

T • H • E D • I • R • T

Newsletter of Master Gardener Volunteers of CCE Schoharie and Otsego Counties
Gardening • Environment • Community • Sustainability • Education



Harvesting Early Crops: A How-To

One of the joys of gardening in Otsego and Schoharie Counties is harvesting the season's first vegetables. Early crops such as lettuce, spinach, radishes, and other cool-season greens are often ready long before tomatoes and peppers begin producing. Knowing when and how to harvest these crops can improve flavor, extend the harvest season, and keep plants productive.

Continued on page 2

Grow with us! Subscribe for gardening tips, pollinator-friendly ideas, and local wisdom for Otsego & Schoharie counties in Central New York.

Mounding Potatoes: Why It Matters

Potatoes are one of the easiest and most rewarding crops to grow in our region, but they require one special task during the growing season: mounding, also known as hilling.

When potato plants reach 6 to 8 inches tall, begin pulling loose soil up around the stems, leaving only the top few inches of foliage exposed. Repeat this process every two to three weeks as the plants continue to grow.

Continued on page 5



Hemaris thysbe (Hummingbird clearwing)
© Angela Hartley. Used with permission.

Pollinator Watch

Hummingbird moths are fun visitors in the garden. They vibrate their wings 70 to 85 times per second, so they are agile flyers. You may easily mistake them for miniature hummingbirds because they hover and zoom about in the same fashion. Their wing vibration even creates a similar humming noise.

These striking insects are members of the sphinx moth family, with heavy bodies and long front wings. Unlike most other moths, they typically fly during the day or around dusk so they are referred to as diurnal (rather than nocturnal). June and August are peak months for their activity. Like most moths, they have very long tongues that they use to reach the nectar of long-necked flowers. Such nectar is inaccessible to many other flower visitors.

Five species of hummingbird moths are found in North America. The most common species in the eastern United States is the hummingbird clearwing...

Continued on page 3

Harvesting continued from page 1

Lettuce

Leaf lettuce can be harvested using the “cut-and-come-again” method. Pick the outer leaves when they reach 4–6 inches long, leaving the center leaves intact so the plant continues growing. Harvest during the cool morning hours for the best flavor and crispness. Head lettuce should be harvested when the head feels firm and fully formed. Delaying harvest may result in bitter leaves, especially during hot summer weather.

Spinach

Spinach leaves are best harvested when they are young and tender. Pick outer leaves individually or cut the entire plant just above the growing point to encourage regrowth. Regular harvesting helps delay bolting, which occurs when warm temperatures cause plants to flower and become bitter.

Radishes

Radishes mature quickly and should be harvested promptly. Most spring varieties are ready when roots reach about 1 to 1½ inches in diameter. Waiting too long can result in woody, pithy roots with a stronger flavor. Gently loosen the soil and pull the roots by hand. Don’t forget—the young greens are edible too.

Harvest Tips

- Harvest in the morning when vegetables are coolest and most hydrated.
- Wash produce gently and refrigerate promptly.
- Succession plant every few weeks to ensure a continuous harvest.
- Remove any bolting plants and replace them with summer crops.

Regular harvesting keeps your garden productive and ensures fresh vegetables for the table throughout the growing season. ■

Pollinator continued from page 2

(*Hemaris thysbe*). Another species you may find in your yard is the Snowberry clearwing (*Hemaris diffinis*). While they look very similar, *H. thysbe* has a reddish-brown abdomen, and *H. diffinis* is primarily yellow and black like a bumblebee.

Adult hummingbird moths feed on nectar from a variety of flowers, especially summer phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), bee balm (*Monarda*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera*), verbena, cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), and salvia. However, their larvae require specific food plants. The larvae of the hummingbird clearwing moth feed on the leaves of arrowwood viburnum, highbush cranberry (*Viburnum opulus*), honeysuckle, hawthorn, cherry, plum, or snowberry. The snowberry clearwing hummingbird moth larvae feed on the leaves of snowberry, honeysuckle, or dogbane (*Apocynum*).

