Principles of Landscape Design: An Overview  By Susan Bell

This is the first of seven articles explaining and illustrating six principles of landscape design. This month provides an overview, to be followed by an in-depth article for each design principle.

What makes a garden beautiful is not so much what is grown there, but rather how what grows there is arranged. The best analogy I have read is that design principles are the recipe, and the elements—line, form, space, texture, and color—are the ingredients.

Unity or harmony. A landscape design should be in harmony with the site and structures in addition to reflecting the intention of the gardener. The site extends into the neighborhood, and the environment—climate, soil, light conditions, and so on—is a driving factor. The design for a harmonious wildlife habitat, for example, would include native plant species; water, nectar, seeds, and berries for food; and evergreens for nesting. A Japanese garden could include a weeping maple and a snow lantern in a bed of moss along a stone and gravel path. Cactus and palm trees would seem out of place in the rolling hills and woodlands of the Maryland Piedmont region. A garden without unity creates confusion.

Repetition. It is important to repeat elements throughout a design to create unity and rhythm. Applying this principle visually connects your garden areas. It is also calming to the eye when one or more common features flow together through the garden beds. Visual links can be the same groundcover used under each tree, or stone edging throughout a garden area. On the other hand, too much repetition creates monotony.

Lawn continued on page 3

Get Your Lawn!

By Rion Haley

Your yard is the welcome mat to your home. A well-tended area invites guests to take the time to admire it before ringing the doorbell, may increase the value of your home, filters pollution from runoff, and helps control soil erosion. If your grass did not perform the way you intended this summer and fall, now may be a good time to review the turfgrass section of your Maryland Master Gardener Handbook.

1. If you have a cool-season lawn, fall is the time to: a) heavily water b) not water c) not fertilize d) not seed
2. Cool-season turfgrasses are best adapted to: a) Eastern Shore b) Western Maryland c) most of Maryland d) Howard County
3. Warm-season turfgrasses are: a) dormant during hot weather b) Kentucky bluegrass c) active in the fall d) excellent in heat and drought
4. Tall fescue is a durable turfgrass: true or false
5. Zoysiagrass is: a) drought tolerant once established b) brown after frost c) warm season d) all of the above
6. A turfgrass with the lowest nitrogen requirement is: a) fine fescue b) Bermuda grass c) tall fescue d) Kentucky bluegrass

Quick Links - see page 2 or click here
Look What WE Have Done!

This is my last column as president of Master Gardeners. Thanks for the opportunity to learn so much about our fantastic program. It has been a most exciting, interesting, and, yes, challenging two years. But this column is not about me; it is about all of you who have done an incredible amount of gardening education this year. Some members may not be aware of everything that’s going on. So this column is about as many activities that this aging brain can remember. If I forget one, please send me an email and I will make amends.

There are now 15 Plant Clinics with over 400 meetings and at least 4,000 contacts this year. The expansion from libraries to farmers’ markets has increased the number of clients served. At farmers’ markets we assist an average of approximately 35 individuals at each site/meeting from spring through fall. Therapeutic Horticulture now serves 23 sites with monthly or twice-monthly programs with clients.

The Demonstration Gardens provide visual opportunities for citizens to see what can be done with, well, much work! The Fairgrounds garden receives an award every year and was viewed by more than 4,700 fairgoers. The Derwood garden has an average of 50 volunteers each week, who set up an education program that is both self-instructive and feeds right into our Grow It Eat It (GIEI) spring and summer events.

The April and August GIEI events hosted hundreds of citizens eagerly learning about every aspect of gardening, including tomato grafting, Boy Scout and Girl Scout merit badge programs, winter gardening, canning, seed saving, composting, fruit growing, and even tomato tasting. The Gardening Information Resource Table group (GRIT) continued the SWAT legacy with information tables at local big box stores and nurseries during the spring and summer.

