

The Belmont Victory Gardens



HANDBOOK

Version 2026.1.1

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INTRODUCTION

The Belmont Victory Gardens are one of the largest and oldest continually active community gardens in the Boston area. They cover two acres of land, with 132 plots ranging in size from 12 by 12 feet to 50 by 50 feet. There is no residency requirement, so anyone may garden here.

The Gardens are located in Rock Meadow Conservation Area along Mill Street, which spans 70 acres of meadow, wetlands, streams and woods. This area is part of the Western Greenway, a corridor of undeveloped green space linking Belmont, Waltham, and Lexington. Rock Meadow has been designated by the Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife as “an important grassland conservation area” that provides significant habitat for plants and animals. As a part of this Greenway, the crops and flowers grown in the Gardens benefit from and support the rich biodiversity of the area.

MISSION OF THE VICTORY GARDENS

The mission of the Belmont Victory Gardens is to provide accessible space for gardeners that is part of an active, supportive, gardening community. We are also a contributor to Rock Meadow conservation and committed to the education of gardeners on sustainable organic methods.

2026 NEW UPDATES

- Spring garden cultivation and maintenance deadlines have been moved to May 15. This is to give ample time for plot allocation and cultivation of plots by new gardeners should a returning gardener surrender their plot.
- Garden Community Teams. In order to maintain garden upkeep, gardeners will join a team in order to maintain community spaces, equipment and keep our garden community thriving.
- No Workday participation or alternate service: potential non-renewal or single-occurrence fine.
- A clarification on structures.

GARDEN RULES

Rules and etiquette enable community gardens like ours to function & thrive. The rules on the next page were established by the Belmont Conservation Commission and Garden Board. If you are not following the rules, a board member or the Garden Commissioner will contact you. If you continue to be non-compliant, you will lose

your plot.

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The number of violations required to lose your plot is at the discretion of the Commissioner. The Commissioner and the Garden Board may add rules or guidelines as situations come up.

Garden Rules

- 1) Gardens must be actively gardened and well maintained during the entire growing season.
- 2) Attend the Spring Community Work Day (alternate: perform 2 hours of service), and participate in a Community Team.
- 3) Do not expand your plot. Keep paths clear and keep personal items inside the plot.
- 4) Keep your fence in good repair; replace unsafe and unsightly fences.
- 5) Regularly remove invasive plants from your garden and fence
- 6) Be respectful of your garden neighbors and fellow meadow users
- 7) Conserve water.

8) Use certified organic pest and disease controls in the Gardens.

9) Gardeners must obey Town of Belmont laws while in the meadow

10) Do not install bird boxes/houses or feeders in the gardens.

11) Do not install permanent structures

Explanation of Rules

1) Gardens must be actively gardened and well maintained during the entire growing season.

Your plot must be worked by May 15

The plot must be cleared of trash and show visible and recent signs of spading, sowing, planting, weeding, etc. **Gardeners that miss this deadline will be contacted and risk losing their plot.**

You must utilize the space

Additionally, gardeners must fully utilize the cultivable area in their plot e.g. a gardener who plants a few plants in a large plot will be reassigned to a smaller plot.

You must maintain your plot during the whole season.

The plot must show visible signs of ongoing efforts to remove and suppress weeds as weeds spread to other plots. Produce should be harvested or taken to the compost bin, not left to rot. After the first frost of Autumn (usually around Oct 15), fall crops are optional, but plots should at least be cleared of weeds and trash in preparation for the next season. **Gardeners who fail to maintain their plot for the entire season will be contacted and may not be allowed to renew next year.**

Know your limits - consider a co-gardener. A well-maintained BVG garden takes a minimum of approximately 1 hour of work per week during the growing season. The weeds and produce need to be pulled and picked regardless of the hot weather and conflicting summer schedules. We need our gardeners to do a self-assessment and really think about whether they are up for the season. As noted below, BVG has a years-long waitlist and it has been made clear that we can no longer accommodate unutilized/underutilized plots. They will be reassigned. We encourage our gardeners who may be limited to consider working with one of our waitlisted future-gardeners to co-garden in their space. Please contact the BVG Board if this would be of interest.

If you have a condition or situation that prevents you from maintaining your plot, please review the Membership Reserve option on p.11 or contact the Board for help.

2) Attend the Spring Community Work Day and Participate in a Team.

Attendance at the annual work day is the main event where all gardeners get together to work on community projects. If you are unable to attend the work day, **you** must arrange with the board to complete 2 hours of garden service during the growing season. Information about the Workday and service opportunities is sent in the e-newsletter. **It is important to note that this requirement is mandatory.**

Lack of participation in Work Day or an approved service alternative before the conclusion of the season (October 15), may either 1) result in a violation that results in plot surrender 2) if allowed to renew in the following year, will result in a fee of \$150 that will need to be paid in addition to the annual dues. Note that if this fine is assessed, it will be a single occurrence i.e. it is not a 'buy-out' option. Future lack of participation from the plot will result in surrender.

New for 2026. The BVG itself has no paid employees and depends on its gardener community in order to survive and thrive. Beginning this year, we will require all gardeners to join a Community Team to keep the garden going strong. Initially, the following teams will be formed.

- **Compost Maintenance.** This team will ensure that hot composting continues and is maintained.
- **Integrated Pest Management.** This is the 'nematode crew' – responsible for treating the garden with beneficial nematodes or other biological pest management solutions that the team decides on for the season, maintaining trap crops as well as other organic/biologic community pest control measures.
- **Repairs.** This team will ensure that equipment such as wheelbarrows are

maintained and that our irrigation system is in good working order.

