

AA COUNTY  
MASTER  
GARDENER  
PROGRAM

Newsletters

Training Calendar

EAB Minutes

2009 Meetings

Policy &  
Procedures  
Handbook

NEW  
PROJECT  
CODE

*The GROW IT, EAT IT programs now has a project code. For any GROW IT, EAT IT activities, use project code 28 on your timesheets.*

*The timesheets have been revised on the web. ([Click Here](#))*



## April Monthly Meeting

Date: Tuesday, April 14, , 2009

Place: St. Margaret's Church, Parish Hall  
1601 Pleasant Plains Road  
Annapolis, MD 21409

Time: 7:00 p.m. Business Meeting  
7:30 p.m. Presentation

### HOT AND NEW PERENNIALS FOR THE LANDSCAPE

The Anne Arundel County Master Gardeners invite the public to attend a presentation by Terri Poindexter of Behnke Nurseries. Terri has been with Behnkes since 1994, working as head propagator for 8 years and as the Grower for woodies and perennials for 3 years. She teaches at the USDA Grad school in the Horticulture program, including classes on propagation of perennials and woodies, woody plants for the fall landscape and woody plants for the winter landscape

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Anne Arundel County Cooperative Extension

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ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY GOVERNMENT OFFICE BUILDING ☎ 7320 RITCHIE HIGHWAY, SUITE 210 ☎ GLEN BURNIE, MARYLAND 21061

MARYLAND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAMS ARE OPEN TO EVERYONE WITHOUT REGARD TO RACE, COLOR, RELIGION, AGE, NATIONAL ORIGIN, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, MARITAL OR PARENTAL STATUS, OR DISABILITY.

## THE COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Mike Ensor, Coordinator

Many thanks for a great turnout at our March Master Gardener monthly meeting as we went on tour of the production area at Homestead Gardens.

Our first meeting of the new EAB was held on March 17. I am pleased to announce the positions of the new board. The position of Chairperson was accepted by Marilyn Kinkel. The position of Vice Chairperson was accepted by Scott Doran. Elizabeth Matarese has accepted the position of Financial Advisor. Susan Knisely, Anne Nourse, and Lisa Winters will serve on the board as Advisors. Congratulations to all of our new board members.

Please mark on your calendars the Anne Arundel Master Gardener Annual Open House for Saturday

May 16, 2009 at Arlington Echoes from 9 AM to 3 PM.

Also please place on your calendars the Annual Master Gardener Day at the University of Maryland scheduled to take place Thursday, May 28. Please register ASAP to be sure to get the classes you would like. Registration information may be found by going into the [www.hgic.umd.edu](http://www.hgic.umd.edu) website.

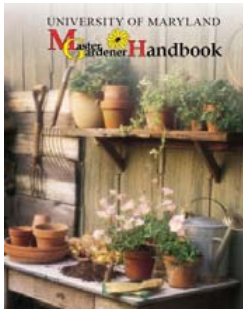
Finally it feels like "spring has sprung" and many of your projects are up and going. I wish each of you a great gardening season and a great Master Gardener year.



## New Master Gardener Handbooks

Jon H. Traunfeld and Robin Hessey, University of Maryland Extension

The new handbook is 640 pages and includes 400 color photos. All material has been completely revised and updated. There are 28 chapters, including 9 new chapters (e.g. ecology, weeds, invasive species, alternatives to turf, landscape design, water quality and conservation). The cost is \$69 and includes shipping and handling. Mail your order form and check made payable to the



University of Maryland to Robin Hessey at the Home and Garden Information Center at 12005 Homewood Road Ellicott City, MD 21042. Order forms can be found on the HGIC website at:

<http://mastergardener.umd.edu/Handbook.cfm>

For more information contact

Robin Hessey at 410-531-1754.



## MG Hours – Frequently Asked Questions

Ralph Beedle, MG

**Q: How often should I submit a time sheet?**

A: Submit a time sheet at least once every two months or when the timesheet is almost full.

**Q: Should I report attendance at a monthly meeting?**

A: Sign-in at the meeting. Record entries are made on that basis. You do not need to report your attendance at a MG monthly meeting.

