

## **Harvard Community Garden, June, 2008**

The Harvard Community Garden is a project of Harvard Local (<http://harvardlocal.org>). It was started by Harvard Local, but is open to any Town resident.

The Garden's goals, as stated on its web page (<http://harvardlocal.org/garden.shtml>), are:

- To provide a location and help for people to grow and share fresh produce.
- To promote ecological awareness and community cooperation.
- To be an active resource for sustainable organic gardening, and experimentation with gardening techniques.
- To be a place where people can gather and socialize.

The web page also has meeting announcements, current news, and general information such as membership form, rules, guidelines, plot plan, timeline, wish list, maps, layout, and pictures.

Please see the last page of this document for a map of the garden.

### ***Location and History***

The Garden's location is on Littleton Rd, opposite Orchard Hill. The land belongs to the Town of Harvard, and is managed by the Harvard Conservation Commission. It was used as a community garden 30 years ago. Members from that time remember carrying water in buckets from a nearby spring to their gardens.

The May 2, 2008 edition of the Harvard Press reported that in April, 1976,

"Harvard Community Gardeners met at the end of the month to make plans for the growing season. Plots -- 25 by 30 feet in size -- were made available for an annual rent of \$10, which covered the cost of plowing and tilling."

More recently, the Garden Club used roughly 3000 square feet, 10 years ago, for plant storage.

### ***Rules***

Members are asked to read and sign a set of garden rules, which cover membership, plot maintenance, and electric fence safety. The rules include a waiver that holds harmless members of the Community Garden, Conservation Commission, Town of Harvard, and Harvard Local in case of an accident. To sign up for plots, members fill out a membership form before the gardening season starts, and send it in with their membership fee.

Planning meetings have been held bi-weekly since the end of January. Now that the garden is underway, we may hold them monthly, at the garden.

Parking for up to 10 cars is available in the field outside the garden area, and there is more space along Littleton Road.

### ***Finances***

Funding comes from potentially three sources. First are membership fees, which are based on plot size. Second are donations. Third are grants. We have submitted a proposal to the Garden Club and are awaiting news.

## ***Membership***

Currently we have 29 members, with 19 plots. Members communicate with an email discussion list, and all announcements are sent to this list.

In the future, depending on interest, there may not be room at the Littleton Road site to host additional gardeners. Would the Commission consider exploring other sites in town for another garden?

Planting has started, and members are growing a variety of vegetables, including tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, lettuce, potatoes, onions, squash, and other standards. Some such as strawberries are being grown in plots reserved for perennials. Several people use trellises for plants that grow vertically, such as beans and tomatoes. The trellises are also used to grow many kinds of squash, which otherwise would spread out horizontally. Along the outside of the plots, wheat, rye, and other grains will be grown as an experiment.

## ***Soil***

The field in the spring was covered with well established field grass. The southwest portion of the field had 3000 square feet of landscape fabric, used to store plants. Community Garden members removed the fabric, which is now stored along the south edge of the field. We may reuse it at some point for weed control.

Tony Shaw prepared the ground for planting in the garden area. He made several passes with a harrow, plow, harrow again, and finally tiller. He generously donated his time and equipment, and we paid him for the fuel he used.

We took soil samples in the early spring. The north end of the field may need lime, but the south looks ok. The soil has good organic content. Some areas of the field are wet: the southeast and north corners, and the west side midway between north and south ends.

## ***Plots***

The plots are inside a 14400 square foot (0.33 acre) fenced, tilled area. There are three sizes of plots. A full plot is 20' x 20', a half plot is 20' x 10', and a quarter plot is 10' x 10'. All three sizes are available for gardeners who wish to grow annual vegetables. Quarter size plots are available for perennials.

This year there are 19 plots: 9 full, 7 half, 2 quarter, and 1 perennial. The total area is 13 full plots, or 5,200 square foot (0.12 acre).

Along the south edge of the garden, a 20' border is reserved between the plots and fence for compost piles. This space is also intended for people to leave their tools, wheelbarrows, bags of fertilizer and mulch, and other equipment temporarily, while working on their plots.

Our plan for future years is for individuals to be responsible for tilling their own plots. This is an alternative to asking someone to come in with a tractor and till the whole garden. Allowing individuals to manage their own plots opens the possibility to use more permanent mulches on the paths between plots, such as wood chips that decompose slowly.

We are looking at a bulk order of mulch such as salt marsh hay, and may be reaching an agreement with the owner of a local Garden Center. We may also order fertilizer and lime in bulk.

## **Fences**

The garden is inside two concentric electric fences, 4' high and separated by three feet, to keep out deer. The electric fencing is rated at 0.16 joules, which is the lowest energy level available. The fence is marked with warning signs, and safety information will be published on a sign at the garden entrance. We are ensuring that all members are trained on the correct method for activating and deactivating the fence.

Under the electric wire on the inner fence, is 4' of chicken wire to keep out rabbits and woodchucks. 3.5' feet of this is vertical, and the bottom 6" are bent out at a right angle. Overlapping this bottom 6" are 2 feet of chicken wire running horizontally along the ground, to discourage digging. The top 6" of chicken wire are loose and bent outward, to discourage climbing over the top.

The fence has two gates currently, in the middle of the south and west sides. We are planning to add another on the north side.

