

# Brooklyn Gardener

Spring/  
Summer 2003



THE NEWSLETTER OF BROOKLYN GREENBRIDGE • BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN

## GreenBridge Launches New Program in the "Waste Free NYC" Campaign

So-called "garbage" may be the biggest economic and social problem for NYC in the 21st century. But as we know from our nearly ten years of experience in urban composting, garbage can be gold and gardeners can make a difference!

Now, Brooklyn GreenBridge, along with six other community-based NYC organizations, has a special opportunity for ten months to contribute solutions to this overarching urban problem. Master Composters, recruited and trained here at BBG, will be the volunteer corps of educators and activists leading a new campaign, led by a graduate of that program and former GreenBridge intern, Clifford Rose. The Master Composters will be out in neighborhoods teaching, talking, and demonstrating, and also recruiting gardeners to reduce waste by composting woody plant material and grass clippings.

We will have **three** major service components for spring and summer 2003:

**Chipping equipment on loan** for small woody plant recycling with community gardens, block associations and neighborhood projects (starting April).

**"Bring your Brush to the Garden" days** with larger chipping equipment to turn your materials into mulch (March-June).

**Grass Recycling Campaign including "I'm a Grass Recycler"** pledges for gardeners with access to a precious composting resource – grass clippings!

We are hoping that no less than 3000 Brooklyn residents will participate in this effort. The program is a special pilot project to examine how much waste we can PREVENT from ever going into the waste stream and how many DOLLARS this will save, so we'll be keeping careful records and weighing every pound we recycle. Funded by the New York City Council and administered by INFORM,

Inc., an environmental research and action group, Brooklyn

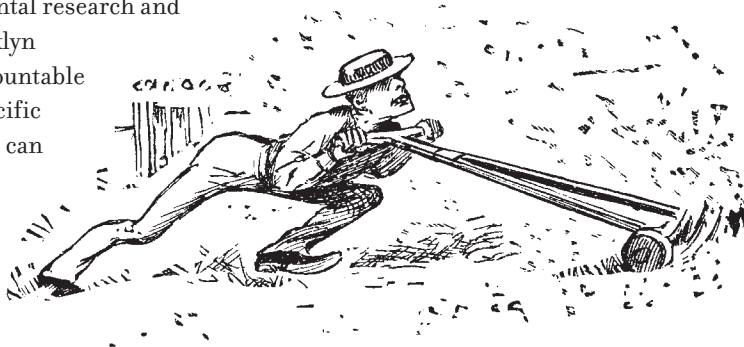
GreenBridge is accountable to demonstrate specific ways that gardeners can be part of a "Waste Free NYC."

By saving these materials for our gardens as composted grass

clippings and/or mulch, we will have more beautiful, healthier lawns, plants, and produce to share with families, friends and neighbors. The quality of life in our neighborhoods will improve while we gain skills in horticulture and activism.

As part of this new campaign, GreenBridge has revived our Compost and Waste Prevention Hotline, 718-623-7290. So give us a call if you'd like to learn more about this new initiative or to become involved.

— Ellen Kirby, Director



PLEASE POST!



## GreenBridge Workshops

Pre-registration is required at least one week in advance for these workshops; call 718-623-7220 to register. Free unless noted. Call 718-623-7250 for class descriptions.

### Introduction to Horticultural Therapy

Thursday, February 6 • 5:30–7:00 pm OR  
Tuesday, June 17 • 6–7:30 pm

**Street Tree Pit Gardening** Saturday,  
February 15 • 2:30–4:30 pm

### Spring Towards a Healthier Lawn:

**Maintenance Tips** Saturday, February 22 •  
1–3 pm

### Gardening with Children and Youth: For

**Adult Leaders** Thursday, March 20 • 10  
am–12 pm OR Thursday, April 17 • 4–6 pm  
OR Wednesday, June 4 (emphasis on  
summer camp programs) • 10 am–12 pm

### Introduction to Composting in the City

Wednesday, March 26 • 3–5 pm

### Window Box and Container Gardening

Wednesday, April 9 • 5:30–7:30 pm

**Lasagna Gardening** Thursday, April 10 •  
6–8 pm

### Summertime... And the Lawn Care is Easy!

Thursday, May 22 • 5:30–7:30 pm

### Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest

**Orientation** Tuesday, April 8 • 5:30–7 pm

**Flower Gardening Basics** Saturday, June 7 •  
3–5 pm

**Choosing the Right Lawn Mower** Tuesday,  
July 8 • 5–7 pm

### Battle the Asian Long Horn Beetle!

Tuesday, July 15 • 5–7 pm

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

For information, call 718-623-7250 unless otherwise noted. Listings are free unless otherwise noted.

**March 3 to 31. Photo exhibit of winners from 2002 Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest,** at BBG's Visitor Center.

**March 15. 22nd Annual Making Brooklyn Bloom.** 10 am–3:30 pm at BBG.

**March 22. GreenThumb "GrowTogether."** For info, call 212-788-8070.

**April 18. Deadline for ordering Window Box Kits.** \$17 each; pick up at BBG May 10.

**April 30 and May 1. BBG annual Plant Sale.** Free with Garden admission. For info, call 718-623-7200.

**June 16. Deadline for entering the Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest.** (Applications available in March).

## Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest 2003

- Applications available by March 15. Contest is open to all residential and business blocks in Brooklyn. Get your block or business association to join in!
- Prize for the neighborhood with the most entries! Deadline to enter is June 16.
- For information and applications, call 718-623-7250.
- Jointly sponsored by Borough President Marty Markowitz and Brooklyn GreenBridge, with support from Independence Community Foundation.