**Q: Does travel time to a monthly meeting count?**

A: The monthly meeting is a Training Activity. Travel time does not count for training activities. For Interns, the monthly meeting is counted as a volunteer activity but the travel time is not counted.

**Q: Which training and education events count for MG training?**

A: In addition to Monthly Meeting and UMD Day of Training, the Monthly Calendar of Events list training opportunities available. Not all are accepted for training hours. Only those with the asterisks (\*) count for hours. Training is reported on the timesheet as code 4 – Advanced Training.

**Q: How is the monthly meeting credited for an Intern?**

A: The monthly meeting for an Intern is counted as volunteer time. This is also true for the UMD annual day of training.

**Q: Can I use the Activity Report from the UMD web site?**

A: No. The AA county Project Codes are not the same as the State Site Codes. We track activity by the Project and when hours are reported to the State at the

end of the year, the database program converts the data as needed for use by the State.

**Q: Can I send my 'hours' in a plain e-mail (saves money)?**

A: Yes, but you must provide all of the information called for on the timesheet.

**Q: Will I get a response every time I send an email to you?**

A: When Excel timesheet or your plain text e-mail are processed an e-mail reply will be provided. Since timesheet are process in groups of about 15, the 'reply' may not be sent for several weeks.

**Q: When I mail a timesheet, will I receive an acknowledgement?**

A: Yes, I will send an e-mail acknowledgement.

**Q: Interns are required to have 40 volunteer hours in 12 months. When does that 12 months period start?**

A: To be consistent with the active master gardener reporting period, the start date is 1st of January following the Classroom training phase. This is based on a Fall MG Training Class.

**Q: Several Projects conduct formal training, how is that training reported and counted?**

A: Formal Project training is reported as Advanced Training and is counted as training for Interns and Active MGs. For Interns: this training does not count toward the 40 hour volunteer requirement.

**Q: If an Intern volunteers between the end of the classroom and the first of January, will those hours count toward the required 40?**

A: Yes, hours accrued by an intern during this period are carried-over to the next calendar year.

**Q: How much detail is needed in the 'Description of Activity' on a timesheet?**

A: Be brief. DO NOT use more than one line.

**Q: Should I leave blank lines between entries on the timesheet?**

A: NO, it creates more work to enter the data in the database.

**Q: What if I need more space to add activity entries?**

A: Use another timesheet. These timesheets cannot be 'extended' since the format is 'protected'.

**Q: If I have a question about the acceptability of hours for an activity, who do I contact?**

A: Check with the database manager – Ralph Beedle. If necessary, the MG Coordinator, Mike Ensor will be contacted.

**Q: Is the format for entries important?**

A: Yes. When you don't follow the format shown at the top of the timesheet columns, it creates problems when transferring data to the database.



## Native Orchids

Elizabeth Matarese, MG

Orchids are usually associated with the tropics, but would you believe we have some of the most exquisite orchids right here in Maryland? Everyone...well, almost everyone...is familiar with the Moccasin Flower or Lady Slipper, *Cypripedium acaule*. There are little patches of these flowers in areas around Maryland, where developers haven't yet laid waste in building subdivisions. In western Maryland, there seem to be more of them left. But the Lady Slipper is not the only orchid we have.

The reason for this article is to alert Master Gardeners about the existence of the family (Orchidaceae) of native orchids, which are either threatened or endangered in our area. In most cases, these are miniatures that grow in the woods; most of us don't even recognize them when we see them, for their bloom time is usually a short term in May, June, or July. Here are two orchids which are considered

endangered or threatened in a number of states. Look for them when you take a walk in the woods.

1. *Tipularia discolor*, in the vernacular referred to as Crippled Crane-fly, blooms in July. Its distinguishing characteristic, the leaf, which is purple abaxially, displays parallel veining, typical of a monocot. The leaf emerges in the fall, but the stem in the spring produces a terminal raceme (of flowers) up to 18" long. *Discolor*, the second term of the Specific Epithet refers to the "different color of the underside of the leaf. *Tipularia* refers to the Latin for "water spider" later associated with the crane-fly.

