



THE SPROUT

**MONTGOMERY PARKS COMMUNITY GARDEN PROGRAM
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2025**

Welcome, new and returning gardeners!

As the freezing temperatures and snow days come to an end, we're getting excited for another season in the gardens! For many of us, the garden is more than a place to grow food or flowers - it's where we go to find peace and quiet... an escape from the chaos. We hope the gardens will continue to be that place for everyone. The Community Garden Program remains dedicated to building inclusive communities, recognizing that every voice and perspective has value. Just like a garden, we are the strongest and most resilient as a community when we honor and celebrate our differences and diversity. Read on to learn about care farming, companion planting, and upcoming events!

- Emma Morel, Community Garden Program Assistant Manager

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REMINDERS

Garden Point of Contact

Each garden has a Community Garden staff member assigned as the main point of contact. This staff member can be contacted with any issues or concerns that cannot be resolved by your Garden Liaison(s).

- **Michelle Nelson:** Black Hill, Brink Road, King Street, Long Branch, Sligo Mill, South Germantown
- **Emma Morel:** Bradley, Edgewood, Fenton Street, Gaynor Road, Nolte, Parklawn, Rocking Horse
- **Michelle & Emma:** Briggs Chaney

Contact Information

- **Michelle Nelson**, CG Program Manager
 - Email: Michelle.Nelson@MontgomeryParks.org
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 - Mobile: 240-446-2886
- **Emma Morel**, CG Program Assistant Manager
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 - Mobile: 301-550-1663
- **Community Gardens Email:**
CommunityGardens@MontgomeryParks.org

Updates to the Conditions of Use

The Conditions of Use have been slightly updated for 2025 (see below). A complete version of the Conditions of Use is available on our [website](#). CG staff and liaisons will review the Conditions of Use during garden orientations.

Trees & Banana Plants

The Conditions of Use have been updated to include more guidelines about trees and banana plants. Trees and large shrubs are not permitted without approval from CG Program staff.

- Approved trees and large shrubs must be regularly maintained. Trees and banana plants cannot be taller than 8 feet. Fruit trees should be pruned each spring; banana plants should be trimmed back each fall. Only 1 banana plant, with a maximum of 3 offshoots, is allowed per plot.
- If a permit is terminated for any reason, it is the gardener's responsibility to remove all trees and large plants from the plot. Failure to do so may result in a \$250 fee applied to the gardener's ActiveMontgomery account.

Structures

All requests should be submitted via the [Structure Request Form](#) before a structure is installed. Requests for new and temporary structures (lasting for one season or less) must be submitted and approved annually. Requests for structures that will remain in the same location for multiple seasons must be submitted and approved every two years.

Important Dates

Spring Guideline: April 1

Per the Conditions of Use, by April 1, your garden plot should be 20% prepared for the season. This includes activities like weeding, adding soil amendments, digging, planting, starting seedlings, and/or cultivation.

Summer Guideline: June 1

By June 1, your garden plot must be fully (90 – 100%) planted for the season, depending on the weather. It should be clear that you are actively gardening and fully utilizing your plot. During the gardening season, dead plants and those that have stopped producing should be removed.

FEATURE

Farming as Care for People and Plants

By Natalie Mayanja, [Grown@Pope](#) Coordinator

While the garden rests under a blanket of snow, winter is a great time to restore our own bodies and minds as we prepare for a new season. Using this time to research and learn new-to-us practices can ignite inspiration for the spring. In mid-January, I had a truly enlightening trip to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst for the first-ever [Care Farming Network National Conference](#).

Care farming uses farming activities to provide therapy, social support, and skill development. These programs take place on working farms, where plants, animals, and outdoor spaces work together to help people heal and grow. [Red Wiggler Community Farm](#), in Germantown, created the Care Farming Network to connect farms that focus on these therapeutic benefits. These farms often produce market goods, but what makes them unique is that many of their farmers have experienced trauma or have developmental disabilities. Farming plays a key part in their recovery and empowerment.