- **General Administration/Communications.** This is the organizer crew responsible for ensuring our activities are organized, participation is tracked, and communications to the garden community is maintained.
- **Subsection Garden Wardens.** As a result of a number of unworked and non-compliant plots (not planted, not maintained, fence protrusions), we will ask that members of a garden ‘neighborhood’ serve along with a Board member to review their sections and ensure that our gardens are being maximally utilized and safe, invasives and weeds are minimal, and that our gardeners in-need have a helping hand when need be.
- **New Ideas?** If you have a great idea, let us know and let’s consider forming a new group!

3) **Do not expand your plot. Keep paths clear and keep personal items within plot boundaries.**

- Maintain fences so there is no protruding material (see Fence Policy). ● Fences tend to lean and creep outward after cold and snowy winters. Gardeners must shift fences **back in place** that have crept outward to maintain path accessibility.
- Prune any plants growing on fences so they do not stick out into the paths.

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- Do not store personal things in the paths or communal spaces. Personal compost bins may not be kept outside of a plot, for instance in the garden perimeter or next to the communal compost bins.

Note the following exceptions:

- Hoses can be left along the edges of paths. (However, they run the risk of being damaged by mowers. Hose repair kits are in the shed and it is the hose owner’s responsibility to do so.)
- In a board-approved case, a gardener has agreed to “host” the compost bins of their neighbors within their plot perimeter. This is fine, as long as the bins do not block the path, are well-maintained, and the host agrees.

*If you are unsure of your plot boundaries or believe there is good reason to expand your plot area, contact the garden board for approval **first**.*

4) Keep your fence in good repair; replace unsafe and unsightly fences. •

Replace protruding and rusty fences as they pose a safety hazard. • Do not use plastic fencing, bird netting, or window screens; it tangles mower blades and pieces end up scattered in the Meadow, posing a hazard to wildlife.

- See our Fence Policy on page 8 for more info.

5) Keep your garden and fence free of invasive plants.

Invasive plants, for example: garlic mustard or vines like black swallow-wort and bittersweet, spread quickly to other plots. **Invasive vines can quickly destroy a fence.** Birds eat the berries of invasives and drop the seeds wherever they fly, spreading invasives far and wide. Invasive plants crowd out important native plants in the meadow.

6) Be respectful of your garden & meadow neighbors.

- Avoid planting plants and crops that can shade neighboring plots e.g. trees.
 - o Most gardeners love trees - they are wonders of nature. However, BVG is a Victory Garden - not an Arboretum. A large tree planted will be difficult to remove once the plot is surrendered. Therefore, trees planted in a plot must be dwarf varieties no taller than 8 feet in mature height.

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- Don't plant invasive or hard-to-remove plants or non-native rhizomatous plants. These include plants like mint, Jerusalem artichoke, lily of the valley, purple loosestrife, and various groundcovers.
- Raspberry or blackberry plants must be vigorously pruned and meticulously maintained. If your berries spread to a neighbor's plot or start appearing in paths, you may be asked to remove the entire plant. Choose thornless varieties for easier pruning.
- Cultivate good relations with your garden neighbors and fellow meadow users.
 - Report suspected garden theft. Fortunately this has been a relatively infrequent occurrence in BVG but there were noted issues reported in the past. Please report suspected theft of gardener belongings or produce promptly to the BVG Board, the Conservation Commission, or to local law enforcement.

- There are animal husbandry activities in the Belmont Victory Gardens and in Rock Meadow that have been approved by the Board (in the case of the Gardens) and by the Belmont Conservation Commission and Health Department. These activities should be respected. Do not feed the animals or attempt to enter their enclosures unless invited to do so and in the company of one of the caretakers.

7) Conserve water.

Water is our biggest garden expense. Over 100 gardeners share the water at the Gardens, so conserving and using water equitably is a priority.

- Unattended watering devices (sprinklers, sprayers, and soaker hoses) are not allowed.
- Ensure that water faucets are turned off when you leave your garden. • If water pressure is low, check to see if other gardeners are watering. If not, a spigot may be running. If possible, take a moment to check the garden spigots. Thank you!
- Always turn the water off at the spigot, even if your hose has a nozzle that controls water flow. Closed hose nozzles put a lot of pressure on the spigots and can cause them to leak.
- 2-way spigot splitters are allowed, but should only be used when the gardener is present.
- Replace or repair leaky hoses - there are repair supplies in the shed, including rubber washers.
- Cistern-drip systems are allowed, but the gardener must be present when filling the cistern.

8) Use certified organic pest and disease controls in the Gardens. 7

BVG promotes the principles and practices of organic gardening and limits the use of chemical pest controls or herbicides that are deemed harmful by the USDA. Please refer to the organic controls section at the end of the handbook. BVG may provide common stocks of organic-biological insecticides at the beginning of the season and/or during peak pressure. These common stocks will be available in the shed. If you require additional controls or if you have a situation that requires a non-organic product, contact the garden board.

During exceptional times of common pest pressure, BVG reserves the right to use biologic or organic pest and disease control measures such as releasing beneficial

insects (ladybugs, etc) within the garden and at the site of infestation. However, this does not release the plot gardener from taking proactive measures for managing out-of-control garden pests and diseases. Gardeners should only use organic biological or organic pest controls in their plots.

