in early spring to confirm their interest. Potential new gardeners are notified and plots are assigned in mid to late April.

Occasional exceptions to this standard procedure are at the discretion of the Commissioner or the Garden Board. Sometimes, applications by groups that serve a significant community value may be given a higher status in the waitlist. In the past, such groups have included Waverley Place, which is McLean Hospital's community-based support program providing a therapeutic community for adults experiencing mental illness and the Belmont Food Collaborative Group who donate all of their produce to the Belmont Food Pantry.

A few plots sometimes become available for reassignment mid-season. These plots are assigned at the discretion of the Board and the Commissioner.

Spring plot turnover at the Belmont Victory Gardens for the past five years has been about 12 plots per year.

Switching Plots

Plots can be swapped annually, in the spring. If you've had a plot for at least one year and are in good standing (meaning that you've done your workday service and successfully maintained your current plot throughout the season), you are eligible to switch to a different available plot. Returning gardeners who want to swap plots choose before new gardeners from the waitlist.

To request to swap, email the garden board at belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com. Plot swaps are conducted in the order in which the request was received and the swaps are completed by email in mid April. Note that gardeners often remain on the list for multiple years.

Gardeners who make significant volunteer contributions may be moved to a higher position in the swap list at the discretion of the Garden Board and the Commissioner.

GARDEN EXPENSES & FEES

Located within the Rock Meadow Conservation area and under the jurisdiction of the Belmont Conservation Commission, the Belmont Victory Gardens are run as a self-supporting entity and a fund raising mechanism for the Commission. Garden fees and donations cover all garden expenses and contribute to Meadow and parking lot upkeep. ¹ Garden fees are set by the Commission.

Garden Expenses

Garden fees pay for the various services we provide, including:

- Water
- Maintenance and upgrades of the irrigation system
- Mowing of garden paths
- Annual trash removal
- Purchase, upkeep, and repair of wheelbarrows and mowers
- Installation and upkeep of communal compost bins
- Distribution of certified organic pest control products to gardeners

GARDEN COMMUNICATIONS

Garden Website

The Belmont Town website, <http://www.belmont-ma.gov/conservation-commission/pages/victory-gardens-at-rock-meadow>, includes basic info about the gardens. The Garden Handbook is posted there.

Email is our main communication method.

Registration information & forms, workday info, important garden notices, and monthly newsletters are all sent by email. If you do not receive these emails, contact Amelia at belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com

¹ Bee keepers with hives at Rock Meadow, Friends of Rock Meadow and other meadow projects also donate money toward Meadow upkeep.

For those who absolutely do not use email, make sure we have a current postal address and phone number on file for you.

Newsletters

Monthly newsletters are put together by a garden volunteer. These include garden notices, events and reminders, project updates, local gardening interest items and gardening tips.

Google Group

The BVG google group has replaced the yahoo group. The reason for the change is to make it easier for new gardeners to join the group if interested. Participation in the google group is optional - all official communication will be sent directly from belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com.

The BVG google group is used for non-official communications, and gardeners are expected to treat each other with courtesy and respect.

Examples of intended use:

- swap watering duties with plot neighbors
- share extra seeds or give away tools
- ask for gardening advice or share gardening info

Facebook

We have a Facebook page, maintained by gardener volunteers, for sharing tips, social items, and photos

GARDENING BASICS

Soil Testing

We recommend that you test your garden soil for nutrients and contaminants upon starting your garden and then every three or four years. Soil samples can be mailed to the Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Lab at UMASS Amherst. Directions for collecting and mailing your samples are online at: <http://soiltest.umass.edu/>.

A routine analysis costs about \$15 and will tell you exactly how much lime and fertilizer you should be adding for the type of crops you plan to grow. It will also give information on any toxic metals (lead or arsenic) that may be in the soil. If you are unsure about how to test your soil or have questions about reading your results, ask a board member or garden neighbor for help.

Soil Preparation

Building healthy soil and soil preparation is the key to successful organic gardening.

Compost

This is the most important addition to maintain fertile soil. We recommend you add a 2-inch layer of compost to your garden beds in the fall or spring. Turn this under, or use a lasagna layering or no-till method, and you are ready for planting. You can make your own compost in your plot or use compost from the communal compost bins. Signs for accessing and creating compost are posted on the bins. Take some and leave some for others.