2. *Galearis spectabilis*, called the Showy Orchis, is a delicate flowering orchid. Easily overlooked, it blooms during late April through July, and sports blooms that range from light purple to pink to blush white. It thrives in rich forest woods, among the humus of layers of leaves. The flower has two upper petals that act as a

helmet; thus the Specific Epithet Galearis, Latin for helmet, and spectabilis referring to it showiness and

remarkableness.



**Raceme**



**Leaf, abaxially purple (note purple spots above)**



**Woodland habitat**

There are many more of our native orchids that go unnoticed! Most of them will not survive the leveling of the woods, as land development continues to eat up their habitat. Protecting them is limited, in that most of them have complex mycorrhizal needs and are

extremely difficult to transplant. Cultivation by seed is in beginning stages for some of them. And studies to determine the exact nature of their dependencies and symbiotic relationships with mycorrhizae are also just underway. So, if you can identify these precious plants



**Two-parted petal with spurred lip**



**Ovate basal leaves**



**Woodland Habitat**

in places that can be protected and/or preserved, it will be in the best interest of our communities to know where they are and to educate as many people as possible about their beauty and fragility.

These photos belong to the USDA, and credit is given to the photographers who took them and archived them for the education and enjoyment of those who study Native Orchids of North America.

These photos belong to the USDA, and credit is given



**Plant for Success**

Valerie Pawlewicz, MG

The "Plant for Success" Master Gardener consulting project is getting a great response from the Annapolis Greenscape community groups. Already we have worked with a girls scout group to design a planting in the sensory garden at ARC (a center for people with



disabilities) and to design a city park with the City of Annapolis and the local community association.

At least three groups will need basic on-site plant assistance on Greenscape Day, Saturday, April 18 from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. These groups already have a design and plants; they just need someone to be on-hand to make sure they amend soil, plant, water and mulch properly.

If you are interested, please contact Valerie Pawlewicz (MG '05) who will set you up with the group of your choice (all projects are within Annapolis city proper).

Contact: Valerie Pawlewicz  
[vpawlewicz@earthlink.net](mailto:vpawlewicz@earthlink.net)  
410-903-9512



## Anne Arundel Master Gardener Project Reports

Descriptions of all Master Gardener projects can be found on the Web ([click here](#)).

### Apprentice Gardens

Anne Nourse, MG

Apprentice Gardens met on March 27 and established guidelines for the project. Anne Nourse, the Chair for this project, brought and distributed materials, which contain ideas and suggestions for various aspects of garden activities for 7-8-9-10 year olds.

The meeting began at the site, Kinder Farm in Severna Park, where the group identified work that had to be accomplished as preparation for the families and children. The plan calls for about ten families to

participate.

Jim McNichol brought several bags of Leaf-gro, paint, and other supplies, donated by Lowe's, which will be used Saturday to get the garden prep underway. If there are other MGs who would like to participate in the project, they will be heartily welcomed aboard. This project should be a lot of fun...there's a water garden, a trellis garden, several raised beds and lots of things to do.



### Arlington Echo – Chesapeake Connection

Sandy Patterson, MG

Six of our Master Gardeners attended an orientation session on 3/16 given by Arlington Echo (AE) staff to restart this project.

We will be assisting with school project installations this spring. They include 25 different Anne Arundel County schools with projects from installing bluebird boxes to bog maintenance; prepping and planting native gardens, rain gardens, spring vegetable gardens, and meadows; planting courtyards; and habitat creation.

We'll be getting muddy and dirty and (I hope) loving every minute!

Remember, if you are an Intern: we are school-based so no activity during June, July, August, and early September. You are welcome at any of the school planting days listed on the schedule I sent to all of you, just let me know ahead of time so I can alert AE staff to expect you!



### Ask a Master Gardener

Joe Marsala, MG

As you read this our group will have completed our spring training classes. The topics covered this year were: 'Vegetable Gardening', 'Pruning', as well as 'Soil, Turf, and Fertilizing'. As usual, we all had a great time and learned a lot! Lew Shell, Bob Stewart, and I taught the classes.

I would like to comment on the Pruning class. The lab for this class (we always have a really involved lab) was pruning trees and shrubs in St Margaret's landscape. Believe me, there was plenty of plants for

everyone! We worked on pruning for over two hours, and made some significant improvements in the landscape. It's great that we could combine a learning experience with helping the church that furnishes space for our monthly meetings and classes!

