

What's Growing On?



Hi friends,

It's May! We are in the midst of our spring gardening season. It has been a cool start; I know I have had to cover the plugs some evenings. I use a large sheet to cover the plants and rocks to hold down the sheet. I was lucky and didn't lose any plants!

The NJAS Learning Through Gardening website continues to grow and change. I hope you have had the opportunity to see all we have to offer! The LTG program is moving away from the "grant" program it has used in the past. We want to collaborate with schools to establish and maintain a school garden through an affiliation. All schools will be transitioning to this new program. More details will be coming.

I hope you have had a chance to view our Gardening Basics Workshop. Reach out if you would like to schedule an in-person workshop for your school. Gardening questions? Please reach out with any questions or concerns, anytime.

Happy Planting!
Nancy

May 19 ~ World Plant a Vegetable Garden Day!

Personally, I always wait until Mother's Day to plant my annual flowers and vegetable seeds and plugs into the garden; so, the middle of May is the perfect time to celebrate World Plant a Garden Day! Be aware that the last frost date varies across NJ, depending upon your location. Make sure young seedlings are covered if frost is expected.

Upcoming Events

May is National Asparagus Month

May 2 - Composting Day

May 3 - Garden Meditation Day

May 16 - Love a Tree Day

May 19 - World Plant a Vegetable Garden Day

May 20 - Pick Strawberries Day

May 30 - Water a Flower Day

Important Announcements:

- Please take a moment and fill out this [Best Practice Survey!](#) Share the link with your committee!
- **Thank you** to Kube Pak located in Allentown, NJ for donating the plugs to all the schools in our program!
- Warm weather seedlings: tomatoes, green peppers, zucchini, and eggplant will be delivered during the week of May 16th.
- Cool weather leafy vegetables will be delivered beginning the week of September 12th!

For the schools who requested summer plugs, you should be receiving them on or around this date, so keep an eye out for them as they will either be mailed or delivered on or around May 16. Please remember that the seeds you received should last you for the entire growing season (spring, summer, and fall)

How does your Garden Grow?

The Five*-Minute Plan:

To avoid students losing interest in basic garden tasks, break chores into five-minute intervals. Here are some sample tasks that can be done for five-minutes at a time:

- Watering
- Weeding
- Feeding
- Deadheading
- Mulching
- Transplanting

*Can be a ten-minute plan, based upon the age of the students you are working with.

Weeds:

- Keep them under control before they go to seed. Otherwise, you will be fighting them for years to come!
- Try using one of these to help keep weeds down: mulch, straw(not, hay*!) or newspaper.

*Don't use hay!! Hay has seeds which will introduce even more weeds into the garden....a costly mistake!

BEST PRACTICE WORKSHOP:

Planning for this event is at its earliest stages. PLEASE help me as I plan this workshop by taking just a couple of minutes to complete [this form](#). I was thinking that composting, specifically, vermicomposting would be this year's focus. I would love for us to learn about composting as well as make worm bins to take back to our classrooms.

Screen Free Week is celebrated May 2-8....what better place to celebrate than in your garden? Send me pictures, please!



Learning Through Gardening is creating a new affiliation program called *Growing Together!*

Growing Partnership - This is a "start-up" three-year affiliation. This will help to establish a brand-new school garden.

Growing Associate - This is a three-year affiliation that will help rejuvenate an existing garden area.

Growing Ambassador - This is a three-year affiliation to keep a Growing Together school garden growing! This can be applied for after your school has been a Growing Partner School or a Growing Associate School.

Come Grow with Us!

Strawberries!

Strawberry picking begins in late May in southern New Jersey and runs into late June and depending on weather conditions.

Strawberries are good for muscles, the brain, and the heart. They can lower blood pressure, and they aid in improving cognitive processes.

Celebrate this delicious relative of the rose with your students. Here are some ideas!

- Use strawberries to learn about DNA!! You and your students can extract DNA from a strawberry! Check out this cool experiment by [clicking here](#).
- Plan a trip to a local NJ farm for your students to pick strawberries: [The Best Strawberry Picking Farms in New Jersey \(new-jersey-leisure-guide.com\)](#)
- Make Strawberry Jam.... freezer jam is easy and there is no cooking required! Recipe is on the next page 😊

Here are some books about strawberries that you and your class may enjoy:

- [The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear](#) by Audrey & Don Wood; a picture book in which the Little Mouse will do all he can to save his strawberry from the Big, Hungry Bear.
- [The First Strawberries](#) by Joseph Bruchac; From an award-winning Native American storyteller comes this captivating re-telling of a Cherokee legend, which explains how strawberries came to be.
- [From Seed to Strawberry](#) by Mari Schuh; How does a tiny seed grow into a sweet, juicy strawberry?
- [Saving Strawberry Farm](#) by Deborah Hopkinson; Set during the Great Depression, Saving Strawberry Farm brings Davey's Midwestern town to life as friends and neighbors plan to save the farm the only way they can -- with a secret penny auction!
- [The Strawberry Festival](#) by Meaghan Fisher; It's time for the Strawberry Festival! Kevin and Emma Rose are excited to go downtown and join in the festivities with their Mama and Daddy.
- [Jamberry](#) by Bruce Degen; A small boy and a big friendly bear embark on a berry-picking extravaganza, looking for blueberries, blackberries, and strawberries.



Easy No-Cook Freezer Strawberry Jam

Recipe from Kitchn.com

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups hulled and thinly sliced strawberries
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons powdered instant pectin

EQUIPMENT

- Potato masher
- 6 (8-ounce) jars

INSTRUCTIONS

Place the strawberries in a large bowl and mash with a potato masher until desired consistency. Add the sugar and lemon juice and stir to combine. Let stand for 30 minutes at room temperature until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is quite liquidy.

Sprinkle the powdered instant pectin over the strawberry mixture and whisk to combine. Continue to stir until the mixture begins to thicken, about 3 minutes. At first it will only thicken to about the consistency of egg whites but remember that the jam will continue to gel as it sits.

Divide the mixture between 6 (8-ounce) jars, leaving at least 1/4 inch of room at the top of each. Tightly seal the jars and leave at cool room temperature out of direct sunlight for 12 hours. Once the jam is set to its jammy consistency, move the sealed jars to the refrigerator or freezer for long-term storage.

Remember that frozen jam should thaw in the refrigerator overnight and will need to be used within 1 week of thawing, so it's best to thaw one jar at a time. Use within one year of freezing.