Our Speakers’ Bureau is running strong, with 54 talks at local garden clubs, libraries, senior centers, and GIEI events. The Spring Gardening Conference was a success, attended by almost all of the over 90 registrants, despite the untimely arrival of a major snowstorm. And this year Master Gardeners are hearing those same talks at the Fall Members’ Conference. Close Encounters with Agriculture took place at Derwood for three weeks in October. It is sponsored by Extension and assisted by many Master Gardeners. They host 4,000 fourth-graders in experiencing every aspect of agriculture, from how we get meat to how insects are indicators of stream health.

Master Gardeners started two new activities this year: Growing Forward, a youth gardening program, and Urban Gardening, focusing on down-county residents who live in townhouses or apartments. Growing Forward started with a concept that evolved as relationships were developed with the community, the White Oak Recreation Center, and local businesses that donated materials and funds to create a garden with a deer fence. Local children came to learn how to plant, nurture, and harvest food, and they suggested making donations to the local Manna Food Center. The group is looking forward to next year without start-up tasks.

Urban Gardening hosted monthly talks and demonstrations at the Fenton Street Market and the new Silver Spring Library that included self-watering container gardening, pests and beneficial insects, houseplants, herbs, lawns, and winter gardening. There were more than 1,400 contacts from five events held from May through September. This group is working on a large event called “Growing Anywhere” to be held at the Silver Spring Civic Center next April.

Well done, fellow Master Gardeners.

Janet
How to Submit Articles and Pictures

MGs are invited to submit articles and pictures for the newsletter, but keep in mind that submissions may be edited and/or not used until a later month. Please limit stories to 350-400 words.

Send submission as an attachment to your email by the 12th of the previous month to mcmgnewsletter12@yahoo.com

Photos must come with basic information that includes name of the person in the photo, subject matter or caption and either a signed photo permission slip from those in the picture or an email from them saying they allow us to use their picture in the newsletter. Click here for the form.

If you have your name, email address and/or phone number in your article, please give us permission to use them. The newsletter can be accessed through the internet. Without the permission, we will delete the contact information.

Principles of Landscape Design continued from page 1

Contrast. Contrast is how one creates variety and focal points to enhance the garden. The goal is to “spice up” a garden view and to draw the eye. This can be achieved through any contrasting element. Some examples are a rose arbor, a weeping tree, an urn, or a vine scrambling up a fence or spilling over a wall. The focal point will determine the style or theme of a garden. But too many contrasting items can be distracting, giving the eye no place to rest.

Balance. Humans prefer balance or symmetry. Symmetrical gardens have two or more equal parts, and plantings on each side of the axis are mirror images, geometrically arranged, manicured for a formal feel. Although a symmetrical garden is easier to design, plants need more maintenance to be kept uniformly shaped and sized. Asymmetrical gardens are random and informal. Plants on each side of the axis are not identical, feel more relaxed and natural, and are often arranged along curved paths.

Proportion or scale. This principle is takes into account the size of the garden itself, the home, and its surroundings. The selection of plants includes planning for mature size, proper spacing, and sizing of all the elements in relation to each other. If a garden has no defined boundaries, there is no sense of privacy or safety. Some gardens are too meager for the space, while others are so overcrowded that windows are blocked and trees loom over the house.

Sequence. Sequence is arranging plantings to direct the eye over the garden or to direct movement through the garden. You can soften a hardscape to enhance it, or frame a focal point to emphasize it. You can use plants to create privacy or screen out your utility area or the neighbor’s driveway. Sequence is also used to control access into and around the garden—quickly on a straight path, or slowly down a curved path. Another goal is to create mystery about what lies around the corner or beyond the garden gate. Without sequence the landscape is boring; you see everything at a glance.

Next issue: Unity or Harmony

MG Susan Bell is a member of the Speakers’ Bureau. Her company, HillTop Gardens, (www.facebook.com/HilltopGardens), provides landscape consultations, design, installation, and seasonal maintenance services. Her specialty is the One-Day Garden Makeover. Contact her at susan@hilltopgardens.vpweb.com.