Trap Crop Zones. Beginning in 2025, BVG will install a series of ‘micro-plots’ containing species of plants known to attract nuisance pests away from the ‘economic crop’ i.e. the ones in your plot. We encourage gardeners to check these trap crop areas and spray-down any seen pests with a spray bottle of organic insecticidal soap.

9) Gardeners must obey Federal and local laws and ordinances while in the garden. For instance, dogs must be on leash in the Meadow and gardens. Violation of laws can result in the loss of your plot. Cultivation of marijuana or other controlled or illegal substances is expressly prohibited.

10) Do not install bird boxes/houses or feeders in the gardens. Rock Meadow, including the BVG, is under a conservation restriction that does not allow for the installation of bird boxes/houses/feeders.

11) Do not build permanent structures. The Rules and Regulations for Rock Meadow (June 22, 2023), Section 1.05, prohibits the set up of a tent or other structure of any kind, without the express written permission of the Conservation Commission. In the BVG, structures such as garden fences as well as trellises, storage boxes, cloches/hoop houses, etc are permissible so long as they are safely constructed and maintained (e.g. no sharp fence protrusions). Any garden structure should be hand-removable e.g. do not pour concrete to set posts permanently. Additionally, they should not be ‘inhabitable’ e.g. hoop house tunnels are OK; walk-in glass greenhouses are prohibited.

Fence Policy

Garden plots do not have to be fenced but are highly recommended. Adding a fence will help keep out local wildlife and reduce human theft.

Fencing Requirements

- Protruding and rusty fences pose a safety hazard to the Rock Meadow/BVG community and should be corrected immediately. • Keep your fence in good repair.
- Replace unsafe and unsightly fences, as well as fences laden with impossible-to-remove invasive plants.
- Fences should be kept free of invasive woody plants, shrubs and trees. • **When replacing fences, stake out the intended new fence line and get approval from the BVG Board. Plot increases are not allowed and paths must be maintained. Fences that over time have “bellied out” beyond the original plot line should be returned to the original line.** • Be sure your fence does not encroach on the path. There should be enough room for lawn mowers and wheelbarrows to easily navigate the paths.
- Plastic fencing, bird netting, and window screens are not allowed as fencing material.

We recommend a 4-5 foot tall metal wire fence. To keep out woodchucks, rabbits, and voles, trench the borders of your plot and install hardware cloth at the base of the fence (on the inside is best), with 6 inches buried when possible and at least 6 inches attached well to your fence. Chicken wire is less expensive but rusts out faster and young rabbits or voles can fit through easily.

Communal Compost Bins

2025: Beginning in spring we have new compost bins and procedures. • Please follow the directive signs located at the bins when placing materials for composting.

- Do not put trash, plastic, metal, rocks or wood materials in the compost bins and bulk storage piles.
- Do not put twigs, branches or any other woody plant material in the compost bins and bulk storage piles. Please place these items in the designated brush piles.
- Do not compost food scraps or paper from home (our communal bins do not get turned often enough to handle household compostables; you can try composting these in a personal bin within your plot)

- Invasive plants must be bagged and taken home for curbside trash pick-up 9

- **Finished Compost:** take some for your garden, leave some for others. Consider volunteering to join our compost processing and turning team!

OWNERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

The Belmont Victory Gardens are a part of the Rock Meadow Conservation Area, which belongs to and is under the jurisdiction of the Belmont Conservation Commission and the Town of Belmont. The Town purchased this 70-acre parcel of land in 1969 with Belmont tax money and significant support from state and local grants.

Belmont Conservation Commission

The Belmont Conservation Commission has jurisdiction over Rock Meadow Conservation Area and the Gardens. It sets policies, including fee hikes, budget allocation, and approves any changes in infrastructure on the property.

Garden Commissioner

The Commissioner, Mary Trudeau, is a wetlands expert who has worked as the Town's Conservation Agent since 2006. She works under the Belmont Conservation Commission and oversees the Victory Gardens. Her responsibilities include setting and enforcing garden rules, overseeing applications and plot assignments, collecting fees and managing the budget, working with the Conservation Commission to set and allocate Garden fees, and coordinating with the Garden Board in the daily operation of the Gardens.

Mary Trudeau, Office of Community Development, Homer Municipal Building, 2nd floor, 19 Moore Street, Belmont, MA 02478
Phone 617-993-2667 Fax 617-993-2651
Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 8:00 am - 2:00 pm.
Email: mtrudeau@belmont-ma.gov

Garden Board

2017 was the first season in which the garden coordinator position was replaced by

a board made up of seven gardeners. This first board was appointed by the Commissioner. All board members contribute according to their talents and share equally in leadership and decision making. In 2026, 7 board members will continue to lead the garden and work to recruit new board members for future openings.

2026 Garden Board

Jenny Brown, John Fuller, Joe Hibbard, Suzanne Johannet, Steve Klionsky, Nigel Kraus, Rich Minton

Email: belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com

PLOT ASSIGNMENTS

Prospective gardeners should email Mary Trudeau, mtrudeau@belmont-ma.gov to be added the waitlist

The standard procedure is that plots are assigned in the order of the waitlist. Persons on the waitlist will be contacted in early spring to confirm their interest. Potential new gardeners are notified and plots are assigned in mid to late April.

Occasional exceptions to this standard procedure are at the discretion of the Commissioner or the Garden Board. Sometimes, applications by groups that serve a significant community value may be given a higher status in the waitlist. In the past, such groups have included Waverley Place, which is McLean Hospital's community-based support program providing a therapeutic community for adults experiencing mental illness and the Belmont Food Collaborative Group who donate all of their produce to the Belmont Food Pantry.