## **Water**

There are a stream and spring nearby. If they dry up during the summer, gardeners must bring water from home. While water is available, we must solve three problems to get water from these sources:

- transporting water from the source to the garden
- storage at the garden, and
- watering the plots

Moving water from the source to the garden can be accomplished by several means. We can simply carry buckets by hand. This effort can be reduced if a cart is available. We have considered building one, but finding parts and a design may take more time than is available. Another alternative is to use a pump, either a hand pump, a gas pump, or possibly a bicycle powered pump. The last alternative again would take time and effort to design and find parts, but may be an option for the future.

To store water at the garden, we need to acquire barrels. Members are investigating options for donations of used barrels by local businesses, or purchasing low cost barrels.

To get water from storage to the plots, members can simply fill watering cans from the barrels. We would also like to experiment with drip irrigation, which optimizes water use by directing it to the plants' roots, and minimizes evaporation. Gardeners are also encouraged to mulch, to reduce water needs.

## **Common Area**

There is a common area in the middle of garden, intended for gardeners to relax in. Its size is 1 full plot, 20' x 20'. It is also a possible location for water storage barrels. We plan to have an arbor that provides a shaded area, with grapes, beans, etc. growing on the arbor. A member of the Boy Scouts has volunteered to build a bench to sit on. A sundial has been donated, and will be placed in this area.

## **Contributions**

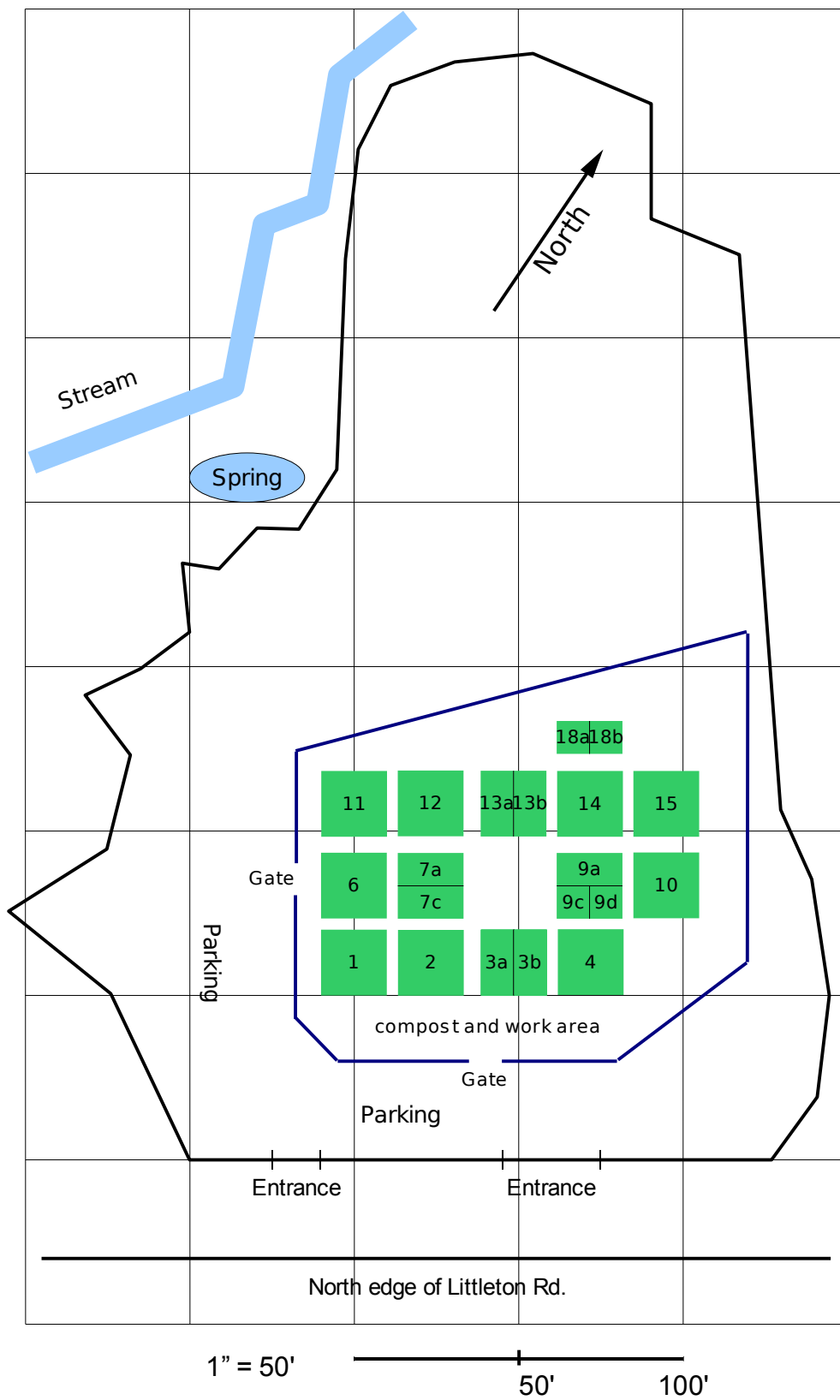
Several members of the Harvard community have offered their time and services to the Garden, and we would like to acknowledge and thank them here.

Tony Shaw, owner of Toreku Tractor, talked with us initially this spring to understand our plans, and

offered advice. He tilled the garden over a two week period, so that we have a large area that is easy to work. Without his help, it is unlikely that we would be planting now.

Kyle Smith is designing and building a sign for the entrance to the garden, as part of his Eagle scout requirement. He is working with the Town authorities to ensure the correct placement of the sign.

Evan Cochrane is designing and building a bench for the arbor in the common area, as part of his Eagle scout requirement.



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