We are looking forward to a great season starting April 18<sup>th</sup> and continuing through October 17<sup>th</sup>. This year our team is larger than ever – 51 volunteers signed up!



**Bay-Wise**

Judy Graham, MG

Bay-Wise committee had their kick-off meeting where newbies learned what was expected and experienced members signed up to lead yard visits, some of which were left over from late 2008. They are being scheduled now.

Training is a bit later this year; anyone interested can sign up and of course I would like those who do to assist at a few yard visits.

Bay-Wise Advanced Training (BWAT)--is necessary for all new members of the Bay-Wise committee who intend to lead yard visits. All three sessions are required. This year they are being held on Saturdays-

- April 25th, 9:30-3:30 at the Broadneck Library, 1275 Green Holly Dr off College Parkway;
- May 2nd, 9:30-3:30 at Calvert Co's Cooperative Extension Office, Prince Frederick; you'll get directions.

- May 9th, 9:30-12N in MG Ellen Levin's yard, 105 Trailing Ivy La, Severna Park.

There is \$45 fee for materials, payable ahead [made out to UMD (U of Maryland) w/ BWAT in subject line and send to me (address below) or at door of first session.

Current members are invited to audit the course for a refresher, but please let me know.

Please reply to:  
Judy Graham, Bay-Wise chair  
[jlakegraham@verizon.net](mailto:jlakegraham@verizon.net) or (410) 263-5389  
416 Second St  
Annapolis, MD 21403

**Beekeeping**

Lisa Winters, MG

**Catch the Buzz****An Organic Garden and Honey Bees Move to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue**

From the perspective of probably every beekeeper in the U.S., the first day of spring, 2009, should be one of the most memorable in decades. It was on that day that Michelle Obama announced that not only would there be a garden on the White House lawn, the first since FDR's Victory Garden, but there would be, yes, BEE HIVES!

The chefs at the white house are looking forward to cooking with locally grown fresh vegetables (and sharing what they can't use with a soup kitchen near the White House), and being able to use honey in

some of their recipes. Honey produced right outside their kitchen door.

Mrs. Obama readied the garden plot on the first day of spring with the help of a couple dozen local fifth graders. They worked to remove the sod and loosen the soil in preparation of planting of the spring crops. The L-shaped plot will contain year-round vegetables once completely established, with vegetables, berries and other tasty edibles. All will be raised organically.

To complete the garden, two bee hives will be moved in early this week. They will be managed by a White House employee who is a beekeeper and lives nearby. The hives belong to the beekeeper.

**St. Margaret's Colonial Garden**

Ginny Klocko, MG

Thanks to Susan Smith, Catherine Waterman, Susan Barbi, Kim Morrow, Marilyn Kinkel, and Sandy Patterson for signing up for the garden this year.

Interns Pat Shema and Carole Fullagar along with Sandy Patterson and Ginny Klocko met at the garden on a brisk Saturday morning to begin work. Pat and

Carole assembled a compost bin and did a great job raking accumulated leaves for the bin. Sandy worked on trimming back any assorted dead foliage. The garden was fertilized and tidied up. Ginny and Sandy marked out where a privacy hedge will be subsequently installed and initial sod removal begun.

Handouts of Sandra Porterfield's extensive research were distributed along with handouts of potential shrub plants.

Many thanks to Catherine Waterman and Sandy Patterson for their continued guidance and support.



## **Healing Garden at Kinder Farm Park**

Bonnie Pavlak, MG

Master Gardeners worked Friday, March 13, 2009 doing a perc test and creating a path of wood chips. The soil drains well and will not be a problem.

Duran, Joan O'Connor, Rose Love, George Lambert, and Lois Tuwiner for their work on the garden.

A Unity Gardens Grant has been approved for \$1000 to purchase deciduous forest plants. Thanks to Scott

Our next meeting will be scheduled when plants become available late April or early May.



## **QWP Composting and Native Plant Gardens**

Pam Dennison, MG

The schedule is completed and we are gearing up for another busy year for the Composting and Native Plant Gardens project. We thank all the dedicated master gardeners who have signed up to help with the project this year. For any master gardener who was unable to attend the February sign-up meeting and would like to volunteer or get more information about the project, please contact:

variety for both volunteers and demonstration attendees alike. Please see Calendar of Events for dates and times.