When the hummingbird moth's caterpillars are fully grown, they drop to the ground to pupate in fallen leaves. In northern states, they remain there

all winter and emerge the next spring.

Hummingbird moths in the south may have more than one generation per year. These moths are one of the many species that depend on a leaf layer that many gardeners see as leaf "litter" and remove.

The caterpillars of hummingbird moths are one of the types of sphinx moth caterpillars known as hornworms because they have a horn-like spike at the rear of their bodies. Do not confuse them with the tomato hornworm or the tobacco hornworm, vegetable plant eaters that belong to other species of sphinx moth. Hummingbird moth caterpillars do not feast on your vegetable plants.

The hummingbird moth is an important pollinator, especially for twilight-blooming flowers that bees and butterflies may miss. Support these fascinating creatures by growing plenty of nectar-providing plants, as well as the shrubs, trees and other plants needed by their larvae. Also, try not to remove fallen leaves from around these larval host plants. ■



Hemaris diffinis (Snowberry clearwing) © Angela Hartley. Used with permission.

The Green Thumb Corner

Bolting is a common challenge in midsummer, especially for cool-season crops like lettuce, spinach, arugula, cilantro, and bok choy. As temperatures rise and day length peaks, these plants shift from producing tender leaves to sending up flower stalks and setting seed.

To help delay bolting, keep crops consistently watered, harvest regularly, and use mulch or shade cloth to reduce heat stress. Succession planting can also help by ensuring a fresh round of greens is ready as older plants begin to fade.

Once a crop has fully bolted, flavor and texture usually decline quickly. Leaves often become smaller, tougher, and more bitter, so it's usually best to pull the plant and make room for a new planting rather than trying to stretch it through the rest of summer.

Garlic Season in Central New York

Garlic is a natural choice for a July plant spotlight in Central New York, where it's both a popular garden crop and a point of regional pride. The Mohawk Valley Garlic & Herb Festival in Little Falls celebrates the area's strong garlic-growing tradition, and for good reason: our climate is well suited to producing flavorful, high-quality bulbs. Garlic is also one of the more satisfying crops for home gardeners, asking for patience up front but



rewarding it with a harvest that stores well and earns its keep in the kitchen for months.

Most garlic grown in home gardens in Central New York is hardneck garlic, which is especially well adapted to cold winters. Hardneck varieties produce a flower stalk, or scape, in early summer and are known for their rich flavor and easy-to-peel cloves. Softneck garlic, the type more often found in grocery stores, tends to store longer but is generally less cold-hardy and is less commonly grown in northern gardens. For many gardeners, that makes hardneck the better fit for our region, even if it doesn't keep quite as long in storage.

After harvest, garlic should be cured in a warm, dry, well-ventilated space out of direct sunlight for two to three weeks. Once cured, hardneck garlic will usually store for about four to six months, while softneck varieties can often last six to nine months or longer under good conditions. Store bulbs in a cool, dry place with good airflow rather than in the refrigerator, which can encourage sprouting. If you grow your own, save a few of your biggest, healthiest bulbs for planting again in the fall. ■

Potatoes continued from page 1

Why mound potatoes?

Protect Developing Tubers

As potatoes grow, they naturally push toward the surface, meaning they could potentially peek above the soil line. Potatoes exposed to sunlight turn green and produce solanine, a naturally occurring toxin that makes them unsuitable for eating. Hilling keeps developing tubers covered and protected.

Increase Growing Space

Additional soil encourages underground stem development and provides more room for tubers to form. Potatoes don't just form at the base of the plant, they grow along the underground stem, meaning the extra soil from hilling gives those stems more room to do their thing. Covering about half to two-thirds of the plant encourages more *stolons* to form, which means more places for potatoes to develop.



Improve Weed Control and Moisture Retention

A well-formed hill suppresses weeds around the plant and helps maintain consistent soil moisture during hot summer weather.