Get on Your Lawn continued from page 1

7. For optimal turf growth, soil pH should be: a) 2 to 3.5 b) 6 to 6.8 c) 8 to 8.6 d) 10 to 12
8. Sod certification ensures sod is free of: a) weeds b) insects c) diseases d) all of the above
9. Advantages of lawn-seeding over sod include: a) can be done any time of year b) less watering is needed c) lower initial cost than sod d) less chance of weed encroachment
10. Fine fescue should be fertilized in the: a) fall b) spring c) summer d) winter
11. Which of the following is a major cause of lawn deterioration? a) infrequent mowing b) low mowing c) sharp mower blades d) grasscycling
12. Mechanical aeration: a) alleviates soil compaction b) encourages root growth c) allows fertilizer into the soil d) all of the above
13. Common chickweed is a: a) summer annual b) winter annual c) perennial d) none of the above
14. Hourglass-shaped lesions extending across the blade with whitened centers and dark borders are symptoms of which turfgrass disease? a) brown patch b) red thread c) dollar spot d) leaf spot
15. What is a possible cause of turf dying each summer? a) mower injury b) site conditions c) oil damage d) dog urine

How did you do?
14 to 15 correct—Your lawn is the envy of the neighborhood!
12 to 13 correct—Is your crabgrass getting the better of you? A quick review of the Maryland Master Gardener Handbook will help.
11 or fewer correct—Maybe your neighbors are wondering if you went on a long vacation. Time to study.

Answers: 1b, 2c, 3d, 4T, 5d, 6a, 7b, 8d, 9c, 10a, 11b, 12d, 13b, 14c, 15b.
Close Encounters with Agriculture - Another Great Event

The first busload of excited fourth-graders arrived at the Agricultural History Farm Park as Close Encounters with Agriculture kicked off its annual three-week-long event on October 12. Once again, the registration of more than 4,000 kids from private and public schools in the county filled up as fast as the teachers could get on line.

Learning about the importance of stream buffers from MG Pam Hosimer totally fascinated these fourth-graders.

What do cows eat? The kids learned more about what cows and other farm animals eat in a relay race to match up chips that represented each animal’s favorite meal. Photos by MG Barbara Waite-Jaques

You mean half of my plate should be filled with fruits and veggies? What’s so important about protein? That’s what MGs Virginia Richter and Anna Hamman helped kids understand when they played a customized Jeopardy game.

Waiting for each busload of new arrivals were goody bags that MGs helped put together and pansy plants provided by Doug Tregoning, former Extension agent.

Meanwhile, over in the Plant Track, MG Gabrielle Hulcher told kids about roots, tubers, flowers, stems, leaves and fruit – and how each of the plant parts can be used as food.
Need MG volunteer hours? Want to earn them from home?

We are looking for a volunteer (or team, group) to help compile an “MG Volunteer Opportunities Reference” handout.

This could be done on a home computer and would be available to MG interns as well as the membership. It would describe our Master Gardener volunteer programs, committees and special events. The handout would be a compact and concise description of what volunteers do, obligations for training, the contact person, how to sign up, when they meet, and other pertinent details. The first attempt would be to format the handout for the next intern class, then adapt it to the MG website.

If you are interested in this project, please contact MG Linda Waters, 301-590-2836; lwaters@umd.edu

See you in 2016!
The Seed will go dormant in December. We wish you a safe and happy holiday season, filled with lots of seed and nursery catalogs. We’re early bloomers, so we’ll see you again in January!

Master Gardener Snow-Day Policy
If Montgomery County Public Schools are closed, all classes and meetings will be cancelled that day. If Montgomery County Public Schools start late, we will start on time.

“Happy Halloween” is the message from this black bat plant (Tacca chantrieri). The deep purple flower is up to 12 inches wide with “whiskers” up to 28 inches long. Leaves are lush and bright green. Around these parts it grows in conditions similar to orchids. In Florida it’s an understory plant that may bloom up to eight times a year.

