Hello Master Gardeners! First I want to start off with a big thank you and congratulations. Thanks to Anne Lee for organizing our annual Volunteer Recognition Night - she works for hours calculating volunteer hours, ordering and preparing pins, decorating, setting up - it's a work of love on Anne's part and she should know how much it is appreciated. She had Volunteer Hour Pins for 76 of our Master Gardeners last Thursday night. Since many of you were unable to attend, we'll be giving out pins at the next several monthly meetings. Sorry you missed a great evening!

Congratulations are for Grace Wyatt, our Volunteer of the Year. She was also recognized last Thursday for her work with the STEM program. Last year, Grace had the germ of an idea that we should participate in STEM with Harford County middle schools. She didn't just think about it, however. She found out how we could get involved, publicized it with our MG group, advertised, and energized 20 Master Gardeners to participate. She guided us through the process of deciding on a program, collecting supplies and materials, training volunteers, and keeping everyone enthused. Grace spent countless hours making this program happen and it was a huge success. In addition, Grace is the MG who logs in our volunteer hours - a solitary task that requires real attention to detail. She's helping us move to an online system for logging in hours - another big task which is time-consuming as well. So, when you see Grace, make sure to congratulate her for being chosen Volunteer of the Year - and thank her for all her good work.

It's spring at last and things are popping out all over - it's so gratifying to see green emerging from soil previously covered with snow. I've made a temporary cold frame out of straw bales and corrugated plastic. Cabbage, lettuce and beets are so happy in there - I almost hate to transplant them! My peppers, eggplants, and tomatoes are safely under lights in the basement, growing and awaiting their day in the sun. I'm going to try a different planting technique this year - spreading things out in various beds rather than grouping them all together. I hope to confuse the pests and try to contain diseases by separating plants. I'll let you know how it works.

Lastly, my bees - one hive died this winter and the other is going gang-busters. My original hive suffered a catastrophe when the outer lid and inner cover blew off this winter - it then rained and turned very cold before I saw what had happened. Alas, they did not survive. They had made tons of honey, so they had plenty to eat, but they froze. I felt terrible when I saw what had happened. And I made sure I had a rock on the lids of both hives after that! My second hive - which was a swarm that Eleanor and August captured and gave to me - is just doing extremely well. The boxes are all full of bees and I've supplemented them with honey from the dead hive - so hopefully it will be a good year for them. I'm getting another package of bees so I hope to have 2 hives by the end of the spring.

We've got LOTS going on in April and May - make sure you check the calendar and jump in to help where you can. We'll be working at Liriodendron and Eden Mill gardens, the Farmer's Markets are gearing up on Saturday mornings, Ask a Master Gardener plant clinics are active again at the libraries, Grow It Eat It classes and the Garden Series are rolling along. There's something for everyone to get involved in. I hope to see many of you at the May meeting - we'll have our annual Plant Swap so pot up your extra plants to exchange with your fellow MG's.

Joan Parris '09
2014 Winter Damage -- A Discussion by Manor View Farm

After the coldest winter in recent memory, there have been many questions about how plant material has survived the winter. Along with the cold, there have been heavy ice storms that have caused massive physical damage. To make matters worse, parts of the south were subject to prolonged record breaking rainfall with flooding in some areas last summer. This caused extensive damage on some moisture sensitive crops such as Dogwoods, Cherries, Sugar Maples, and Arborvitaeas before winter even arrived.

With all of the talk of global warming, coupled with milder than normal winters for the last decade, plants native to the south are moving farther north than ever before. Many of the new plants introduced in the last decade have never really had their cold tolerance tested in the landscape. One only needs to look back at the tremendous number of popular plants we commonly use today that are relatively new to us. Consider the new ever blooming Azaleas, new varieties of Crepe Myrtles, including all of the dwarf varieties, new Buddleias, new Hollies, including the Red Hollies, Camellias, and many other plants that we now use regularly. There will be significant damage. Much will be determined by location, exposure, and the amount of time the plant had to get established. Be patient. See observations from our recent travels and conversations with growers and other plant experts on the next page.
2014 Winter Damage Continued...

**Crepe Myrtle**
Nobody is quite sure which varieties will fare the best. Certainly, the older, time tested varieties like Natchez and Muskogee should be at the top of the list. The best way to evaluate the Crepe Myrtles is to scrape the bark and see if the wood is still green. If the wood is brown, this should be pruned off. If the wood is green, it is not a guarantee that it is alive; only time will tell. Plants may leaf out much later than normal, or not at all. There have been cases of Crepes not leafing out until the following year. One sure sign of serious damage is if the upper branches of the plant begin to turn in toward the center of the plant. The best advice is to be patient and wait.

**Broadleaf Evergreens**
Cold damage on most broadleaf evergreens cannot be fully assessed until warmer weather arrives and plants begin to grow. Signs already indicate that damage in our area will be extensive. Off color foliage and leaf edges beginning to turn brown are being observed on Laurels, Hollies, Magnolias, Nandinas, Camellias and many other species. The full extent of the damage will not be known until later in the season, but it will range between defoliating and leafing out to death.