Pam at [pamdennison7@verizon.net](mailto:pamdennison7@verizon.net) or  
Kathleen at [ktpartners@aol.com](mailto:ktpartners@aol.com)

April 18 is Earth Day at Quiet Waters Park and our volunteers will talk to visitors, give a composting demonstration and hand out compost bins provided by Anne Arundel County. The first of our scheduled work sessions and public compost demonstrations of the year will be the morning of Wednesday, April 22. If you would like more information please contact Pam Dennison [pamdennison7@verizon.net](mailto:pamdennison7@verizon.net) or Kathleen Cornell at [ktpartners@aol.com](mailto:ktpartners@aol.com).

This season, from late April through early November, our twice monthly work sessions and compost demonstrations will take place on one Saturday and one Wednesday morning each month to allow more



## **RainScaping Campaign at the Chesapeake Ecology Center**

Joyce Donlon and Susan Steele, MGs

The RainScaping Campaign at CEC project will have a volunteer training day in April. Interns are welcome to attend. The workshop will include a tour of the gardens with Zora Lathan and distribution of RainScaping materials. Please contact Joyce Donlon or Susan Steele if you would like to attend. The workshop is not Advanced Training hours, it would be program hours--Friday, April 17 @ CEC 9 am-12 pm.

Chesapeake Bay. The campaign will highlight pollutants carried to our waterways in stormwater runoff such as sediment, excess nutrients from overuse of fertilizers, pesticides, oils, metals, and other contaminants; as well as the lack of natural filtering processes and infiltration. The RainScaping Campaign will promote a comprehensive approach to easy-to-use solutions to clean up our streams, creeks, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay. RainScaping techniques such as rain gardens, native tree and shrub planting, rain barrels, and permeable pavers are proven and widely-accepted "beautiful landscaping techniques" that effectively manage stormwater runoff at the source, while protecting natural resources and providing wildlife habitat.

### **RainScaping Campaign Promotes Beautiful Solutions to Water Pollution**

Did you know that stormwater runoff is the major cause of water pollution throughout the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed?

Working together, over 30 (and growing) partners are implementing a RainScaping Campaign to improve the health of Anne Arundel County's tributaries and the

Urban and suburban landowners that understand the importance of rainscaping, but may not have the tools, knowledge or inspiration to start rainscaping on their

own, are our target audience. Through the efforts of the RainScaping Campaign, they will be empowered to actively participate in rainscaping activities which will result in reduced pesticide and fertilizer use, better management of pet waste and trash, and the installation of rain gardens and other landscaping techniques to eliminate polluted runoff.

The Campaign Partners will officially launch the RainScaping Campaign and the RainScaping.org website with a Campaign Kickoff at the rain gardens at the Chesapeake Ecology Center, located on the grounds of Adams Academy Middle School, 245 Clay Street, Annapolis, Maryland, on Earth Day, April 22, 2009, from 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. There will be an

opportunity to tour several rain gardens as well as hear from partners, sponsors, and public officials about the importance of this effort. We hope you'll join us! No RSVP is required. (In case of rain, the Campaign Kickoff will be held in the Adams Academy gymnasium.) For further information, please contact Zora Lathan at [zoralathan@earthlink.net](mailto:zoralathan@earthlink.net).

The RainScaping Campaign is sponsored by the 2008 Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grants Program—administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation—and RainScaping Campaign Partners.



## **Sanctuary Garden**

Sheila Gallagher, MG

Sanctuary Garden volunteers met on Saturday, March 28th. Sanctuary Garden is at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in Bay Ridge. The group reviewed last year's accomplishments and identified some of this year's goals, including planting, some additional native plants, transplanting others to more appropriate sites, making provisions for obtaining water to the planting sites, and tagging plants and shrubs that have been in the original garden as well as the new acquisitions.

The group has posted a grant application for this year. Most of this would go toward acquiring new plants. The agenda for today's meeting included: discussion of the best location for a water garden, a listing of acceptable sources for obtaining native plants, and development of a schedule for providing tours for the spring and

summer this year. May will probably be the initial and formal opening of the garden to visitors.