Photo By MG Sherry Marshall

Weed of the Month

Not everyone would call calico aster (Symphyotrichum lateriflorum) a weed. It can be purchased from a nursery, but is also found growing in woodland and semi-shaded wetland areas. It has a delicate appearance and closely resembles frost aster, heath aster, and other species in the genus with small white flowerheads that bloom in the fall. It is lankier, with smaller flowerheads and fewer ray florets per flowerhead. The name “calico” refers to the diverse colors of the disk florets as they mature. Another common name of this species is side-flowering aster, and another scientific name is Aster lateriflorus.

Photo by MG Alison Mrohs
Thursday, November 5
Notice of November Elections
By Katie McIe

Elections for the MG Governance Structure for 2016 will be held at the November general membership meeting and Fall Conference on Thursday, November 5. Following is the list of candidates for 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Bebe McMeekin</td>
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<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Joe Ginther</td>
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<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Ken Hoyle</td>
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<td>Co-Recording Secretary</td>
<td>Judith Graef</td>
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<td>Co-Recording Secretary</td>
<td>Patricia Eng</td>
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<td>Program Director, Info Tables group</td>
<td>Diyan Rahaman</td>
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<td>Program Director, Hands On group</td>
<td>Melissa Siegel</td>
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<td>Program Director, Gardens group</td>
<td>Michael Panzer</td>
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<td>Program Director, Major Events group</td>
<td>Angela Butler</td>
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<td>Program Director, MG Communications group</td>
<td>Katie McLe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Director, MG Education and Evaluation</td>
<td>Liz Hofmeister</td>
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<td>Derwood Demo Garden</td>
<td>Lily Bruch</td>
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<td>Bill Newman</td>
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<td>GIEI</td>
<td>Terri Valenti</td>
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<td>Growing Gardeners (Manna program)</td>
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<td>School Gardens</td>
<td>Ken Hoyle</td>
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<td>NIH Garden</td>
<td>Selma DeLeon</td>
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<td>Gaithersburg Fairgrounds Garden</td>
<td>Michael Panizer</td>
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<td>Newsletter Editor</td>
<td>Sherry Marshall</td>
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<td>Plant Clinics (includes Community Gardens)</td>
<td>Harry Rea</td>
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<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>LeeAnne Gelletly</td>
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<td>Speakers Bureau</td>
<td>Merikay Smith</td>
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<td>GRIT</td>
<td>Taffy Turner</td>
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<td>GRIT</td>
<td>Lynn Furrow</td>
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<td>Harvest Festival</td>
<td>Barbara Waite-Jaques</td>
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<td>Urban Gardening</td>
<td>Rani Parker</td>
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<td>Growing Forward</td>
<td>Sue Kuklewicz</td>
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<td>Membership</td>
<td>Kathy Kircher</td>
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<td>Membership</td>
<td>Suzanne Grefheim</td>
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<td>Therapeutic Horticulture</td>
<td>Lisa Diamond</td>
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<td>Therapeutic Horticulture</td>
<td>Wendy Band</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>Heather Zindash</td>
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Pre-registration required. You should have received an email Invitation from Eventbrite during the first week of October. To register for the conference, complete and submit the form and select the four sessions you wish to attend (one in each of the four sections, I to IV). MG Mary McKnight is coordinating registration and will answer questions as well as contact Master Gardeners without an email address on file.

PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH AND WEAR YOUR MG BADGE. Beverages, including coffee, will be provided during check-in. Sodas and water will be provided during lunch.

Please contact MG Hallie Butler-Van Horn at hallieblue@msn.com if you are willing to bring refreshments that will be available with morning coffee and during the day.

Thursday, November 5
7th Annual November Members’ Conference
By Bebe McMeekin

Our Seventh Annual Members’ Conference will be held on Thursday, November 5, in the Heritage Building at the Fairgrounds. Here is a win-win opportunity for all of us: become a more informed Master Gardener, earn four continuing education hours, meet new speakers, and hear presentations that were given at the Spring Conferences in 2014 or 2015—and all at no charge!