**Deciduous Plants**
Damage on deciduous plants is often hard to determine until leaf out time. Scrapping the bark is the first step. Also, because of all the snow, it is a good idea to check trunks and lower branches for damage from rodents like rabbits and voles. Also check for bark splitting, especially on trees with thin bark, like Cherries and Magnolias.
Before you bring home your chicks, please check local ordinances. Assuming it is legal to own chickens, here’s some information on where to begin:

**Where to start?**

As with all animals, shelter, food, and water are the basics. Chickens requirements are similar. You'll need a brooder for your chicks, which is basically where they live before they move outside to their coop. They have a few basic requirements for their brooder. Temperature control is very important for new chicks. They must be kept at around 90° to 95° for their first week, and drop temperature by 5° each week after that until the outside temperature is around 70° and they are fully feathered. Generally, a large cardboard box or plastic tote is sufficient for a handful of chicks, with the heat source to one side of the brooder. Heat is obtained typically by a Heat Lamp with a red bulb, but there are other products on the market for this purpose. A thermometer is helpful to gauge temperature, but their behavior will let you know if they are comfortable. If they are huddled together beneath the heat source, it’s too cold. If they are spread out and on the opposite side of the heat source, they are too hot. If they are active, eating and drinking, and not favoring a particular side, the temperature is just right! Pine shavings are generally used to line the bottom of the brooder as bedding.

Chicks will either be on medicated or non-medicated Chick Starter crumbles (your choice) for their first 20 weeks of age. After that point they will switch to “layer feed” which has added nutrients for hens when they start laying eggs. Grit aids chickens with digestion. It is important to provide chicks with “chick grit,” which is small sized gravel, until 20 weeks of age. When you switch to Layer Feed, at that point you will also switch to layer gravel which is a larger gravel substance. If you’d like to add a perch or two at varied heights, it is fun to watch them practice their roosting skills!

At around 6-8 weeks of age, the temperature should be warming up outside, and the chicks will quickly outgrow their brooder. There are many coops available commercially, and there are just as many that have been constructed with scrap lumber or other recycled or repurposed materials. The key to the coop is protection from both weather and predators,
but should have plenty of ventilation. Space requirements vary, but any chicken owner will tell you to build bigger than you think you need. Chicken keeping is addictive! Minimally, you want 4 square feet of floor space per chicken, a roosting bar with minimum length of 1 foot per chicken, and at least 1 nest box for every 3 hens, measuring about 12” square. Some chicken keepers have used milk crates or 5 gallon buckets on their sides, and those have been sufficient. Nesting boxes should be blocked off until about 16 weeks, so that they are sure to roost on their roosting bar at night, instead of the nesting boxes. This will make sure your hens start with good habits, keep the nesting boxes clean, as well as your future eggs. Adequate ventilation is necessary, and is best above roost bars so they aren’t in a draft, but so that ammonia fumes can dissipate. All open spaces should be covered with hardware cloth to keep predators out of the coop. Windows provide added light and ventilation.

A fenced in run is ideal to keep your chickens happy and healthy. You may also choose to free-range your chickens. My preference is a bit of both. Primarily mine stay in the fenced run that is predator proof (more to follow), but I do allow them supervised free range. Maryland predators range from snakes, who prey on eggs and small chicks, cats, opossum, raccoon, foxes, and neighborhood (or your own) dogs. Overhead predators are hawks and falcons, so your enclosed run should have the top protected as well. Fencing should be buried at least 12” deep and bent outward to protect from digging predators. Coops that are raised off of the ground 18” or more provide protection from digging predators, as well as provide an area shaded and protected from the elements. An area of loose dirt should be available for chickens to dust bathe. Dust protects from mites and fleas. If you allow your chickens to free range, you’ll find that your mulched garden beds become a favorite scratching spot.

At the age of 18-22 weeks, your chickens are ready to start egg laying. You do NOT need a rooster to get eggs. You only need a rooster if you want FERTILE eggs that will become chicks. At this point, you will want to switch to layer feed in either crumble or pellet form. You’ll also want to switch to adult grit, and provide ground oyster shell, in a separate container, free choice. Oyster shell gives the hens added calcium for producing shells. When your chickens start laying, you can also dry and crush their own eggshells to feed back to them. They tend to prefer their own shells over the oyster shell, but both are acceptable. Cues that your hens are about to lay include reddening combs and waddles and spending time in the nesting boxes. Nest box curtains provide hens with a dark private place to lay their eggs. These aren’t necessary, but can be as simple as stapled rags that can be easily
replaced season to season. Nesting boxes should have plenty of soft material in the bottom to prevent eggs from breaking. Hens will arrange straw or pine shavings to their liking. Fresh herbs such as peppermint, basil, or oregano, along with flowers like marigolds or nasturtium are a nice addition to nesting boxes to keep away any bugs or flies that may congregate in the coop.

