

## Reducing and preventing produce loss in community gardens Workshop presentation, March 21, 2009

During recent years, gardeners at community garden sites in Burlington have noticed an increase in the amount of produce taken from their plots, especially during August and September. This trend is driven by escalating costs for food and basic necessities, coupled with an awareness of the value of vegetables.

Listed below are suggested techniques that community gardeners can use to reduce produce theft:

- At the beginning of the gardening season, place sturdy twine across the open side(s) of your plot. This creates an identity for your plot and acts as a psychological barrier. Light fencing can also be used around your plot for added security and to deter ravenous woodchucks.
- When laying out your garden, plant a row of zinnias, marigolds, or other easy to grow flowers around the border of your plot, especially the pathway or lawn edges. Avoid using sunflowers as these can shade your garden or a neighboring plot. Non hybrid flowers in a garden have the added benefit of attracting pollinators and beneficial insects.
- To promote community and good will, get to know your fellow community gardeners and greet visitors to the community garden courteously. Visit your garden plot regularly throughout the season and keep it well maintained and as weed free as possible. Theft of produce is less likely to occur when gardeners are visibly present, especially on weekday afternoons during harvest season.
- Harvest tomatoes and peppers before they fully turn color. Red or yellow peppers are often the first crop to disappear as they are easy to pick and slip into a bag or pocket. Avoid planting peppers or eggplants together in large blocks which can draw attention to your garden.
- Pumpkins, larger winter squash, and watermelons are some of the higher risk vegetables in terms of theft. If you grow these crops, plant them in the corner of your plot that is farthest from the path, and be sure to harvest them when ripe. A camouflage technique can also be used by pulling vines over the top of the ripening vegetables.
- Avoid leaving surplus produce (such as large zucchinis) at the garden for others to take; this can invite vandalism. As an alternative, share vegetables with neighbors and donate surplus produce to the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf.
- If you go away on vacation during the gardening season, let your neighboring gardeners know who will take care of and harvest from your plot. Orient your garden caretakers to the garden site and to your plot to make sure they are harvesting the vegetables you intend for them to pick.
- If theft of produce does occur, email a volunteer site coordinator with a brief note on what was taken, approximately when the produce was taken, and the location of your plot. This will help coordinators to plan for additional preventative measures if needed.
- While community gardens offer a safe and healthy form of recreation, please help your garden site and your possessions to be more secure by locking your car in the parking lot.

To share additional ideas for reducing produce loss, please email Jim Flint at [jimf@burlingtongardens.org](mailto:jimf@burlingtongardens.org)