Check-in and morning snacks begin at 8:30 am, followed by elections for the Executive Board at 9 am. The program begins immediately after the elections and ends at 2:30 pm. Concurrent sessions will be held in the Harvest Room and the Garden Room:

I-A  Landscape Tricks of the Trade – Susan Bell
I-B  DIY Irrigation – Les Rucker
I-C  Growing Orchids on Your Windowsill – Adele Fein
I-D  Bees, Beneficials, and Blooms – Marie Rojas
II-E  A Shade of Difference – Joy Adler
II-F  Exploding the Myths: Landscapes, the Environment, and You – Eric Wenger
IV-G  A Few of Our Favorite Herbs – Heather Whirley
IV-H  Water Gardens: An Engaging Ecosystem – Heather Zindash

Announcements continued on page 7


Thursday, December 3

Make Holiday Party Centerpieces

**WHAT:** Volunteer to make centerpieces

**WHEN:** Wednesday, December 2, 9:30 am

**WHERE:** Extension (Derwood) in the Garage Room

Join an annual tradition on Wednesday, December 2, to make holiday centerpieces for the MG Holiday Party. Bring pruning shears and garden gloves; dress for mess. To sign up, please respond to the Eventbrite invitation that will go out shortly.

Whether you help make centerpieces or not, small decorations and lots of greenery from your yard—such as holly, pine, boxwood, nandina, or arborvitae—are needed. Please bring them to the Derwood Garage on Tuesday, December 1, or Wednesday, December 2. Questions? Contact MG Kathy Kircher, 301-585-3334, Kathy.Kircher@starpower.net.

Thursday, December 3

Time to Enjoy Potluck Lunch and Volunteer Awards

**WHAT:** Master Gardener Annual Holiday Lunch

**WHEN:** Thursday, December 3, 11 am—2 pm

**WHERE:** Heritage Dining Hall, County Fairgrounds, Gaithersburg

Mark your calendar now, and plan to join us for our annual holiday celebration. Highlights include:

- terrific three-course array of foods brought by members and their guests
- party hall with festive tablecloths and MG-created centerpieces
- presentation of service awards
- promotion of the intern class
- voluntary and anonymous exchange of gifts of about $10 in value

Outstanding Service Awards will be presented to members who were nominated by their peers for service that went above and beyond the norm. Lifetime Achievement and Dedicated Service Awards will be made to those who have shown exceptional commitment over many years.

**Calling All Cooks and Bakers!**

Share your special dish with the rest of us. Dishes for the potluck lunch should feed approximately 10 people and should include serving spoons (disposable preferred). There is no way to heat food at Heritage Hall, so food should be ready to eat. Appetizers, main dishes, accompaniments, and desserts are all suitable. Please label dishes as to their contents and whether they are vegan, gluten free, vegetarian, and so on.

So bring a dish, and maybe help with setup or cleanup (or all three!). There are two ways to volunteer:

1) Electronic signup will be available in November. Sign up for what you will bring and volunteer for setup and/or cleanup (hours that can go on your green sheets).

2) Contact MG Kathy Kircher at Kathy.Kircher@starpower.net, 301-585-3334, or MG Suzanne Grefsheim at grefshe@gmail.com, 301-946-5529.

Directions to the Fairgrounds hall: [http://extension.umd.edu/mg/locations/holiday-partymonthly-meeting-location](http://extension.umd.edu/mg/locations/holiday-partymonthly-meeting-location).