While care farming is not explicitly stated in Grown@Pope's mission, many volunteers have shared the positive impacts that gardening has on their physical and mental wellbeing. In 2024, we hosted 265 volunteers who contributed over 2,000 hours. Four organizations (including Makom and Community Support Services) volunteered weekly as part of their job skills day programs, helping clients with intellectual and developmental disabilities build job skills and live independently. The conference provided a unique space for me to learn from similar farms and better serve our volunteers.

The conference was co-hosted by Prospect Meadow Farm, a project of ServiceNet, a non-profit in western MA focused on innovative mental health and human services. They offer vocational training in a community farming setting. It was inspiring to see how they involve both people with and without disabilities in growing food, working in a teaching kitchen, and even carpentry. They also have an impressive shiitake mushroom operation where 24,000 pounds are grown each year, making them the largest producer in the region.



One of the best sessions I attended was about measuring the impact of these programs. They provided great resources on how to evaluate care farming's effectiveness in improving health, building skills, and enhancing job prospects. Overall, it was a fantastic learning experience, and I'm excited to apply these insights to support more people through care farming at Grown@Pope!

WHAT'S GROWING



Spring Crops

- **Direct Sow:** arugula, beets, bok choy, Chinese cabbage, carrots, chard, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, mustard greens, parsley, parsnips, peas, potatoes, radishes, salsify, shallots, spinach, tatsoi, turnips
- **Seed Indoors:** artichokes, bitter melon, bok choy, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, collards, eggplant, fennel, husk cherries, jute leaves, melons, peppers (hot and sweet), tatsoi, tomatillos, tomatoes
- **Transplant:** artichokes, asparagus, blackberries, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, onions, raspberries, strawberries
- **Harvest:** arugula, asparagus, bok choy, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard greens, peas, radishes, spinach, turnips

Additional Resources:

- [UME's Planting Calendar](#)
- [What's in Season? / Que hay en temporada?](#)
- [Cover Crop Seeding Dates](#)



Growing Tip: Companion Planting

As you're planning your garden for 2025, consider how companion planting can help your garden thrive. Do you struggle with aphids or have bad luck with squash pollination? Companion planting, or the practice of planting different crops together that benefit one another, can help with these challenges.

One of the most widely known examples of companion planting is the 3,000-year-old Native American practice of planting corns, beans, and squash together: the Three Sisters. The corn acts as a trellis for the beans while the beans fix nitrogen in the soil, benefiting both the corn and squash. The squash shades the soil, helping to retain moisture and prevent the growth of weeds. Planting these three crops together leads to healthier plants and a more abundant harvest.

"Fruits, vegetables, and herbs are noticeably more resilient and productive when each member supports the next." - Farmer's Almanac, Companion Planting Chart and Guide for Vegetable Gardens



Benefits of Companion Planting

- **Deterring pests:** Many flowers are natural insect repellants or can be used as a trap crop to lure pests away from other crops. Nasturtiums have many benefits including an odor that lures aphids away from other plants.
- **Attracting beneficials and improving pollination:** Interplanting dill can help to attract beneficial insects and pollinators like ladybugs, lacewings, and parasitic wasps. This can improve pollination of fruiting crops and help to reduce pests.
- **Improving plant and soil health:** Legumes can help to fix nitrogen, root crops can help to aerate the soil, and some plants may even improve the taste of other plants (like chives and carrots).
- **Suppressing weeds:** Sprawling plants like potatoes, strawberries, sweet potatoes, or winter squash can act as a natural mulch and prevent weeds from growing while benefiting other crops.
- **Shading other plants.** Companion planting can help extend the growing season for spring and fall crops. Try planting lettuce under tomato plants so that the lettuce doesn't wilt from the summer sun.
- **Providing natural supports:** If you don't have the time or money to buy or build a trellis, tall plants can be used as natural supports. Cucumbers can grow on sunflowers or corn.

