

What's in Season from the Garden State

Biweekly Highlights from Cooperative Extension, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

October 31, 2008

Recipe for Success by Thinking Outside the Bin

Forget frost on the pumpkin – Central and North Jersey had snow this week! The chilly autumn air ushers out the warm loving summer vegetables but provides us with an abundance of cold tolerant squashes, apples, pumpkins, greens and potatoes. In the next month as farmers are harvesting the last of their fall crops, it will not entirely be the end of production on a farm until spring. Some farmers will extend their production season using high tunnel structures to protect crops from the cold weather. Most other farmers prepare their fields with cover crops or add leaf mulch. While those fields appear to be lying dormant, there actually is a lot going on during the winter – only it is happening slowly and microscopically.

While farmers step back and let worms and bacteria take on the job of enriching their soil, homeowners can do the same with the stuff coming out of their kitchens and yards.

Loren Muldowney, a soil scientist at the Rutgers NJAES Soil Testing Lab, explains, "Deciduous trees conserve nutrients by dropping their leaves on the ground near their own feeder roots in the fall. We could lose all those nutrients by giving them away to the municipal leaf collectors. But if we want to save money and not have to buy compost in the spring, we can keep those nutrients on site and compost the leaves." For people composting their kitchen scraps, Muldowney suggests the best mix of ingredients for this recipe is a mix of leaves with those leftovers.

Muldowney encourages people to look at the wastes coming from their home as sources of nutrients for their garden soil – and she challenges us to think outside the bin and compost the things we normally throw in the trash without giving it a second thought. Muldowney is making unconventional composting an art – to demonstrate what's really re-usable in our throwaway world.

PJ's Coffeehouse in Highland Park, NJ is a daily stop for Muldowney on her way home from work. It is not a daily dose of latte that she is after, but the many pounds of used coffee grounds they throw out every day. Since Muldowney began her coffee ground pick up arrangement with PJ's in February, 2008, she has kept over 4,700 pounds of recyclable material from going to a landfill. What does Muldowney do with all those pounds of grounds? Between her nine compost bins, community garden plot and the compost she shares with neighbors, she spreads the wealth by topdressing her perennial areas or adds it as a soil conditioner to her garden beds. Besides diverting waste and saving PJ's disposal costs, another benefit is that Muldowney's soil test results show that only nitrogen needs supplanting, other fertilizers are unnecessary for her healthy balanced garden soil.

So what is Muldowney's recipe for success? Add *Jersey Fresh* squash skins, pumpkin rinds and sweet potato peelings, toss in with some fresh fallen leaves, add a dash of worn out cotton socks or underwear (see sidebar) and let mellow until spring.

Find out now what your lawn and garden soil needs in terms of pH and nutrients – avoid the spring rush and submit a fall soil sample to Rutgers NJAES Soil Testing Lab: <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/soiltestinglab>. Testing done now is still valid for spring application. The Rutgers Soil Testing Lab now also offers complete compost testing, including maturity analysis. The soil testing kits are also available at your county Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension office: <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/county>.

See next article on page 2



Muldowney encourages people to look beyond their kitchen and garden for things that can go into the compost pile. Fabrics made of natural fibers will break down and don't need to be thrown in the trash. For instance, Muldowney composted her husband's worn cotton bathrobe. In the photos above, a before shot of the cotton bathrobe, and the after shot shows all that is left is the trim and thread from the seams.

Other unconventional items to compost? Worn cotton or woolen socks and underwear, natural linen, used paper napkins and paper plates, and dryer lint.