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**Policy on Cooking for MG Events**

Guidelines for claiming Master Gardener volunteer hours for cooking are currently being reviewed by the state office. In the meantime, according to Steve Dubik, Montgomery County Master Gardeners may claim cooking hours only for preparing food for the public during the Close Encounters program and the Spring Gardening Conference.
Digging Deeper

Genetically Modified Plants and the Environment
By Janet Young

At our first meeting of the year on September 24, the Digging Deeper Group dug a bit deeper into the controversial topic of GMOs and plants. We explored the details of Genetic Use Restriction Technology (GURT), called by the popular press “suicide genes” or “terminator genes.” We also discussed a peer-reviewed paper that provided an extensive review of methods of formaldehyde detoxification in maize and implications of problems with maize embryos when GURT is used in maize.

The group viewed a video presentation from the University of Nebraska (see item 3 below) to fully understand what is meant by GURT or “terminator technology” and then discussed two known applications. Brazil is currently using this technique to prevent spread of genetically modified plants in the natural setting. Companies have found this technique intriguing because it forces the grower to return to the seller to purchase the seeds, as is required for hybrid seeds. To our knowledge of the literature search, this particular technology is not being used by any U.S. company.

A paper in Agricultural Sciences (item 5) identifies a possible unintended consequence of the use of GURT to disable the corn embryo. The review confirmed that C1 metabolism is active in maize embryo and endosperm to detoxify formaldehyde and provide carbon for synthesis of important compounds. Disabling the corn embryo may have an effect on C1 metabolism, allowing for the possible accumulation of formaldehyde in the corn kernel.

**Conclusion:** One type of GM plant is not the same as another, and not all types of genetic modification are the same. It is important to recognize that genetic modification is one strategy to develop a plant with new traits. It is another method in our botanical toolbox, just like open pollination and hybrid technology are specific breeding techniques to identify and promote new traits. If a gene to increase protein level in a fruit or vegetable is introduced via genetic modification in a way that does not adversely impact other genes of that plant, this is useful. If a change that has an adverse effect upon other essential genes of that plant is introduced, then maybe that type of genetic modification is not a useful strategy for that plant.

Papers discussed:
1. Will Plants with Terminator-Type Genes Prevent Replanting of Genetically Engineered Crops?
   [http://cls.casa.colostate.edu/transgeniccrops/terminator.html](http://cls.casa.colostate.edu/transgeniccrops/terminator.html)
3. Video, Terminator Technology in Cotton Plants, University of Nebraska.
   [http://cls.casa.colostate.edu/transgeniccrops/flash/terminator.swf](http://cls.casa.colostate.edu/transgeniccrops/flash/terminator.swf)
4. Brazil approves suicide seeds.

**Want to start digging, too?** Future topics include lighting needed for plants, rose rosette disease, weed control, pesticides in soil, and many others. To join the group, please contact MG Janet Young. Everyone is welcome!

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 12, Derwood. Topic: Indoor Lighting for Plants, led by MG Linda Davis. Email Janet for the papers to be discussed.
The Growing Forward Program Has a Great First Year

By Sue Kuklewicz

Our Growing Forward garden for young gardeners was brand new, so everything had to be built—from the concept for the program, to the fences and raised beds, to our relationship with the White Oak Recreation Center and community. To build the garden, we held several one-time events staffed by volunteers in the spring.

We officially kicked off our program with kids on June 11. Our plan was to work with the same kids all summer; however, while many did stay with us for the entire summer, the group size ebbed and flowed with weather, family vacations, and other conflicting activities. Although this was not the plan, we reached many more kids than we would have otherwise. We have continued into the fall, meeting once a week, sometimes engaging youth who just show up, and sometimes tapping the aftercare program at the recreation center.

Over the course of the summer, we had lessons on nutrition taught through our partnership with Food Supplement Nutrition Education (FSNE), lessons on insects and bees, and worm composting taught by other Master Gardeners and University of Maryland professionals. We also took a field trip to Brookside Nature Center for a talk and hands-on demonstration about farming during the Civil War. We sent home 100-plus pounds of food with the kids who participated in the garden. One week, at the kids’ suggestion, we donated about 12 pounds of food to our local Manna Food Center.