A few plots sometimes become available for reassignment mid-season. These plots are assigned at the discretion of the Board and the Commissioner.

Spring plot turnover at the Belmont Victory Gardens for the past five years has been about 12 plots per year.

Membership Reserve

As mentioned in other sections of the Handbook, there is high demand for BVG garden plots, with over 200 individuals currently on the waitlist as of 2025. As noted in Rule 1, gardeners must fully commit to using and maintaining their plot for the entire season. Starting in 2025, we now offer a membership reserve option. If a gardener is unable to maintain their plot for the season, they can surrender their plot and will then be placed at the top of the waitlist rather than the end. When ready to

resume gardening, they will be assigned a new plot when one becomes available.

Switching Plots

Plots can be swapped annually, in the spring. If you've had a plot for at least one year and are in good standing (meaning that you've done your workday service and successfully maintained your current plot throughout the season), you are eligible to

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switch to a different available plot. Returning gardeners who want to swap plots choose before new gardeners from the waitlist.

To request a swap, email the garden board at belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com

Plot swaps are conducted in the order in which the request was received and the swaps are completed by email in mid April. Note that gardeners often remain on the list for multiple years.

Gardeners who make significant volunteer contributions may be moved to a higher position in the swap list at the discretion of the Garden Board and the Commissioner.

GARDEN EXPENSES & FEES

Located within the Rock Meadow Conservation area and under the jurisdiction of the Belmont Conservation Commission, the Belmont Victory Gardens are run as a self-supporting entity and a fund raising mechanism for the Commission. Garden fees and donations cover all garden expenses and contribute to Meadow and parking lot upkeep. ¹ Garden fees are set by the Commission.

Garden Expenses

Garden fees pay for the various services we provide, including:

- Water
- Maintenance and upgrades of the irrigation system
- Mowing of garden paths
- Annual trash removal
 - Purchase, upkeep, and repair of wheelbarrows and mowers
- Installation and upkeep of communal compost bins
- Distribution of certified organic pest control products to gardeners

GARDEN COMMUNICATIONS

Garden Website

¹ Beekeepers with hives at Rock Meadow, Friends of Rock Meadow and other meadow projects also donate money toward Meadow upkeep.

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The Belmont Town website includes basic info about the gardens. The Garden Handbook is posted there.

<https://www.belmont-ma.gov/1565/Belmont-Victory-Gardens-At-Rock-Meadow>

Email is our main communication method.

Registration information & forms, workday info, important garden notices, and monthly newsletters are all sent by email. If you do not receive these emails, contact belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com.

For those who absolutely do not use email, you must find an alternate means (e.g. a family member or friend who will serve as your e-mail contact).

Additionally, make sure we have a current postal address and phone number on file for you.

Newsletters

Monthly newsletters are put together by a garden volunteer. These include garden notices, events and reminders, project updates, local gardening interest items and gardening tips.

Google Group

The BVG Google group is for gardeners to communicate with other member BVG gardeners. Membership is optional. To join the BVG Google group, email a request to belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com. After being added you will receive an email in which you must confirm to join.

The Google group is for gardeners to communicate with each other and gardeners are expected to treat each other with courtesy and respect. The BVG google group is used for non-official communications.

Examples of intended use:

- swap watering duties with plot neighbors
- share extra seeds or give away tools
- ask for or share gardening info or advice

All official BVG communication is sent directly from belmontvictorygardens@gmail.com.

Facebook We have a Facebook page, maintained by gardener volunteers, for sharing tips, social items, and photos.

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GARDENING BASICS

Soil Testing

We recommend that you test your garden soil for nutrients and contaminants upon starting your garden and then every three or four years. Soil samples can be mailed to the Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Lab at UMASS Amherst. Directions for collecting and mailing your samples and prices for various tests are online at: <http://soiltest.umass.edu/>.

A routine analysis costs about \$20. Routine and optional tests will show soil composition, may make recommendations on amendments and remediation as needed, and will tell you exactly how much lime and fertilizer you should be adding for the type of crops you plan to grow. Testing is also available for toxic metals and other soil components. If you are unsure about how to test your soil or have questions about reading your results, ask a board member or garden neighbor for help.

Soil Preparation

Building healthy soil and soil preparation is the key to successful organic gardening.

Compost

This is the most important addition to maintain fertile soil. We recommend you add a 2-inch layer of compost to your garden beds in the fall or spring. Turn this under, or use a lasagna layering or no-till method, and you are ready for planting. You can make your own compost in your plot or use compost from the communal compost bins. Signs for accessing and creating compost are posted on the bins. Take some

and leave some for others. Occasionally, the BVG community will organize bulk compost group buys in early spring/late fall. These group buys are an economical way to add quality compost to your plot. Contact the board if you would like to participate or help organize a group buy.

Manure

Manure (horse, cow, and chicken) helps build healthy soil and is necessary for continued fertility. Raw manure needs time to break down, so apply it to your garden beds in the fall (never apply it to plants as it will burn them). Lightly dig about 3 to 4 inches of manure into the soil, cover with some hay, and leave until spring.

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Composted manure can be made by adding raw manure to your compost bin or simply letting it sit in a pile on its own for about four months, after which it will be ready to use.

Fertilizer

We recommend applying fish emulsion or Garden Tone (both available at garden centers) to vegetables that are heavy feeders, such as tomatoes, peppers, corn, and squash.