Manure

Manure (horse, cow, and chicken) helps build healthy soil and is necessary for continued fertility. Raw manure needs time to break down, so apply it to your garden beds in the fall (never apply it to plants as it will burn them). Lightly dig about 3 to 4 inches of manure into the soil, cover with some hay, and leave until spring.

Composted manure can be made by adding raw manure to your compost bin or simply letting it sit in a pile on its own for about four months, after which it will be ready to use.

Fertilizer

We recommend applying fish emulsion or Garden Tone (both available at garden centers) to vegetables that are heavy feeders, such as tomatoes, peppers, corn, and squash.

Wheelbarrows

Wheelbarrows are provided by the Gardens and maintained by volunteers. They are marked with the letter “C” (for “community”) and kept at the front of the Gardens near the compost area (southeast corner). Please return them to this location and make sure they are upside down so they don’t collect rain and rust.

Standing Water

Don’t leave water standing in buckets or other containers. Standing water breeds mosquitoes and can trap small creatures like chipmunks looking for a drink.

Trash – Carry It In, Carry It Out

Trash removal costs money. When we are forced to deal with the trash we generate, we stay mindful that there is no “away” as in throwing trash away - it always goes somewhere, and someone has to deal with it. Thus, we ask you to:

- Reduce waste in your plot.
- Do not allow trash to accumulate.
- Dispose of your own trash by taking it home for collection, including plastic plants pots.

A dumpster is hired once a year for the annual Spring Community Work Day. It is typically on site a few days before the work day until one week after the work day. This is intended for large trash items like old metal fencing.

Fence Recommendations

(Please see the Fence Policy pg 7)

Irrigation

In the spring, when there is no risk of the irrigation pipes freezing, the water is turned on. In the fall, when the risk of freezing begins, it is turned off. The dates are:

Water on - around May 1

Water off - around October 1

Before and after these dates, you will need to carry your own water into the gardens. In dry spring weather, you may want to delay the planting of delicate seedlings until the water is on.

Weeding

- Your weeds impact other gardens.
- Weeds can shade neighboring plots.
- Weeds can shed seeds beyond your plot.
- Weeds offer cover for garden pests.
- Weeds give an appearance of neglect that can invite theft and complaints.
- having trouble keeping up with the weeds? ask your neighbors or a board member for suggestions for weed management.

Fall Cleanup

- Pull weeds to reduce the amount of weed seeds that sprout in the spring.
- Store equipment and remove trash.
- Pull and compost annual plants.
- Cut back perennials and mulch them if needed.
- You may leave cold hardy vegetables like kale and Brussels sprouts until spring and pick all winter
- It is good for garden soil (but not necessary) to cover it with mulch to protect from drying out and freeze-thaws.
- Add manure and/or compost to beds. (Or add compost in the spring.)
- Add lime in the fall if your soil pH is low

Planting Times

The Victory Gardens are located in a bowl-shaped hollow on the north side of Belmont Hill and adjacent to wide open grasslands and woods. We have a microclimate that is often colder than the surrounding residential areas. Especially in spring and fall, frost can nip the Meadow even though in surrounding areas there is no frost.

In spring, peas, fava beans, carrots, spinach, beets and other hardy spring crops can be sowed as soon as the ground can be worked – often mid-March. In mid-May you can begin to set out seedlings of tender warm-weather crops like tomatoes, squash, and peppers, though June 1 is a safer date. The average last frost date in spring is around May 10. However, light frosts can and do occur at the Gardens until Memorial Day. The average first fall frost date is around October 15. See the appendix for additional suggested planting times for the Belmont Victory Gardens.

GARDEN HAZARDS

Please be prepared for hazards when you enter the Gardens. We are working to make the environment a safer place, however many hazards are beyond our control.

Rough terrain The garden paths contain rocks, stumps, holes, and sometimes ground hornet nests.

Improving the paths is a high priority for the Gardens and takes many hands over a sustained period of time. Be alert and use care as you walk on the Garden paths.