## From the Heap... Be Lazy and Leave It On the Lawn!

As Brooklyn GreenBridge dives into a new recycling campaign, get primed to learn a great way to reduce waste, save water, and use less fertilizer on your lawn. Sounds tough? Actually, it's really lazy! Instead of raking up grass clippings after every mowing, leave them on the lawn where they will decompose quickly, returning moisture and nutrients to the soil. Grass clippings are 85% water and 5% nitrogen, so leaving them on the lawn adds water and fertilizer – you can cut down on fertilizing by 30%!

You can buy a special "mulching" or "recycling" mower, but it's not necessary. Just remove the mower's bagging attachment and follow these easy, lazy, suggestions:

- **Cut grass when it's dry.** Wet clippings matt together, forming clumps on the lawn that look messy and take longer to decompose.
- **Sharpen your mower blade twice a year.** A sharp cut makes for a neater lawn, and uses less gas for your mower. Grass will also "heal" faster from a sharp cut.
- **Never cut more than one inch at a time.** Take off no more than 1/3 of the grass blade in any one mowing (wait until grass is 3 to 4 inches tall to mow). Longer grass means more leaf surface area and a better root system, which helps grass to take in more water and nutrients and fend off disease. Shorter clippings also won't clump together when you leave them on the lawn.
- **Skip spring fertilizing – wait 'till fall.** Fertilizing in warm, wet, spring weather promotes excessive blade growth – which means excessive mowing. Skip the spring fertilizing and save yourself the trouble of multiple mowings.

For more lazy lawn advice, check out our free workshops on sustainable lawn care (see the GreenBridge Workshops column).

– Julie Warsowe, *Community Horticulture Program Manager*

### GREENBRIDGE STAFF

Ellen Kirby, *Director*

Clifford Rose, *Coordinator, Waste Prevention*

718-623-7250 General Line

718-623-7290

Compost and Waste Prevention Help Line

## Spotlight on... Figuring out Fertilizers

**Soybean Meal? Greensand? Sea Kelp? What is all this crazy stuff?!** You may reach for the All Purpose Fertilizer out of habit or because other products seem too confusing, but do you know what your garden really needs?

It's best to start with a soil test. For under \$15 you can get a basic nutrient analysis, learn the pH and organic content of the soil, and find if heavy metals are present. Call us for a tipsheet on this important process. It's possible to have too much of soil amendments – a soil test is the best way to know what's what.

Why use organic fertilizers instead of laboratory-created synthetic fertilizers? After all, the essential elements we call nutrients are the same no matter what their origin, but the way plants **use** the nutrients, how nutrients **persist** in the soil, and what **else** is in that bag of fertilizer are the factors that make the difference. To understand this, look at the three numbers separated by dashes on the front of every bag of fertilizer. This is the NPK ratio, the percentage of three basics nutrients found in the fertilizer that are immediately available to plants: Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P) and Potassium (K). A **complete** fertilizer will have these three nutrients and possibly other "micronutrients." A **simple** fertilizer will have a higher amount of one of the three basic nutrients. In organic fertilizers, the NPK ratio tends to be low, because the nutrients tend to be "slow-release," that is, the nutrients become available to plants slowly, over time. Synthetic fertilizers tend to have a high NPK ratio (when any one number is higher than 10 or when all three add up to more than 15), which means that a lot of fertilizer will be available to plants, all at once.

In general, the slow-release process of organic fertilizers is healthier for plants and the soil. The nutrients last longer, it's harder to make a mistake by adding too much, and it's less likely that it will burn plants or roots. Plus, organic fertilizers often supply micronutrients and organic matter.

Other kinds of organic amendments – including cover crops, mulch, and compost – have several benefits. Organic amendments:

- slowly add small amounts of fertilizer to the soil,
- help soil hold moisture,
- physically improve soil structure and drainage, and
- sustain soil organisms.


This is a big topic, so if you have more questions, check out BBG's Gardener's Resource Center, with walk-in hours and a telephone help line. By taking the time to see what your soil and plants really need, and looking for organic products to provide those nutrients – you'll be on your way to building a healthier, more sustainable garden.

– JW

## Goodbye and Thanks to Julie Warsowe!

GreenBridge Program Manager, Julie Warsowe, left our program in January to enter graduate school in public garden management at Cornell University. Julie has advanced community horticulture with GreenBridge for five years and added a friendly and resourceful presence in all her contacts. During the time she has been with us, the horticulture therapy network grew, our newsletter evolved as a regular communication tool and the GreenBridge Registered Garden program became a visible, tangible link between the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the community. Julie will be sorely missed but we wish her well on her important new venture.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden gratefully acknowledges past and present support for these programs from the: Altman Foundation, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Commonwealth Fund, Dime Foundation, Independence Community Foundation, New York City Environmental Fund, Leonard and Claire Tow Charitable Trust, Inc., United States Environmental Protection Agency/Environmental Education Grant, Brooklyn Members of the New York State Assembly and Senate, and New York City Department of Sanitation/INFORM. In addition, the Garden is grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York for leadership stabilization support in 2002–2003.

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**Brooklyn Botanic  
Garden's  
Gardener's Resource Center**

**Gardener's Help Line:**  
**(718) 623-7270**  
Tuesday–Friday,  
10:30 am to 12:30 pm  
and 2 to 4 pm

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