Although the garden did not play out entirely as we envisioned it, we do think it was very successful. The generosity of the community and Master Gardeners was astounding. We said from the beginning that it would take a minimum of three years to fully launch the program, and we were very successful in our first year. Next year will be much easier in many ways.

We were able to do everything without using the Master Gardener funds budgeted for the program. That was due to the tools donated by MGs and our extended list of contacts, money from donations and from grants from the Maryland Agriculture Education Foundation and FSNE, a donation of wood chips from Branches Tree Experts (a tree company many of us use), and the generous donation of all of the wood for the beds (finished cedar, not rough-cut) by TW Perry in Gaithersburg. MG Pat Lynch helped navigate the Montgomery Parks process, included us as a community garden, and worked her magic to get a handsome discount from Deer Fencers and a load of compost from Parks.

Many thanks to the administrative team: MGs Pam Hosimer, Paula Knepper, Katy Levy, Melissa Siegel, and Rachel Shaw. The patience and hard work of the others who assisted were invaluable: MGs Ellen Mann, Marla Nix, Karen Mills, Diana Archibald, Susan Wexler, Judy Dickenson, Elizabeth Bukowski, Christine Ceder, and Jane Halpin. Hopefully I haven’t missed anyone. The kinds words of encouragement from many of the Master Gardeners helped sustain us when times were frustrating.

The young gardeners decided to share their bounty with the local Manna Food Center.

Photos by MG Sue Kuklewicz
Lessons Learned from Lawns

This is the time of year that homeowners with lawn problems send the Derwood Extension office samples of dead turf with questions on what happened and how it can be remedied. Various factors can affect turf health, including diseases, cultural practices, and insects. Below are two common fungal diseases of lawns that many residents of our area encounter.

Brown Patch

Brown patch—sometimes referred to as large patch or rhizoctonia blight—is a hot-weather turfgrass disease caused by the fungal species *Rhizoctonia solani*. The most susceptible grass species include perennial ryegrass, tall fescue, and the bentgrasses.

Brown patch typically produces rings or patches of browning turfgrass that can measure from five inches up to 10 feet in diameter. It may also produce thin, brown to purple borders around the patches. These areas are commonly referred to as “smoke rings.”

The fungus overwinters in the form of resting bodies called sclerotia, either within infected grass tissue or in the soil. Disease activity is prevalent when surface moisture and humidity are high, nighttime temperatures are above 68°F, and daytime temperatures average 80°F or above. Rainy weather and a saturated atmosphere (high relative humidity) greatly accelerate the speed of disease development. Disease severity is greater on lush, succulent turfgrass maintained with high nitrogen levels than on grass maintained with moderate levels. After the grass leaves die, new leaves can emerge from the surviving crowns. On wide-bladed species of turfgrass, leaf lesions with tan centers and dark brown to black margins develop.

Cultural controls would be to use low to moderate levels of nitrogen-based fertilizers with a balanced fertility program. Avoid high-nitrogen applications when the disease is active. Reduce the amount of shade, if possible, and increase the amount of airflow to dry turf more quickly. Irrigate turf early in the day and improve soil drainage. Reduce thatch.

Pythium Blight

Pythium blight, also known as grease spot and cottony blight, can be a highly destructive turfgrass disease, caused by the fungus *Pythium aphaniderMATum*. Severe outbreaks can completely destroy the turfgrass within a few days if weather conditions favor disease development.

Pythium blight first appears as small, irregularly shaped spots ranging from a half-inch to four inches in diameter. Diseased patches fade to a light brown or gray color. Groups of spots frequently join together. With high humidity in early morning or throughout the day, diseased leaves may be covered with the white, cobwebby, moldlike growth of the fungus.

Primarily a warm, wet-weather disease, pythium blight will develop most rapidly and severely at air temperatures from 85° to 95°F. It develops more rapidly when nitrogen levels are high, and more slowly under moderate- or low-nitrogen fertilizer programs. In problem areas, moderate fertilizer applications provide the least risk of pythium blight damage. Providing adequate drainage and air circulation, especially where susceptible grasses are grown, can help control this disease.
Ask & Answer: Should This Tree Be Saved?