Wheelbarrows

Wheelbarrows are provided by the Gardens and maintained by volunteers. They are kept at the front of the Gardens near the compost area (southeast corner) and at the area near the meadow compost bins. Please return them to these locations and place them on their sides so rain can run off or evaporate.

Standing Water

Don't leave water standing in buckets or other containers. Standing water breeds mosquitoes and can trap small creatures like chipmunks looking for a drink.

Trash – Carry It In, Carry It Out

Trash removal costs money. When we are forced to deal with the trash we generate, we stay mindful that there is no “away” as in throwing trash away - it always goes somewhere, and someone has to deal with it. Thus, we ask you to: ● Reduce waste in your plot.

- Do not allow trash to accumulate.
- Dispose of your own trash by taking it home for collection, including

plastic plants pots.

A dumpster is hired once a year for the annual Spring Community Work Day. It is typically on site a few days before the work day until one week after the work day. Prior to Work Day, pile trash in the designated area near the meadow or outside the dumpster. The dumpster is intended for garden trash only.

Fence Recommendations

(Please see the Fence Policy pg 8)

Rock Removal

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It may come as a complete surprise in a place called Rock Meadow, as you begin to work your soil but you may come across the occasional field stone, boulder, possibly a micro-mountain within your plot. We have one rock disposal area, off the meadow side path adjacent to garden plot 87 and the clearing. See the garden map or rock disposal area picture on the following page, or contact the Board for assistance.

NOTE: do not attempt to dislodge boulders with pitchforks or shovels - they will break. There is a large iron bar - a pike - in the shed for this purpose. Please do not load large boulders or large loads of rocks in the wheelbarrows - they will break. There is a large two-wheeler in the shed for transporting very large boulders.

Garden Shed

The shed is near the western (back) border of the Garden next to the chicken coop. Tools, located to the left of the entrance, are for use at the Garden by all gardeners including string trimmers, a rototiller and lawn mowers. There is no storage of personal tools in the shed but gardeners are welcome to donate usable tools for the benefit of all. To the right of the entrance is storage for annual Work Day materials, a seed exchange container as well as other supplies that are welcome to be used by all gardeners.

The shed is secured by a combination lock - the code is given out during orientation, at Work Day or by request from the Board. It should be only accessed by garden members in good-standing. The shed should be locked immediately before leaving.

Irrigation

In the spring, when there is no risk of the irrigation pipes freezing, the water is turned on. In the fall, when the risk of freezing begins, it is turned off. The dates are: Water on - around May 1

Water off - around October 1

Before and after these dates, you will need to carry your own water into the gardens. In dry spring weather, you may want to delay the planting of delicate seedlings until the water is on.

Weeding

- Your weeds impact other gardens.

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- Weeds can shade neighboring plots.
- Weeds can shed seeds beyond your plot.
- Weeds offer cover for garden pests.
- Weeds give an appearance of neglect that can invite theft and complaints.
- Having trouble keeping up with the weeds? Ask your neighbors or a board member for suggestions for weed management.

Fall Cleanup

- Pull weeds to reduce the amount of weed seeds that sprout in the spring.
- Store equipment and remove trash.
- Pull and compost annual plants.
- Cut back perennials and mulch them if needed.
- You may leave cold hardy vegetables like kale and Brussels sprouts until spring and pick all winter
- It is good for garden soil (but not necessary) to cover it with mulch to protect from drying out and freeze-thaws. Shredded leaves from non-sprayed yards make excellent mulch and future fertilizer.
- Add manure and/or compost to beds. (Or add compost in the spring.)
- Add lime in the fall if your soil pH is low

Planting Times

The Victory Gardens are located in a bowl-shaped hollow on the north side of Belmont Hill and adjacent to wide open grasslands and woods. We have a microclimate that is often colder than the surrounding residential areas. Especially in

spring and fall, frost can nip the Meadow even though in surrounding areas there is no frost.

In spring, peas, fava beans, carrots, spinach, beets and other hardy spring crops can be sowed as soon as the ground can be worked – often mid-March. In mid-May you can begin to set out seedlings of tender warm-weather crops like tomatoes, squash, and peppers, though June 1 is a safer date. *The average last frost date in spring is around May 15.* However, light frosts can and do occur at the Gardens until Memorial Day. *The average first fall frost date is around October 15.* See the appendix for additional suggested planting times for the Belmont Victory Gardens.

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GARDEN HAZARDS

Please be prepared for hazards when you enter the Gardens. We are working to make the environment a safer place, however many hazards are beyond our control.

Tools. Garden tools can be dangerous. We highly recommend that gardeners use personal protective equipment, use as designed, and take general precautions. Use at your own risk.

Rough terrain The garden paths contain rocks, stumps, holes, and sometimes ground hornet nests.

Improving the paths is a high priority for the Gardens and takes many hands over a sustained period of time. Be alert and use care as you walk on the Garden paths.

Tick-borne diseases Tiny deer ticks – not to be confused with larger and very prevalent dog ticks - are carried by deer and mice. They can carry many pathogens that can cause serious diseases in humans. They live mainly in tall weeds and grasses. Stay on the mowed paths when walking in Rock Meadow. After walking and gardening, check your body for ticks, and see a doctor if you have any indications.

Mosquito-borne diseases Mosquitoes are prevalent in the Meadow at dawn and dusk. They can transmit serious pathogens, notably West Nile virus.

