

CSA Newsletter

WALTHAM FIELDS COMMUNITY FARM

A project of Community Farms Outreach

240 Beaver Street, Waltham, MA 02452 • 781-899-2403 • www.communityfarms.org



Notes from the Field

It will come as no surprise to any of you, I'm sure, when I tell you that this has been a cool, wet spring. Our crops are growing slowly (but many early season weeds are not!). Farmers, despite our reputation as conservatives, are actually some of the greatest risk-takers around; we tend to push the envelope from year to year on getting things in the ground early whenever we can. The nor'easter that tore through New England the second-to-last week in May, therefore, put a crimp in the planting of some of our warm-weather crops, including wiping out our first cucumber planting and many of our pumpkins. Waltham Butternut squash, a variety developed at the field station, was one of the major casualties, with 100% losses in the field. While we were re-planting the pumpkins and winter squash on the steamy Sunday of Memorial Day weekend with some extra plants that we were fortunate enough to have in the cold frame, Marian Friedman and Chrissy Kellogg noticed a pretty yellow-and-black striped beetle sitting happily on one of the leaves of the few remaining plants. Then they noticed another one . . . and another . . . and five more . . . and twenty more. The striped cucumber beetles, woken from their winter slumbers, had arrived in the field.

Striped cucumber beetles overwinter in the dense vegetation that borders our fields. Members of the first generation emerge when the weather moderates in the spring (conveniently, right around the time that we risk-taking farmers plant our first cucurbits), mate, and lay their eggs in moist soil at the base of the plants in the cucurbit family—pumpkins, winter and summer squash, watermelons, cantaloupes, and cucumbers. When the larvae hatch, they munch on the roots of these plants until they become adults, emerge from the soil, eat the leaves of the plants, often finding a younger planting in the field to decimate, lay more eggs, and begin the cycle again. Of course, one beautiful yellow-and-black beetle in the first generation means many, many larvae and beetles in succeeding generations.

continued on next page

June 5–9, 2005 (Week #1)

greens and radishes

This is YOUR Newsletter

Welcome to the 2005 CSA season. You are holding in your hand (or reading on our Website) the first of over 20 weekly CSA newsletters that will appear this season. Each newsletter will have an article written by a staff member. On the back we usually print recipes that contain ingredients that people will be picking up that week (not always easy to predict). We also make announcements about the CSA.

What has been missing in the past has been the involvement of CSA members. I am the newsletter editor and a member of the Community Farms Outreach board of directors, and I am also a member of this CSA. I end up choosing recipes the night that I put the newsletter together. I would so much rather receive the recipes from YOU! Please send me your favorite recipes and I will put them into the right issue.

I also invite you to write letters or articles to the newsletter, making suggestions or asking questions. It would be wonderful to hear about each other's experiences at the farm. Here are some topics that people would probably be interested in reading about:

- How do you wrestle all that food into your fridge on pickup day? What foods need to be cooked first? How do you store your greens?
- What are we supposed to do with collards? celeriac? fennel? kohlrabi? tomatillos?
- Describe your family's experience picking up at the farm.
- Describe your experience volunteering at the farm.
- Maybe you have something to say about sustainable agriculture, organic farming, seasonal eating, the disappearance of small farms, the built-up nature of suburbs, being in touch with where our food comes from, the importance of community, etc.

Kathy Diamond
newsletter@communityfarms.org

Notes from the Field (continued)

This by itself would be a challenge, but the first generation of cucumber beetles also carry a disease called bacterial wilt, a tricky sickness which causes cucumbers and cantaloupes to wilt, collapse and die—but not until they appear just about ready to produce. Because of this, although as organic farmers we tolerate and even expect a certain level of pests in our crops, the level of this first generation of cucumber beetles that we can take is extremely low, less than one beetle per plant. Even though we rotate our crops, and even though last year was a fairly mild season as cucumber beetles go, the numbers that Marian and Chrissy were seeing in our already-stressed plants was more like 10-20 per plant.

As many of you know, I'm not a big fan of pesticides, even organic pesticides, and certainly not as a first resort—and there are many other techniques that we can use to “hide” our cucurbit family crops from the beetles, like reemay, the white floating row cover that we use for many other pests (including woodchucks) and a non-toxic spray-on white clay coating that disguises the plants and confuses the beetles. But these beetles had emerged immediately following the storm, we hadn't had a chance to spray the clay on the plants, and all our reemay is currently protecting other crops—and the beetles had already found the squash and pumpkins. Striped cucumber beetles, particularly in the huge first-generation numbers that we were seeing in the field, are nothing to be trifled with. I knew that the combination of beetles and nor'easter would mean no pumpkins if I didn't do something very quickly. So I put on a head-toe rainsuit, shouldered the backpack sprayer, mixed up an emulsion of fish oil and Pyganic, an organic pyrethrin that kills beetles on contact, and

spent the rest of that day and some of the next spraying cucumber beetles. The night between the two sprays, I was up for two hours alternating between picturing cucumber beetles swarming over the pumpkin plants (unlikely at 2:00 in the morning), regretting the fact that Pyganic is toxic to beneficial insects as well as harmful ones, and being grateful that the pumpkin and winter squash plants had not yet flowered, meaning that very few honey bees, if any, were in the path of the backpack sprayer.

Small worries in the context of world events, to be sure, and at least we aren't spraying toxic synthetic chemicals on our food plants—Pyganic breaks down very quickly in the environment, and is even considered safe to spray on the day of harvest (you should know, however, that we do not spray any pesticide on the day of harvest, ever). When I returned on Tuesday morning, the number of beetles on the plants had decreased dramatically, but it felt like a mixed blessing nonetheless. Meanwhile, the potato beetles have emerged at the same time as the slow-growing potatoes and the cold-stressed tomatoes, the woodchucks are eating huge quantities of lettuce and broccoli, and our weeds are outgrowing the carrots. But the double rainbow over the farm on Saturday night was one of the most beautiful I've ever seen, and the combination of blue skies and thunderheads all weekend long was enough to lift my spirits above the mundane. I slept well on Monday night. Such is the life of the organic farmer.

Amanda Cather

3rd Sunday Gathering

June 19th at 4:00 P.M.

To reach us:

Amanda Cather: farmmanager@communityfarms.org

Ellen Gray & Matt Kochka: asstgrowers@communityfarms.org

Marla Rhodes: developmentmanager@communityfarms.org

Volunteer Coordinators: volunteer@communityfarms.org

Newsletter Submissions: newsletter@communityfarms.org

CFO Board of Directors: board@communityfarms.org



Community Farms Outreach is a nonprofit organization dedicated to farmland preservation, hunger relief, and education.