Tick-borne diseases Tiny deer ticks – not to be confused with larger and very prevalent dog ticks - are carried by deer and mice. They can carry various pathogens, notably Lyme disease. They live mainly in tall weeds and grasses.

Lyme disease is a serious illness. Stay on the mowed paths when walking in Rock Meadow. After walking and gardening, check your body for ticks, and see a doctor if you have any indications. Help us keep the paths mowed so we can reduce the number of ticks.

Mosquito-borne diseases Mosquitoes are prevalent in the Meadow at dawn and dusk. They can transmit serious pathogens, notably West Nile virus.

Protect yourself against mosquito bites in the Gardens and stay informed about local health notices. Do not leave standing water, which attracts mosquitoes, in buckets or other containers.

Ground hornets Ground hornets, like bees and wasps, are pollinators for our crops. Also, hornets and paper wasps prey on other insects, and help keep pest insect populations under control. Paper wasps carry caterpillars and leaf beetle larvae back to their nests to feed their growing young. Their sting is painful, however, and every year we find their nests in the garden paths. They become increasingly aggressive as the season progresses. As long as we avoid stepping on their nests, they do not pose a problem.

Typically, hornet nests are discovered by people who are mowing the paths. Be careful when mowing. If you find a nest, contact the Garden Board, who will mark it so others don't step on it.

Bees and wasps There are many bees, wasps, hornets and other stinging insects in the Gardens. They are pollinators for our crops.

If you are allergic to these, please make sure you know how to handle a sting safely.

Poison ivy We are trying to eliminate poison ivy from the gardens, but there are still some patches around. Please learn to identify this plant and notify the Garden Board if you find any. If you come into contact with it, wash well with an appropriate scrub/soap within 24 hours of contact.

Coyotes

Coyotes appear regularly in the Meadow and have also been seen walking along the paths through the Gardens. Unlike the wolf, the coyote's range has expanded in the wake of human civilization, and they readily reproduce in metropolitan areas. They move about during the day and night. They are capable of digging their own burrows, though they often prefer the burrows of groundhogs. They are opportunistic, versatile feeders eating voles, rabbits, squirrels, mice, lizards, snakes, deer, livestock, ground-nesting birds, insects and other invertebrates. They also prey on cats and dogs in urban areas. Fruits and vegetables can form a significant part of the coyote's diet in the summer and autumn. As top predators in our ecosystem, coyotes perform useful ecological services by controlling populations of rodents and other small mammals.

Coyote attacks on humans are uncommon, because in general, they have a healthy fear of humans. However, attacks are becoming increasingly frequent, especially in the state of California. Coyotes are losing their fear of humans which is further worsened by people intentionally or unintentionally feeding them. In such situations, some coyotes have begun to act aggressively toward humans, chasing joggers and bicyclists, confronting people walking their dogs, and stalking small children.

Precautions - Never feed a coyote! Coyotes that have learned to expect food from humans can be dangerous. Leash your dog and keep it close to you, especially during winter and spring, when coyotes are breeding. John Maguranis of Belmont Animal Control says that while waving your arms and yelling used to be effective in scaring away coyotes, it is less so now because urban coyotes have learned these gestures pose no threat. He reports he has

been able to scare coyotes away by walking directly toward them. If you are nervous about coyotes, carry a stick when walking in the Meadow.

ROCK MEADOW & THE VICTORY GARDENS

History of Rock Meadow

Ten thousand years ago, a vast glacier that covered this area began to retreat, sculpting the undulating land that is now Rock Meadow and leaving in its wake the rocky soil that inspired its name. Native Americans, notably the Pequosetts, periodically burned the meadow to produce grassland that attracted game. Grasslands like this are a unique habitat where many species of animals, birds, insects and plants thrive.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Europeans colonized the area and, over the next 250 years, they farmed and grazed animals in Rock Meadow and operated wool, lumber, and grain mills on Beaver Brook, which runs along the west edge of the Meadow. Remaining from those times are the Beaver Brook millpond, the 1750 Eaton House, and the 1819 David Kendall House, located south of the Meadow along Mill Street.