Protect yourself against mosquito bites in the Gardens and stay informed about local health notices. Do not leave standing water, which is a breeding ground for mosquitoes, in buckets or

other containers. Any gardener wishing to grow in standing water must add a biological larvicide (e.g. *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* - Bti) to the container.

Ground hornets Ground hornets, like bees and wasps, are pollinators for our crops. Also, hornets and paper wasps prey on other insects, and help keep pest insect populations under control. Paper wasps carry caterpillars and leaf beetle larvae back to their nests to feed their growing young. Their sting is painful, however, and every year we find their nests in the garden paths. They become increasingly aggressive as the season progresses. As long as we avoid stepping on their nests, they do not pose a problem.

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If you find a nest, contact the Garden Board, who will mark it so others don't step on it.

Bees and wasps There are many bees, wasps, hornets and other stinging insects in the Gardens. They are pollinators for our crops.

If you are allergic to these, please make sure you know how to handle a sting safely.

Poison ivy We are trying to eliminate poison ivy from the gardens, but there are still some patches around. Please learn to identify this plant and notify the Garden Board if you find any. If you come into contact with it, wash well with an appropriate scrub/soap within 24 hours of contact.

Coyotes

Coyotes appear regularly in the Meadow and have also been seen walking along the paths through the Gardens. Unlike the wolf, the coyote's range has expanded in the wake of human civilization, and they readily reproduce in metropolitan areas. They move about during the day and night. They are capable of digging their own burrows, though they often prefer the burrows of groundhogs. They are opportunistic, versatile feeders eating voles, rabbits, squirrels, mice, lizards, snakes, deer, livestock, ground-nesting birds, insects and other invertebrates. They also prey on cats and dogs in urban areas. Fruits and vegetables can form a significant part of the coyote's diet in the summer and autumn. As top predators in our ecosystem, coyotes perform useful ecological services by controlling populations of rodents and other small mammals.

Coyote attacks on humans are uncommon, because in general, they have a healthy fear of humans. However, attacks are becoming increasingly frequent, especially in the state of California. Coyotes are losing their fear of humans which is further worsened by people intentionally or unintentionally feeding them. In such situations, some coyotes have begun to act aggressively toward humans, chasing joggers and bicyclists, confronting people walking their dogs, and stalking small children.

Precautions - Never feed a coyote! Coyotes that have learned to expect food from humans can be dangerous. Leash your dog and keep it close to you, especially during winter and spring, when coyotes are breeding. A local animal control expert states that while waving your arms and yelling used to be effective in scaring away coyotes, it is less so now because urban coyotes have learned these gestures pose no threat. He reports he has been able to scare coyotes away by walking directly toward them. If you are nervous about coyotes, carry a stick when walking in the Meadow.

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ROCK MEADOW & THE VICTORY GARDENS

History of Rock Meadow

Ten thousand years ago, a vast glacier that covered this area began to retreat, sculpting the undulating land that is now Rock Meadow and leaving in its wake the rocky soil that inspired its name. Native Americans, notably the Pequosetts, periodically burned the meadow to produce grassland that attracted game. Grasslands like this are a unique habitat where many species of animals, birds, insects and plants thrive.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Europeans colonized the area and, over the next 250 years, they farmed and grazed animals in Rock Meadow and operated wool, lumber, and grain mills on Beaver Brook, which runs along the west edge of the Meadow. Remaining from those times are the Beaver Brook millpond, the 1750 Eaton House, and the 1819 David Kendall House, located south of the Meadow along Mill Street.

In 1895, McLean Hospital (founded in Charlestown in 1811 and the first mental hospital in the United States) purchased 100 acres of land in Belmont, including Rock Meadow, and relocated its facilities to this land. McLean established a farm that provided food for its live-in patients and staff. Records from 1927 show the McLean farm included a farmhouse, stone crusher, cow barn, dairy barn, silo, slaughterhouse, pump house, greenhouse, two piggeries, and two stables.

After the outbreak of World War II, many men who had worked the McLean farm went off to fight the War, and the farm ceased production. By the 1950s, the production and distribution of food in New England had changed so much that the farm never reopened. In 1969, the hospital sold much of its land to the Town of Belmont, and the meadow became conservation land under the jurisdiction of the Belmont Conservation Commission. The only remnant of the McLean farm is the abandoned dairy barn, located south of the Rock Meadow parking lot.

History of the Belmont Victory Gardens

In 1943 during WWII, food producing gardens were planted all over Europe and the US at private residences and in public parks. Called Victory Gardens, these gardens were established as a part of efforts to ease food shortages, free up transportation vehicles, and to boost

morale. In the US, Victory Gardens were promoted by Eleanor Roosevelt. At their peak, the gardens produced up to 40 percent of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States during World War II.

At this time, likely 1943, the Belmont Victory Gardens were established at a location on Concord Avenue next to the current high school. In 1969, (25 years later) the garden site was earmarked for athletic fields, the gardens were moved to Rock Meadow on land that the Town had newly acquired from McLean Hospital.