Because the weather was not cooperative, work was limited to basic clean-up efforts. Co-chairs Sheila Gallagher and Patsy Peters thanked the volunteers for coming and sharing information, suggestions, and ideas for 2009 plans.

The Sanctuary Garden is a beautiful spot on the Bay, so anyone interested in working at a peaceful, beautiful site would be welcomed to join the group.




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**A list of 2009 Projects with descriptions can be found on the web ([click here](#))**

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## **Earthworm Lovers! Unite!**

Elizabeth Materese, MG

Recently, Green House Product News Magazine, a trade publication dedicated to giving advice to commercial growers, published a question from one of its customers, addressed to the magazine's floriculture and nursery farm adviser.

How do I get rid of earthworms in my pots? My customers are complaining that the earthworms are crawling out of the pots...perhaps they are feeding on the roots of the plants! This from a commercial grower!

I envisioned the nursery farm adviser picking himself up from the ground to answer this incredulous query. Wouldn't you? I am also envisioning what must be the

ignorance of even commercial growers. What a job we Master Gardeners have ahead of us....from children who believe peas come from the freezer in Trader Joe's to radishes that come from the produce section of the supermarket to olives that grow in a jar! Who would have thought we would be in this desert of horticultural ignorance?

Anyway, after picking himself up, the nursery farm adviser gave the following account:

First of all, earthworms are your friends! They are beneficial and typically not a plant pest or root feeder. They have a vacuum cleaner for a mouth and pick up

very small organic matter as food, so they are not going to be a pest worth controlling.

The adviser acknowledged that, aesthetically, they may be a "nuisance."

A nuisance! Excuse me.... The adviser could have told the grower to become educated about earthworms! And, in turn, s/he could educate the customers. As a commercial grower, with thousands of pots that were going to various garden centers, the impact this could have is unimaginable...in a good way. And earthworms are free!

Instead, the grower was advised to lay plastic cloth down, admittedly an upfront cost in material and labor, but on an amortized basis, justifiable. But it would eliminate the need for chemical controls! Pullllleeease!



So, this is what we are up against. Where should our efforts begin? Probably in the schools. A little education can go a long way when it comes to horticulture. If we can educate the kids about where their produce comes from, how it grows, and what nourishes it, we may save some of the earthworms yet. Who knows which of the kids we talk with will grow up to be a commercial grower?

Want to know more about earthworms? Go to <http://www.backyardnature.net/earthworm.htm> and <http://www.microsoil.com/earthworm.htm>



## Announcements from the State Office

### Upcoming Advanced Trainings from State MG office

1. **\*\*MG Annual Training Day\*\*** May 28, 2009. You should be receiving your registration materials by the beginning of April. You will only have until May 1 to register, so be looking out for them. Classes fill up, so register early. We are expecting 500 or so MGs this year and we have a full slate of about 30 wonderful presentations including: ecological design; designing edible landscapes; plant diseases; snakes and turtles; diagnostic walks; tree ecology; home food preservation; green roofs; native plants for shade and sun; cooking with herbs; youth gardening; rain gardens; pests of herbaceous perennials; community gardens; raspberries, blueberries, strawberries; National Arboretum plant introductions and more!

2. Everyone should have received a newsletter from the State MG office by now, unless you were a new trainee or a transfer. Please check it out at: <http://mastergardener.umd.edu/StateNL09.pdf>

3. Upcoming courses:

To find information and registration forms for MG Advanced training, go to the web: <http://mastergardener.umd.edu/AdvancedTraining/index.cfm>

Ask A MG "Practicum" one 4 part course taking place in various locations in Baltimore County taught by Dr. Dave Clement, Mary Kay Malinoski,

Bonnie Pavlak and Joe Marsala. Field walks to Historic Hampton House, Oregon Ridge and more.

Plant ID Taxonomy in Harford, Howard, Montgomery and Queen Annes County- all daytime classes in June taught by Wanda MacLachlan or Steve Dubik

Entomology- Getting Intimate with Your Foe  
Tuesday, June 23 9:30-3:30 in Carroll Co. - Taught by Dr. Mike Raupp, one of Extension's best and most engaging presenters.