In 1895, McLean Hospital (founded in Charlestown in 1811 and the first mental hospital in the United States) purchased 100 acres of land in Belmont, including Rock Meadow, and relocated its facilities to this land. McLean established a farm that provided food for its live-in patients and staff. Records from 1927 show the McLean farm included a farmhouse, stone crusher, cow barn, dairy barn, silo, slaughterhouse, pump house, greenhouse, two piggeries, and two stables.

After the outbreak of World War II, many men who had worked the McLean farm went off to fight the War, and the farm ceased production. By the 1950s, the production and distribution of food in New England had changed so much that the farm never reopened. In 1969, the hospital sold much of its land to the Town of Belmont, and the meadow became conservation land under the jurisdiction of the Belmont Conservation Commission. The only remnant of the McLean farm is the abandoned dairy barn, located south of the Rock Meadow parking lot.

History of the Belmont Victory Gardens

In 1943 during WWII, food producing gardens were planted all over Europe and the US at private residences and in public parks. Called Victory Gardens, these gardens were established as a part of efforts to ease food shortages, free up transportation vehicles, and to boost morale. In the US, Victory Gardens were promoted by Eleanor Roosevelt. At their peak, the gardens produced up to 40 percent of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States during World War II.

At this time, likely 1943, the Belmont Victory Gardens were established at a location on Concord Avenue next to the current high school. In 1969, (25 years later) the garden site was earmarked for athletic fields, the gardens were moved to Rock Meadow on land that the Town had newly acquired from McLean Hospital.

Over the next forty years, the fortunes of the Gardens rose and fell and rose again. The 1970s saw a renaissance in community gardening, as baby boomers espoused “grow your

own” and the United States experienced its first oil crisis and subsequent rise in food prices. Then, during the 1980s and 90s, interest in vegetable gardening waned. Many community gardens were bulldozed to make way for housing developments and malls. Belmont’s Victory Gardens were fortunately located on conservation land and thus spared that fate, but nevertheless plot use declined. Fences and paths fell into decline; plots became overgrown. Rock Meadow also fell into decline for want of sufficient tending (be it mowing, grazing or burning). By 2003, about 30 percent of the meadow had been lost to the processes of reforestation.

The Meadow & Gardens in the 21st Century

In 2003 neighbors who abutt the Meadow became alarmed at the increasing loss of grassland due to reforestation. They formed the Friends of Rock Meadow and for two years raised money to help pay for mowing. In 2005 they partnered with the Belmont Conservation Commission and raised over \$75,000 in matching grants to create a long-term plan for the Meadow.²

The new conservation project brought new visibility to Rock Meadow and The Victory Gardens. Invasive trees and shrubs were removed along Mill Street, and passersby, for the first time in years, could actually see the Gardens from the road. The Gardens also gained a presence online, enabling anyone looking for a community garden to Google and find it. New leaders appeared and promoted the Gardens through the local newspaper and farmers’ market. And the local food movement began to surge as bestsellers like Michael Pollan’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* revealed the dangers of a globalized and industrialized food system.

These rapid changes had a profound impact on the Victory Gardens. In 2007, we saw a threefold increase in applicants. All available plots were taken and a waiting list was started. In 2010, the Gardens were expanded—16 new plots were added. Also, large plots that had earlier been conjoined were divided and 12 abandoned plots were reclaimed. As of 2013, the waiting list stood at over 100. Applicants typically wait two to three years to be assigned a plot.

² The goal of the long-term plan is to control invasive plants and restore 30 acres of the property to grasslands. The first phase of this work began in the summer of 2007 and will continue through 2016. In addition, a grant from the Rails to Trails Program is making it possible to improve infrastructure, including trails, bridges, signs, and benches.

Belmont Victory Gardens Map



Examples of Organic Pest & Disease Controls

BTSD *Bacillus thuringiensis*
var. San Diego

A naturally-occurring strain of soil bacteria. For leaf-eating beetles, including the Colorado potato beetle. Available from organic supply catalogs.

BTK *Bacillus thuringiensis*
var. Kurstaki

Naturally-occurring strain of soil bacteria. Used to control cabbage loopers, hornworms, and most other caterpillar pests.

Copper sulfate

Controls bacterial and fungal diseases of fruit, vegetable, nut and field crops, including mildew, leaf spots, blights (Late Blight), and apple scab. It is used in combination with lime and water as a protective fungicide, referred to as Bordeaux mixture, for leaf application and seed treatment.