Over the next forty years, the fortunes of the Gardens rose and fell and rose again. The 1970s saw a renaissance in community gardening, as baby boomers espoused “grow your

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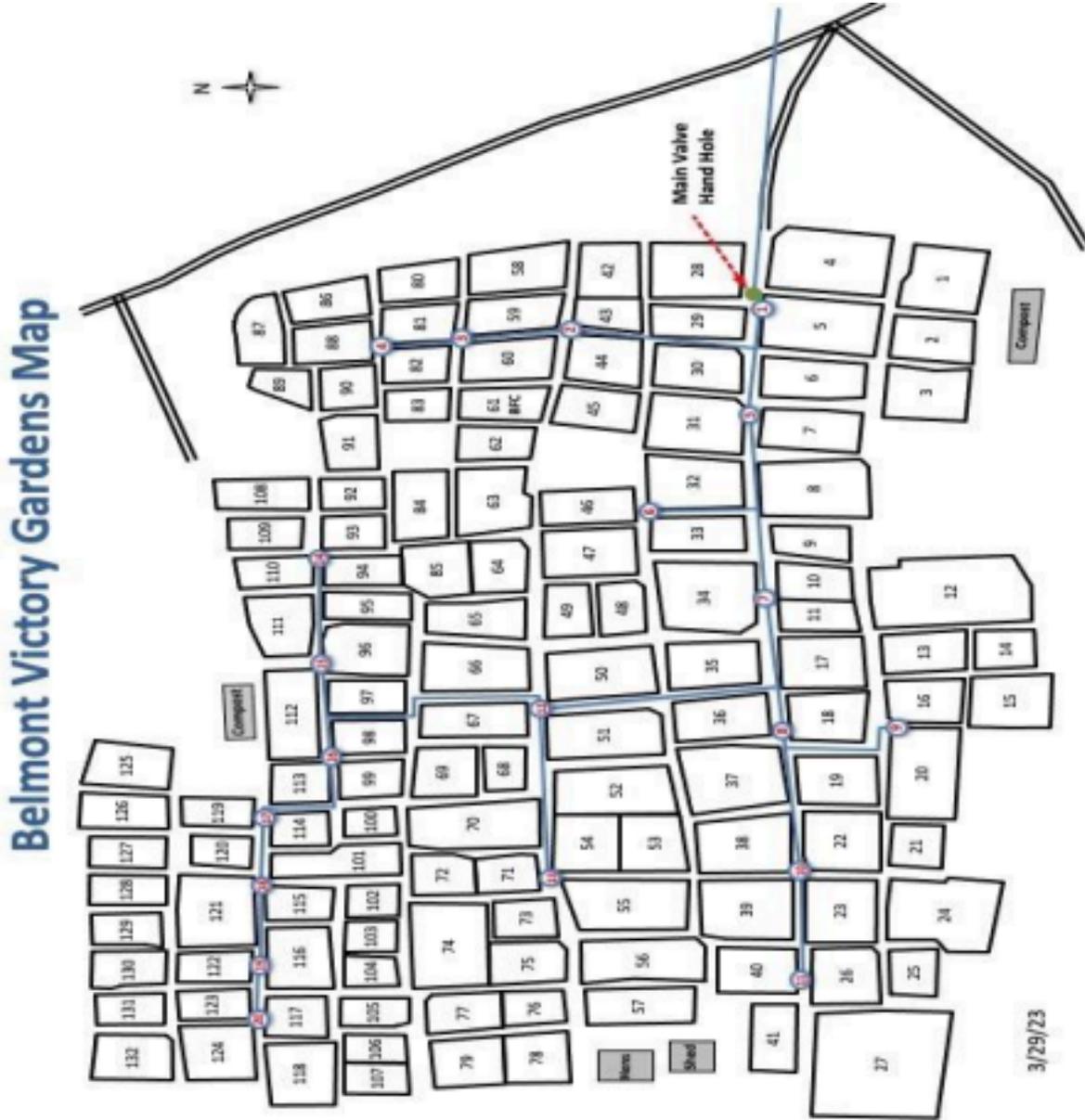
own” and the United States experienced its first oil crisis and subsequent rise in food prices. Then, during the 1980s and 90s, interest in vegetable gardening waned. Many community gardens were bulldozed to make way for housing developments and malls. Belmont’s Victory Gardens were fortunately located on conservation land and thus spared that fate, but nevertheless plot use declined. Fences and paths fell into decline; plots became overgrown. Rock Meadow also fell into decline for want of sufficient tending (be it mowing, grazing or burning). By 2003, about 30 percent of the meadow had been lost to the processes of reforestation.

The Meadow & Gardens in the 21st Century

In 2003 neighbors who abut the Meadow became alarmed at the increasing loss of grassland due to reforestation. They formed the Friends of Rock Meadow and for two years raised money to help pay for mowing. In 2005 they partnered with the Belmont Conservation Commission and raised over \$75,000 in matching grants to create a long-term plan for the Meadow.²

The new conservation project brought new visibility to Rock Meadow and The Victory Gardens. Invasive trees and shrubs were removed along Mill Street, and passersby, for the first time in years, could actually see the Gardens from the road. The Gardens also gained a presence online, enabling anyone looking for a community garden to Google and find it. New leaders appeared and promoted the Gardens through the local newspaper and farmers’ market. And the local food movement began to surge as bestsellers like Michael Pollan’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* revealed the dangers of a globalized and industrialized food system.

These rapid changes had a profound impact on the Victory Gardens. In 2007, we saw a threefold increase in applicants. All available plots were taken and a waiting list was started. In 2010, the Gardens were expanded—16 new plots were added. Also, large plots that had earlier been conjoined were divided and 12 abandoned plots were reclaimed. As of 2025, the waiting list stood at over 200. Applicants typically wait two to three years to be assigned a plot.



Rock Disposal Zone



Rock Disposal Zone. In the depression inside the stone pile.

Examples of Organic Pest & Disease Controls

Bt Bacillus thuringiensis

var. San Diego A naturally-occurring strain of soil bacteria. For leaf-eating beetles, including the Colorado potato beetle. Available from organic supply catalogs.