Many gardeners use compost, straw, or shredded leaves in addition to soil when building hills. Whatever material you choose, be sure the developing potatoes remain completely covered throughout the season.

By mid-summer, healthy potato rows should resemble long ridges. With proper hilling and watering, gardeners in Otsego and Schoharie Counties can look forward to a productive harvest later in the season. ■



Garden Chore Checklist

July and August are a great time to check in on the garden, make a few adjustments, and keep things productive through the rest of the season.

Vegetable Garden

- Harvest regularly to keep plants producing
- Continue staking, tying, and pruning tomatoes, cucumbers, and other vigorous crops as needed
- Watch for signs of stress, poor growth, pest damage, or disease and address issues early
- Succession plant lettuce, spinach, kale, radishes, turnips, and Asian greens for fall harvests
- Remove spent crops that are no longer productive and prepare space for late-season planting

Soil & Garden Care

- Water deeply during dry periods, aiming for about 1 inch of water per week
- Check mulch levels and replenish where it has thinned or broken down
- Keep weeds under control so they don't

compete for moisture and nutrients

- Pay close attention to containers and raised beds, which dry out more quickly in summer heat

Pest & Disease Watch

- Inspect plants regularly for insect damage, yellowing leaves, wilting, or spots
- Watch tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, and other common crops for mid-season disease issues
- Remove diseased foliage promptly to improve airflow and reduce spread
- Take note of recurring pest or disease problems to help guide next year's garden planning

Find more gardening guidance at [Cornell Garden Based Learning](https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/garden-based-learning/)

<https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/garden-guidance/>. ■



Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer

QUESTION: How do I know when to harvest garlic?

ANSWER: Harvest from fall plantings will be in late July or August. Look for yellow tops. Harvest when the tops begin to turn yellow and fall over, before they are completely dry. You can dig a test bulb to see if the crop is ready.

Click here to ask a Master Gardener a question.
<https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/master-gardener-program/ask-a-master-gardener-volunteer>

Community Events

July 15, 2026

Family Gardening Program (Part 2)
 CCESO Grow Garden
 123 Lake St, Cooperstown, NY

July 23, 2026

Grow Garden Open House
 123 Lake St, Cooperstown, NY

See the full list of upcoming community events: <https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/events>



Weather Watch

July is when the garden really starts producing. Warm days and mild nights keep summer crops strong, while early plantings have steady harvests. Visit the NRCC :

https://www.nrcc.cornell.edu/services/blog/2011/05/10_last_frost/index.html

Dates	Weather Conditions
July 1-7	Isolated t-storms, hot
July 8-10	Sunny, mild
July 11-19	T-storms, then sunny; cool
July 20-27	T-storms, then sunny; cool, then turning hot
July 28-31	Showers, heavy north; mild
July	Temp 70° (avg) Precip 4" (avg)



Grow With Us on Social Media!



Master Gardeners - Otsego

<https://www.facebook.com/CCEOtsegoMG>



Master Gardeners - Schoharie

<https://www.facebook.com/CCEschoharieMG>

Our Mission

We prepare volunteers to be peer educators who build relationships with community audiences to integrate local experience and research-based knowledge in planning for and initiating steps to manage gardens, lawns, and landscapes with an emphasis on food security and environmental stewardship.

Learn more about the CCE Master Gardener Volunteer programs of Otsego & Schoharie counties here: <https://cceschoharie-otsego.org/master-gardener-program>

Master Gardeners Volunteers are trained through Cornell Cooperative Extension who share research-based gardening knowledge with the community. We answer questions through the Ask a Master Gardener Volunteer service, teach classes, and maintain demonstration gardens in Cooperstown and Cobleskill. You'll find us at farmers markets, fairs, and local events offering practical tips, and we also grow plants for fundraisers, lead beginner gardener programs, and offer soil testing to help neighbors grow with confidence.

Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for providing equal program and employment opportunities in accordance with applicable laws.