

Kevin Fletcher here, your regional garden specialist!


Let's take a look at how things have been going at some of our community gardens around the area:

It looks like about 1/4 of our Eastside garden won't have any gardeners signed up for it this year, so we decided to try to put it to good use by growing a big crop of sweet potatoes (500 plants!) to give to the donation station at the end of the year.


Unfortunately though, and as many of you will recall, the weather wasn't very cooperative or nurturing a few weeks ago for some newly-planted sweet potato slips, so we lost many of them to some severe heat in spite of how much supplemental watering they received before the rain kicked in. Thankfully though, we have plenty of seeds of butternut and "delicata" winter squash to fill in the gaps. Let's hope they flourish a little more with all of this wonderful rain we've recently received!

Speaking of water, our community gardens at the Carriage Hill Apartments on the south side of Athens unfortunately do not have access to running water within a reasonable distance of the garden, so we have been getting most of our water from a rain catchment system on the side of the nearby maintenance shed. I am pleased to announce that we have successfully replaced the too-small rain barrel system with a nice big 700-gallon water tank, nearly tripling the capacity there.

The new water tank used to hold the runoff liquid from a local composting facility so that it could be recycled in the composting system and avoid any need for an extra wastewater management system. There was a bit of sediment and some fairly stinky leftover bits of old compost tea left in there for sure, but we managed to get it all scrubbed out and squeaky-clean with a lot of elbow grease, some soap, and a handy-dandy pressure washer, and lots of vinegar (for disinfecting). Here are a few photos from the process:

 Keith giving the tank a quick rinse before we load it up.

Keith giving the tank a quick rinse before we load it up

 Giving it a good scrub-down on the inside. Nothing toxic, just some over-brewed compost tea. Stinky stuff.

Me, giving it a good scrub-down on the inside. Nothing toxic, just some over-brewed compost tea. Stinky stuff!

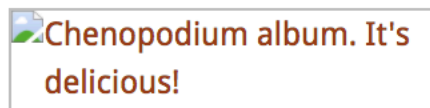
 All in place, filled up, and ready to use.

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Groundhogs – We have successfully banished several groundhogs from our Southside and Eastside community gardens. They were wreaking havoc on several of our gardeners' leafy vegetable crops. Hopefully now their salads can grow in relative safety! Here are a few useful ideas for how to deal with groundhog problems you might be having in your home gardens.

Gardening season is very synonymous with something else as well: WEEDING SEASON!

One of the most common and prolific weeds in our area is *Chenopodium album*, commonly known as lamb's quarters, goosefoot, and pigweed – a common name it shares with other common (and also usually edible) weeds in the genus *Amaranthus*.



Chenopodium album. It's delicious!

Well here is some good news: You can eat it.

The leaves and young shoots of lamb's quarters can be cooked eaten as a leafy vegetable. It is packed full of healthy vitamins and minerals. One small consideration though: it does contain moderately high levels of oxalic acid (as do many other wild leafy greens), which can upset the stomach and possibly leach some calcium out of the bloodstream. Cooking helps to reduce the levels of oxalic acid though, and adding calcium-rich dairy products to the recipe (see "Cream of Lamb's Quarters Soup" link below) can easily and tastily counteract these effects.

One of my home garden beds turned from a bed full of cute little baby veggies and flowers to a sea of these weeds over the course of just a few days. After pulling out several pounds of it I thought it would be a shame to let all this potential food go to waste, so I found [this delicious recipe for "Cream of Lamb's Quarters Soup"](#) by Aube Giroux on pbs.org

I thought it was quite delicious. I'm definitely going to make this again throughout the season.

Here's a photo of how it turned out:



With a tasteful garnish of chives and croutons

Try it yourself!