Additional Resources

- [13 Plants that Repel Garden Pests](#)
- [Collection of Companion Planting Guides & Charts](#)
- [Companion Planting Guide](#)
- [How To Use Companion Planting Strategies To Maximize Your Home Garden Yield](#)
- [Three Sample Companion Garden Plans](#)

SEASONAL RECIPE

Spring Pea Tart

Yield: 4-6 servings

Time: 45 minutes

Ingredients

- 2 cups peas
- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry, thawed
- 3/4 cup grated gouda cheese, about 3 oz.
- 8 oz. herbed goat cheese
- 2 tsp. honey
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- 1/2 cup snow peas, trimmed and halved crosswise
- 1/2 tsp. olive oil
- Balsamic glaze, for topping



Preparation

Step 1 - Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Cook the peas and set aside to cool.

Step 2 - Roll out the puff pastry on a piece of parchment paper into a 10-by-12 inch rectangle. Slide the parchment and pastry onto a baking sheet. Using a fork, score a border all the way around the edge of the pastry, about 3/4 inch in. Use the fork to prick the pastry all over the inside border. Sprinkle evenly with the gouda. Bake until puffed and golden brown, 18 to 20 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes.

Step 3 - While it is baking, combine the goat cheese, honey, 1 cup of the cooked peas, salt, and pepper in a food processor or blender and process until smooth and green.

Step 4 - Spread the goat cheese mixture on the cooled tart. Sprinkle with the remaining 1 cup cooked peas.

Step 5 - Toss the snow peas with the olive oil and a pinch each of salt and pepper in a medium bowl. Top the tart with the snow peas and drizzle with balsamic glaze just before serving.

Recipe and image from [The Pioneer Woman](#).

EVENTS

March

Rooting DC: Free Conference for Urban Gardeners (free)

Sat, March 8, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm; Eastern Senior High School, Northeast DC

Composting & Recycling Workshop (free)

Sunday, March 9, 10:00 am - 12:30 pm; Fox Haven Farm, Jefferson, MD

Food Gardening on a Warming Planet (free)

Wednesday, March 12, 7:00 pm; Online

Creating Pollinator Havens with Native Plants (free)

Tuesday, March 25, 7:00 - 8:00 pm; Online

April

Eco-Friendly Planters (\$10)

Saturday, April 5, 10:00 - 11:00 am; Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, MD

Food Waste Prevention Week (free)

Monday through Sunday, April 7 - 13; Various online webinars

Pressed Flowers Workshop (\$40)

Saturday, April 12, 12:30 - 2:30pm; Plants Alive!, Silver Spring, MD

Earth Month Family Celebration (free)

Saturday, April 26, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm; Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, MD

May

Tea Blending Workshop (\$25)

Saturday, May 3, 1:00 - 2:30pm; Plants Alive!, Silver Spring, MD

Backyard Herbs: Medicine Making (\$50-55)

Sunday, May 4, 12:00 - 2:00pm; Smile Herb Shop, College Park, MD

RESOURCES

Read

15 Garden Plants that Repel Pests by MasterClass

Black Flora: Inspiring Black Flower Farmers and Florists by Teresa J. Speight

How I Keep a Garden Binder and Free Garden Journal by Little Truths Studio

The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World by Robin Wall Kimmerer

The Three Sisters by Tonto National Monument AZ, National Park Service

Listen

Collards: A Cultural Journey Through Time and Taste by Black in the Garden

Episode 474 of Food Talk with Dani Nierenberg and Gerardo Reyes Chavez on How to Fix the Food System - Starting in the Fields by Food Tank

A Hawaiian Breadfruit Rev'ULUtion with Dr. Noa Kekuewa on Ologies

Watch

Edible Landscaping & Garden Design with Chia-Ming Ro on The Beet

Follow the Food Series, BBC

The Secret Relationship Between Plants and People with Nick Cutsumpas, TEDxGrand Canyon University