Neem Oil

Extracted from the Neem tree, native to India. Repels and kills many pest insects. Discourages pollinating bees. Use sparingly and when pollinators are not around (dawn, sunset). Available at most garden centers.

Pyrethrin

AKA pyrethrum. In use since the 19th century. A derivative of a species of chrysanthemum grown mostly in Kenya. A nerve poison to most insects, including honeybees, killing them at high concentrations and repelling them at lower concentrations. Use sparingly and when pollinators are not around (dawn, sunset). Available at most garden centers.

Spinosad

Chemical derived from a rare bacterium. Highly effective against many caterpillar and beetle pests, but **toxic to many beneficial insects**. Use only as a last resort and apply very sparingly and when pollinators

are not around (dawn, sunset). Available from organic supply catalogs.

Suggested Planting Dates – Spring & Summer Harvest

- Feb 22: Sow onion, celery and celeriac seeds indoors (11 weeks before last frost).
- March 8: Sow broccoli, kale, cool weather lettuce, escarole, eggplant and thyme seeds indoors (9 weeks before last frost).
- March 15: Sow pepper seeds indoors (keep temp above 78°F for germination). Also sow indoors marigold, parsley, basil and beet seeds. (8 weeks before last frost)
- March 27: Start watching the soil for the first direct planting! As soon as the soil can be worked, it's time to sow peas, fava beans, arugula and radish seeds directly in the garden (up to 6 or 7 weeks before last frost).
- March 29: Sow tomato seeds indoors. Sow cabbage seeds indoors. (6 weeks before last frost).
- April 5: Transplant lettuce, broccoli and kale seedlings into the garden (use row cover if necessary). Sow more cool-weather lettuce seed indoors. (4 weeks before last frost).
- April 19: Sow pumpkin, cucumber and zinnia seeds indoors (3 weeks before last frost).
- April 26: Sow summer squash, watermelon and melon seeds indoors. Sow 2nd planting of peas directly in the garden. (2 weeks before last frost)
- May 3: Sow more cool-weather lettuce, more beets and spinach indoors or directly in the garden. (1 week before last frost).
- May 10: Sow directly in garden seeds for sunflowers, nasturtiums, carrots, parsnips. Plant potatoes, onions sets. Plant 2nd crop of radish. (Week of last frost).
- May 17: Transplant tomatoes to garden. Plant seeds for corn, beans and soy beans directly in garden. (1 week after last frost).
- May 23: Sow 3rd cool-weather lettuce crop indoors or in garden. Transplant peppers, pumpkins, squash, cucumbers and melons to the garden if the soil is well warmed. (2 weeks after last frost).
- June 14: Sow warm-weather lettuce crop (Summer Crisp type) indoors or in garden. Sow 2nd crop of beans, 3rd crop of radish in garden. (5 weeks after last frost).
- July 5: Sow 2nd warm-weather lettuce crop (Summer Crisp type) indoors or in garden (8 weeks after last frost).
- July 23: Sow 3rd warm-weather lettuce crop (Summer Crisp type) indoors o Sow 3rd crop of beans, 4th crop of radish in garden. (11 weeks after last frost).

Suggested Planting Dates – Fall Harvest

These spring and fall calendars can be found on-line in a format where you can edit the frost dates at:

<http://www.skippysgarden.com/planting%20calendar%20spring%20v2015.html>

Sow seeds for last crop of beans by June 27 (15 weeks before first frost).

Transplant fall broccoli and cabbage seedlings to garden by July 11 (13 weeks before first frost).

Transplant fall collard and bok choy seedlings to garden by July 18 (12 weeks before first frost).

Sow last crop of carrot and beets directly in the garden by July 25 (11 weeks before frost).

You can try to get a fall crop of peas, though the weather typically goes from hot to frost too fast for a crop to mature. Sow pea seeds in the garden by August 1 (10 weeks before frost).

Sow fall spinach seeds indoors or directly in the garden by August 15 (8 weeks before frost).

Sow last fall lettuce seeds indoors or in the garden by August 22 (7 weeks before frost).

Sow last crop of radish seeds directly in the garden by September 5 (5 weeks before frost).