Sometimes homeowners are uncertain about whether to remove a tree that seems unhealthy or is causing a problem. It’s harder to make a decision when the tree is a favorite.

Q. I have an apple tree in my back yard that is about 100 years old and is slowly dying. My three deceased dogs are buried beneath its branches. The birds use it as a staging area for visits to the bird feeder (they all take turns, even the crows). We love the tree, and it’s not a hazard, but what’s the right thing to do?

A. Most gardeners struggle with this decision. If the tree is not a hazard and no one is complaining about it, you can let it die in place if you wish. However, most arborists are challenged when it is time to remove a declining or dead tree, as the unstable structure is more dangerous to take down. This may increase the cost (and no, you shouldn’t try to remove it yourself). You also may need to spend money to remove dead and dying branches along the way, either to improve the tree’s aesthetics or because the branches have become a hazard. Only you can decide whether to spend money on a tree in decline rather than invest in a new tree.

Q. How do you know if your tree is in the process of dying?

A. In addition to dead branches, look for trunk damage (like vertical cracks, seams, large older wounds) that can be signs of decay. Is your tree hollow? Rot, fungus growth, and/or loss of bark at the base of the tree can be signs of disease. An arborist should be able to help you with a proper diagnosis if you are unsure.

Q. What are other signs that it’s time for tree removal?

A. There are many:

- It is the wrong tree for the spot. The tree has become too close to structures, blocks your view, has become a traffic hazard, is growing into power lines, threatens the integrity of your home’s foundation, or is crowding a more desirable tree.
- The tree has structural problems. Perhaps it was a victim of prior bad pruning practices (the dreaded “topping”), or has bad crotches or two leaders, or has started to lean in a manner that creates a potential hazard. Dead branches on only one side are a sign of disease and the tree can pose a danger.
- It is an undesirable species. According to University of Maryland Extension, trees that have weak wood, have shallow roots that damage lawns and pavement, are vulnerable to pests and disease, or are invasive are undesirable. Examples include black locust, Siberian elm, box elder, mulberry, poplar, Bradford pear, silver maple, tree of heaven, mimosa, catalpa, empress tree, and willow.
- The tree is a nuisance because of profuse dropping of seeds, sap, or branches or has a crazy root structure.
- It is in the way of new construction or will not survive the onslaught of heavy machinery and the compaction that accompanies new construction.

There is a bright side to losing a tree that has been a venerable old friend. Its removal can pave the way for a replacement that is healthy, vigorous, right-sized, or more desirable.

For more information, see “How Do You Decide When to Remove a Tree?” from the University of Maryland Extension Home and Garden Information Center, https://extension.umd.edu/learn/how-do-you-decide-when-remove-tree.

Sometimes it’s difficult saying good-bye to a tree that’s been a benefit to animals and humans for many years.

Photo by MG Sherry Marshall
November 6, 10 am - 12:30 pm. Fall Flora Along the C & O Canal. Leisurably walk to enjoy our area’s diverse plants as blooms linger, fruits develop, and colors change. Audubon Naturalist Society, Violette's Lock. $28 (ANS $20). Registration required.

November 7, 1 pm. Winter Protection for Trees & Shrubs in Your Landscape. Christopher Lewis will discuss protecting borderline-hardy landscape plants and keeping your holiday tree looking fresh. Behnke’s Nurseries, Beltsville. Free. Reservation requested.


November 18, 6:45 - 8 pm. “Growing Legacy” film viewing. The film explores the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve, where rare pastoral landscapes are preserved. Includes comments by policymakers, farmers, advocates, and consumers. Meadowside Nature Center, Nature Center Classroom. Free. Register at ActiveMontgomery.org (#7588) or call 301-258-4034.