Landscape Horticulture: 200 Common Landscape plants

- Flowering Shrubs- daytime in St. Mary's Co, taught by Bob Stewart in June
- Ornamental Trees and Vines- daytime in Queen Anne's Co., taught by Steve Dubik in July
- Shade Trees- Evenings in Prince George's Co. taught by Wanda MacLachlan in July



### **Advanced Training Day Presentation**

Anne O Nourse, MG - Organizer

#### **Busting Garden Myths**

Scott Aker  
Gardens Unit Leader  
U.S. National Arboretum

February 21, 2009

**Myth: Double digging is the best way to improve your soil. It's English, so it has to be good.**

Fact: In its natural state, soil profiles allow for a smooth transition from higher organic matter near the surface to less at deeper levels. Disrupting this gradient creates soil moisture problems and impedes drainage, especially in heavy soils. Infertile subsoil ends up at the surface where most of the roots are located.

Best Practice: Use organic mulch near the surface and loosen the top six to eight inches of soil without flipping it over. Save your back.

**Myth: If your soil is heavy, adding sand will help to improve drainage. You can also place some sand or gravel under plants as you plant them to improve drainage.**

Fact: If your soil has a high clay content, sand will interfere with flocculation (aggregation of many clay particles into a single larger particle when lime is

added) of clay particles. This will actually decrease internal drainage. Pea gravel or sand placed below plants creates a perched water table.

Best Practice: Add organic matter to your soil to open it up. Use gypsum or lime to flocculate clay particles. Avoid compaction, and never work soil that is too wet.

**Myth: Yes, the soil is well drained. My garden is sloped, and the water runs right off it!**

Fact: Internal drainage is far more important than surface drainage. If water cannot move down through the soil profile, it will cause problems for anything you plant, even if the area is sloped.

Best Practice: Till in organic matter to ease soil compaction. Install perforated pipe to drain away excess water if the subsoil doesn't allow for drainage.

**Myth: High phosphorus fertilizer stimulates root growth and increases flowering.**

Fact: Flowering and root growth are controlled to a much greater extent by other factors. Phosphorus is not very mobile in soil, and if fertilizers containing phosphorus have ever been used, phosphorus levels will generally be adequate. In nature, trees are perfectly healthy without fertilization.

**Best Practice:** Before fertilizing, test your soil if possible. Rely on slow-release sources for nutrients. If you add organic matter, its decay will release nutrients into the soil.

**Myth: Deep fertilization is great for trees and shrubs.**

**Fact:** Most tree roots are in the top 18 to 24 inches of soil, and the fine roots most active in the uptake of nutrients are at the soil surface. Deep fertilization places fertilizer in a place where tree roots are unlikely to reach it.

**Best Practice:** Don't fertilize trees at all. If you feel you must, give them one cup of a balanced slow release fertilizer per inch trunk diameter in the fall, and leave the fertilizer on the surface. Use organic mulches to provide nutrients.

**Myth: Mycorrhizae inoculants need to be added when a new tree is planted.**

**Fact:** Mycorrhizae are ubiquitous in most environments. They will colonize the host tree roots if the soil conditions allow for it.

**Best Practice:** Don't use fungicides as a drench in your garden, and add some organic matter to the top layer of soil.

**Myth: A few marigolds in the tomato patch will control nematodes.**

**Fact:** Although extracts from marigold roots are nematicidal, the concentration of these compounds is never high enough to benefit plants growing near the marigolds. You'd have to grow a solid plot of marigolds as a cover crop for two months and turn the plants under for any benefit; even then only certain nematode species are controlled.

**Best Practice:** Rotate crops or solarize your soil if you have nematode problems.

**Myth: Tomatoes love to grow near carrots, but never plant your onions anywhere near your beans.**

**Fact:** Diversity is the key to success in the garden. Given the correct sunlight, nutrient, and soil conditions and good weather, plants will thrive regardless of who their neighbors are.

**Best Practice:** Rotate crops, and focus on cultural parameters rather than folklore.

**Myth: Handle container plants carefully so you don't disturb the root system.**

**Fact:** Woody plants lose a portion of their fine root system every year and can tolerate losing a portion of their root system at planting time. Girdling roots are a much greater threat to plant health than rough transplanting. Annuals that have to be handled gingerly should be direct sown.