New Jersey Department of
Agriculture's Jersey Fresh &
Seafood Availability Report

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Apples | Spinach |
| Arugula | Squash - butternut |
| Baby Arugula & | & acorn |
| Baby Spinach | Sweet potatoes |
| Beets | Swiss chard |
| Cabbage | Turnips |
| Collards | White Potatoes |
| Dill | |
| Escarole & Endive | |
| Kale | |
| Leeks & Green Onions | |
| Lettuces | |
| Parsley | |
| Radishes | |



| | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Bluefish | Farm Raised Hard |
| Butterfish | Clams & Oysters |
| Flounder | Little-necks/Middle- |
| Fluke | necks |
| Ling | Specials |
| Lobster | Cherrystones, |
| Monktail (Day | Chowders, Top- |
| Boat Gill Net) | necks |
| Sea Scallops | Cape May Salt Half- |
| (Day Boat) | Shelled Oysters |
| Skate Wings | Delaware Bay |
| Squid | Oysters |
| Sword Fish | |
| Tilefish | |
| Whiting | |



What Determines the End of the Produce Season: Frost vs. a Freeze

Wesley Kline, Ph.D., Cumberland County Agricultural Agent

People interchange the terms frost and freeze, but they are distinctly different. Most people think of frost as frozen moisture on plant surfaces. There are two types of frosts: *white* or *hoar* frosts form visible frost (moisture freezes forming small crystals) on plants and other surfaces. *Black frosts* form few or no ice crystals because the air is too dry. The temperatures for a frost hover around 32°F. Frosts usually occur when winds are calm, skies are clear, there is a shallow cool air mass (30-200 ft) and cold air drainage from high to low spots in a field. The use of row covers helps protect crops during a frost. A freeze generally has winds above 5 mph, clouds may exist, the cold air mass is 500-5000 ft deep, there is no frost or cold air drainage and protecting plants is difficult.

Some plants or fruit will survive a frost or short freeze, but long periods of freezing temperature will kill any plants not winter hardy. Vegetables with heavy leaf cover such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplant can withstand a light frost, but the fruit must be harvested and consumed in a short period. The fruit of these vegetables are water-soaked and soft on thawing if the temperatures are too low. Cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, turnips and rutabaga can withstand lower temperatures. If they freeze, they need to warm up before harvesting and can then be stored in cool locations and do not need to be consumed right away.

Squashes for the Vegetably-Challenged

When it comes to the vegetably-challenged (i.e. people who don't like vegetables), the word 'squash' may send them running as fast as a plate of greens, broccoli or seaweed. The onset of autumn brings a whole variety of colorful and tasty winter squashes – including some that may appeal to picky eaters, children (and adults who act like children by refusing to eat their vegetables).

Cool crisp autumn evenings are perfect for cranking up the oven and baking squashes. Two tasty and easy to prepare squashes are acorn squash and spaghetti squash. Both squashes can be cut in half and the seeds scooped out. For acorn squash, arrange cut side up in a baking dish, fill the empty seed cavity with butter and honey or brown sugar, and bake until tender. Voila! Tastes like dessert – yet it's *squash!*

For spaghetti squash, place the cleaned halves face down on a baking sheet and bake until tender. Use a fork to scoop the spaghetti-like flesh out and place in a baking dish. Add spaghetti sauce, shredded mozzarella and bake until bubbly. Voila! Tastes like spaghetti – yet it's *squash!*

And for those that may turn up their noses at squash thinking it doesn't pack the nutrition like greens, broccoli or seaweed, winter squash are also a powerhouse of several important nutrients. According to Kathleen Morgan, Chair of the Department of Family & Community Health Sciences, Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension, "Winter squash is an excellent source of vitamin A (in the form of beta-carotene), a very good source of vitamin C, potassium, dietary fiber and manganese. In addition, winter squash emerged as a good source of folate. One cup of winter squash provides 145% of our daily value for vitamin A, and 32% of our daily value for vitamin C, 25% of the daily value for potassium and 21% of the daily value for manganese while having over 5 grams of fiber. One of the most abundant nutrients in winter squash, beta-carotene, has been shown to have very powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties."

While you've got the oven on – save those seeds and toast them! After separating the seeds from the stringy innards, toss the seeds in olive or sesame oil, spread the seeds onto a baking sheet and sprinkle with seasonings such as cumin, cayenne and salt or tamari sauce, and roast until golden, tossing them around occasionally, so as not to burn. Some people boil the seeds first in salted water to soften the husks.

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