



## Growing Well Newsletter

633 W Broadway  
Gardner, MA  
978-632-0991  
January 11, 2023



Hours:  
Monday to Friday:  
8:30 am to 5:30 pm  
Saturday:  
8:30 am to 4:00 pm  
Sunday:  
closed

\* please notice that our Thursday evening hours have changed.  
We will close at 5:30 pm.



Ahhh! Welcome to the New Year, Winter (sort of!) and Bored Animals...

Our goats wait for the arrival of Christmas trees to relieve their boredom, but...

### Are your chickens BORED?!?!?

If they are – you (and they!!) are not alone... We've had several chicken owners come in these past few weeks asking if we had solutions for bored and cranky chickens – and we do!

First up – get a bale of hay and toss a pad/leaf of hay in with your birds – and stand back! They will have a field day with hay and will provide better quality eggs if they're still laying. Egg quality improves even more if you use quality hay (like green second cut).

Second – grab some wheat seed or bird seed and sprout it (link here for details on how to do it). We have wheat berries and mixed bird seed in smaller bags for you to experiment with but you can also start with a 50 lb sack if you're really gung ho! Once you have the grain sprouted – add it to your chicken's feed or sprinkle on the hay for an added boost. Again – your egg quality will improve dramatically and your birds will have a great time hunting for the sprouts.

*IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE:* Raw and dried beans are toxic to chickens. Happily, the process of sprouting destroys the hemagglutinin toxin, but you might avoid large beans (like kidney beans) for sprouting – just in case. However, smaller legumes like mung beans and lentils are just fine once sprouted!

And last – add some chicken herbs. Yes – there are blends of herbs just for chickens and ducks. The Country Hen in Hubbardston uses a proprietary blend of herbs to get those great Omega 3 eggs. The mixes we have at the store aren't proprietary – but they are fun to feed your chickens and will also improve your eggs.

One thought for next year. Bag up bags of dried maple, oak, ash leaves and use them on the coop floor – a nice covering once a week both entertains your birds and greatly improves the quality of the manure that you'll be cleaning out and using in the spring!

### Fungus Gnats

Another problem that's been heard about around the store lately is those pesky fungus gnats that often show up this time of year. A lot of people think that they're fruit flies but, if you watch closely, they fly around the tops of your plants and aren't near your fruits. They're very small and can't bite you, but they're very annoying.

You can use sticky traps to catch the adults (bright yellow cards covered with tanglefoot). However, it's not the adults that do the damage – other than laying the eggs that become the larvae!

It's the larvae that can damage the roots of your houseplants. Fungus gnats love overly damp organic soils that are actively growing fungus strands. One control is to let your plants run damp dry to dry before watering for at least two watering cycles.

After that, you can put out a cider vinegar trap of a cup of water with a 2-3 tbl of vinegar and a couple drops of dish soap. The adults are drawn to the vinegar and drown. Follow this with a hydrogen peroxide drink of 1part H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (hydrogen peroxide!) and 4 parts water, mix and water your plants until the water runs out the bottom. Drain off any excess and don't water again until the soil is damp dry. This will kill a lot of the larvae.

It takes three to four weeks for the full cycle of fungus gnats to flow through (from adult >to egg >to larvae >to adult. This means vigilance for a month but you'll really only be "managing" for about a week. Leave the yellow sticky traps up and you'll catch any adults before they can breed -and you'll know if you're winning if the numbers on the cards drop.

### **And a quick word on Citrus...**

We had a question come in about growing a citrus plant happily indoors from a reader and wanted to get some basic info out. We've wintered citrus for years – both for clients and for personal use. There really isn't anything that tastes quite like your own Meyer Lemon or Kumquat in late winter. The biggest tricks are water and night temps.

Here in the north, we don't have enough daylength to do more than continue to slowly ripen fruit set during the summer in the winter months. That means that the plants need as much sun as you can provide (south wall windows) and need NIGHT temps around 50 degrees. Ours are on a cold porch that we hold at 45 degrees and they do very well.

We also run the plants pretty dry – often just to wilt – before watering again. Citrus have a very different coarse kind of root that HATES to be too wet. We start fertilizing about a week before the Spring Equinox in March and then continue to fertilize throughout the growing season. Please stop in and grab some citrus specific fertilizer before the equinox arrives!

The plants go outside at the end of May and come back in around mid-October. We make sure to start them in the shade for the first few weeks and then out in to the full sun. Too much sun too soon and they'll burn. Not enough sun by mid-summer and you won't get a decent fruit set.

### **Now for some fun!!!**

We're continuing in to the new year with all kinds of programs. Some are straight forward learning lectures (like Designing a Productive Home Landscape), some are just fun (Building Your Own Terrarium and Celebrate Seeds Coffee Klatch) and some are a mixture of both (participating in the Annual Audubon Backyard Bird Count). Stay tuned for more details as the season moves along.

### **Here's the starting list:**

#### *Jan 16 – National Fig Newton Day*

Pick up a Fig Tree voucher for \$5 off a \$19.99 Fig Tree to be picked up in April (If you already have figs, make sure you have them mulched for the winter. They don't like cold feet.)

#### *Jan 21 - Seed Catalog Coffee Klatch*

1-2:30pm– Lots of seed catalogs and chat about varieties and the planting season. Coffee and donuts will be available!

#### *Feb 4 - Terrariums 1-2:30pm*

\$38 An almost fool proof way to grow plants – mini, mini greenhouses with total charm. We provide all the materials and plants. Class limit 10. Sign up early!

More will follow!!!