**Best Practice:** Remove all circling roots on trees and shrubs and tease media away from the outer part of the root ball. Direct sow annuals that don't transplant easily.

**Myth: Ailing trees and shrubs should be fertilized to perk them up.**

**Fact:** Trees and shrubs that are in decline are not in need of additional nutrients, and heavy fertilization may cause rampant, unthrifty growth that is attractive to pests. Fertilizers may actually injure roots if applied heavily.

**Best Practice:** Ensure that factors causing the decline are remedied first, and wait to see if the tree or shrub is able to come out of decline before applying any fertilizer.

**Myth: Fertilize your turf in the spring.**

**Fact:** Cool season turf grasses need to be fertilized in the fall, when root growth is most active. Fertilizer applied in spring has a greater likelihood of being leached or running off the soil surface. Only warm season grasses should be fertilized in the spring, and they need much less than cool season grasses. Good quality turf can be maintained without fertilizer if the soil is properly prepared.

**Best Practice:** Invest in soil preparation, let clippings return nitrogen to the soil, and mow high for good quality turf.

**Myth: If you mow your turf shorter, you'll have to mow it less often, and you'll control any weed species that might be in your lawn.**

**Fact:** Turf responds to short mowing by growing rapidly. This stresses turf, and causes it to go dormant faster if conditions are dry. Weeds are more problematic with short mowing because light required for germination can reach the soil surface.

**Best Practice:** Mow turf at the highest setting on your mower.

**Myth: Give your gardens one inch of water per week if it doesn't rain. Roses need two inches per week.**

**Fact:** Irrigation decisions should take into account soil type, weather conditions, and the plants grown. Some plants, like yew, should never be irrigated. Others need consistent moisture. Check the soil before you irrigate, and irrigate to get water deeply into the soil. Don't use amount applied to determine when to stop irrigating.

**Best Practice:** Irrigate infrequently but thoroughly; do so in the early morning hours to make the best use of water resources.

**Myth: Trees should be topped to control their height and prevent damage to nearby structures.**

**Fact:** Topping results in rank growth that is poorly attached to the tree. The resulting branches are more likely to break than branches that are removed in the topping process.

**Best Practice:** Prune young trees early to develop good structure and you will limit the amount of pruning needed later and grow a tree that is not likely to topple or damage structures nearby.

Visit the U.S National Arboretum web site at [www.usna.usda.gov](http://www.usna.usda.gov)



### MASTER GARDENER ANNUAL TRAINING DAY

Thursday, May 28, 8 am - 4:15 pm  
University of Maryland, College Park Campus

Keynote speaker:

Miriam MacGillis  
Founder, Genesis Farm (NJ)  
Community Supported Agriculture Project  
and  
Earth Learning Center

"Securing our Health, Our Communities and the Common Good: One Garden at a Time"

Cultural historian and author, Thomas Berry has said: "to garden is to activate the deepest mysteries of the Universe". In this presentation, Miriam MacGillis of Genesis Farm in Blairstown, NJ, will reflect on the profound implications which arise out of the relationship between a gardener and the natural world in the ageless activity of planting and tending seeds as they emerge in the bounty and beauty of food and flowers. In these critical times, when the health and availability of food is so threatened and the essential beauty of nature is so diminished, the role of the gardener as a keeper of these treasures has never been more important. How we see ourselves in this larger historic context will be the focus of this presentation.

Miriam MacGillis may not be a household name, but she is one of the most articulate and inspiring speakers you'll ever hear. She will not only set the perfect big-picture tone for all that MGs do, but she'll inspire us and teach us the importance of our Grow It Eat It initiative. Miriam has lectured the world over and has inspired many of the important thinkers and doers of our time.

### Want an easy way to communicate with your fellow Master Gardeners?

If you would like an easy way to send a message out to the whole MG group or see messages sent by others, think about joining our Yahoo MG email group. This is a way for anyone to send or respond to messages or announcements (separate from the newsletter). All you need to do is to let Robin Costas know you want to be on the list by sending her an email at [costasrt@gmail.com](mailto:costasrt@gmail.com)