BTK *Bacillus thuringiensis* Naturally-occurring strain of soil bacteria. Used to var. Kurstaki control cabbage loopers, hornworms, and most other caterpillar pests.

Beneficial Nematodes Beneficial nematodes (*H. bacteriaphora*, *S. carpocapsae*, and *S. feltiae*) are microscopic organisms that attack numerous ground-dwelling insect pests. Apply mid-spring to soil on a cloudy day or evening.

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Surround WP kaolin clay Surround WP kaolin clay is a specifically granulated clay that forms a barrier from insect attack.

Additionally, can add benefits such as sunscald protection to crops such as tomatoes.

Biocontrol/Bioinsecticides Bacterial and fungal strains and extracts known to target pests. e.g. *Burkholderia* spp. strain A396

Insecticidal soap sprays Simple sprays of soap (few drops per gallon of water) can be effective in controlling pests.

Garlic-onion-pepper sprays Use sprays made from garlic and onion for repelling insects and animals.

Copper sulfate Controls bacterial and fungal diseases of fruit, vegetable, nut and field crops, including mildew, leaf spots, blights (Late Blight), and apple scab. It is used in combination with lime and water as a protective fungicide, referred to as Bordeaux mixture, for leaf application and seed treatment.

Neem Oil Extracted from the Neem tree, native to India. Repels and kills many pest insects. Discourages pollinating bees. Use sparingly and when pollinators are not around (dawn, sunset). Available at most garden centers.

Pyrethrin AKA pyrethrum. In use since the 19th century, a derivative of a chrysanthemum species in Kenya. A nerve poison to most insects, including honeybees, killing at high concentrations and repelling at lower concentrations. Use sparingly and when pollinators are not around (dawn, sunset). Available at most garden centers.

Spinosad Chemical derived from a rare bacterium. Highly effective against many caterpillar and beetle pests, but **toxic to many beneficial insects**. Use only as a last resort and apply very sparingly and when pollinators are not around (dawn, sunset). Available from organic supply catalogs.

- Feb 22: Sow onion, celery and celeriac seeds indoors (11 weeks before last frost).
- March 8: Sow broccoli, kale, cool weather lettuce, escarole, eggplant and thyme seeds indoors (9 weeks before last frost).
- March 15: Sow pepper seeds indoors (keep temp above 78°F for germination). Also sow indoors marigold, parsley, basil and beet seeds. (8 weeks before last frost)
- March 27: Start watching the soil for the first direct planting! As soon as the soil can be worked, it's time to sow peas, fava beans, arugula and radish seeds directly in the garden (up to 6 or 7 weeks before last frost).
- March 29: Sow tomato seeds indoors. Sow cabbage seeds indoors. (6 weeks before last frost).
- April 5: Transplant lettuce, broccoli and kale seedlings into the garden (use row cover if necessary). Sow more cool-weather lettuce seed indoors. (4 weeks before last frost).
- April 19: Sow pumpkin, cucumber and zinnia seeds indoors (3 weeks before last frost).
- April 26: Sow summer squash, watermelon and melon seeds indoors. Sow 2nd planting of peas directly in the garden. (2 weeks before last frost)
- May 3: Sow more cool-weather lettuce, more beets and spinach indoors or directly in the garden. (1 week before last frost).
- May 10: Sow directly in garden seeds for sunflowers, nasturtiums, carrots, parsnips. Plant potatoes, onions sets. Plant 2nd crop of radish. (Week of last frost).
- May 17: Transplant tomatoes to garden. Plant seeds for corn, beans and soy beans directly in garden. (1 week after last frost).
- May 23: Sow 3rd cool-weather lettuce crop indoors or in garden. Transplant peppers, pumpkins, squash, cucumbers and melons to the garden if the soil is well warmed. (2 weeks after last frost).
- June 14: Sow warm-weather lettuce crop (Summer Crisp type) indoors or in garden. Sow 2nd crop of beans, 3rd crop of radish in garden. (5 weeks after last frost).
- July 5: Sow 2nd warm-weather lettuce crop (Summer Crisp type) indoors or in garden (8 weeks after last frost).
- July 23: Sow 3rd warm-weather lettuce crop (Summer Crisp type) indoors o Sow 3rd crop of beans, 4th crop of radish in garden. (11 weeks after last frost).

Harvest ²⁶

Sow seeds for last crop of beans by June 27 (15 weeks before first frost).

Transplant fall broccoli and cabbage seedlings to garden by July 11 (13 weeks before first frost).

Transplant fall collard and bok choy seedlings to garden by July 18 (12 weeks before first frost).

Sow last crop of carrot and beets directly in the garden by July 25 (11 weeks before frost).

You can try to get a fall crop of peas, though the weather typically goes from hot to frost too fast for a crop to mature. Sow pea seeds in the garden by August 1 (10 weeks before frost).

Sow fall spinach seeds indoors or directly in the garden by August 15 (8 weeks before frost).

Sow last fall lettuce seeds indoors or in the garden by August 22 (7 weeks before frost).

Sow last crop of radish seeds directly in the garden by September 5 (5 weeks before frost).

Suggested Planting Dates – Fall Harvest Planting: Online Resources

There are several spring and fall calendars that can be searched to provide guidance for seed-starting and fall planting guidance. A few examples:

[USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map](#)

[Johnny's Seed-Starting Date Calculator](#)

[Old Farmer's Almanac 2025 Planting Calendar](#)