Sometimes adding fresh herbs or a plastic Easter egg helps the hens know where to go to lay their eggs. It is not uncommon to get a “weird” egg every now and again. When they first start laying, you may get a soft shell or no shell egg, or a super small egg with only albumen (egg white) and no yolk, or one that is misshapen or bumpy. This is to be expected with new layers and isn’t cause for concern.

**Beating the heat** In the heat of summer, it is very important to keep your birds cool and hydrated. It is more important to keep your hens cool in summer than it is to keep them warm in winter. Fresh water should be provided at all times. Frozen watermelon is a favorite on the hottest of days. A shallow pan of water will allow the hens to cool their feet and provide heat relief. Be sure to provide shade areas. Natural branches and tree stumps give the hens places to perch and add interest to alleviate boredom.

**Surviving the cold** Depending on how dirty your coop gets, you’ll want to remove caked areas of litter from the coop as necessary, and change the bedding every few weeks or even monthly, depending on conditions. Fall is a good time to do a deep clean and winter prep. Provide extra bedding material, make sure all areas are firmed up, cleaned, caulked, loose screws are tightened, etc. Many “old timers” use the “Deep Litter Method” for the winter, and this has worked for me. Basically, you are composting inside the coop. Provide a good 4”- 6” base of pine shavings, and top with straw. Every week or so, give the litter a stir, and add some more straw. This will provide a natural heat in the coop for winter. Heat lamps are not necessary outside in the coop, and are dangerous. Coop fires happen and are devastating. Your birds will adapt as the weather gets cooler. If you do provide heat to the coop, and there is a power outage, the birds will not be acclimated to the weather and can die. A good practice is to cover the majority of the run with a roof or tarps to
protect the birds from bitter cold winds and snow. Chickens are “snow blind” so if the ground is covered in snow, they likely won’t leave the coop. Spreading some hay or straw in the run will give them the sight depth that they need. It will also provide some grains to scratch and hunt for and is a good boredom buster. Giving the hens scratch grains about an hour before they go in for the night will create internal heat as they digest the corn and grain. This is a welcomed treat, but shouldn’t be given in excess.

**Benefits of chickens to the backyard gardener** Chickens make great composters! If you can incorporate your compost pile in or near the chickens, this would prove beneficial to you both. Chickens naturally scratch and peck. This instinct naturally turns your pile for you. They will eat nearly every weed, clover, and imperfect (not rotten) vegetable or fruit that you would normally add to compost. They love it! The more weeds/compost they eat, the less feed you buy!

Chickens love to eat bugs, worms, and any other little critters they can find including mice, frogs, and small snakes! This is IPM at its finest! If allowed to free range in your garden, they will eat garden pests right from your plants! And as they graze, they leave their droppings. Their manure is high in nitrogen.

I personally have a two part composting system. Nearly all food wastes go to the chickens first, then when they are done, leftovers go to the second compost bin which is separate from where they feed. Chickens eat nearly all table scraps. They will pick a roasted chicken carcass clean, after it has been boiled for chicken stock of course. They will eat virtually all leftovers. Stale bread, Freezer-burnt bagels, Pasta, salad, shrimp shells and tails, rice, lettuce cores, strawberry tops, limp kale, and the list goes on. (Note, do not feed “rotten” foods. Over-ripe is ok, rotten is not ok). Our compostable household trash has nearly been eliminated!

Be aware that certain compostable items are not good for chickens and can be poisonous. Avocado, onion, citrus, and white potato are some. *Please do your own research regarding this, as many sources vary on what items are harmful or poisonous.*

**Resources** regarding chicken keeping that I have found especially helpful include:

http://www.fresh-eggs-daily.com/
http://www.tillysnest.com/
http://www.the-chicken-chick.com/

Views vary slightly on some topics from site to site, but I’ve found information from each site to be extremely helpful in my new chicken venture. Each site can be found on Facebook. Many thanks to each site for granting permission to reference bits of their information. For questions regarding chicken health or illnesses, please seek an avian vet. The opinions above are my own and may differ from others raising chickens, but so far my hens are happy and healthy! Give chickens a try!

*Darlene Bonaccorsi ’12*
**MG ANNUAL TRAINING DAY**

**Thursday, 5/29/14** at the University of Maryland College Park.

Please remember to register by 5/1/14 for $69 rate. Rate goes up to $79 after 5/1.

- 5/1 – Last day to order MG merchandise. Last day to register at early-bird $69 price
- 5/2 – Registration fee goes up to $79
- 5/13 – Confirmation letters with your list of classes are mailed out
- 5/15 – Last day to cancel and get a refund
- 5/29 - Master Gardener Annual Training day!!

Questions or having difficulty registering? Contact Robin Hessey by email rmhessey@umd.edu or call 410-531-1754.

April at Longwood Gardens and Sherwood Gardens
ENTOMOLOGY: ECOLOGICAL IPM

Location: UME Baltimore County, 1114 Shawan Road, Cockeysville, MD 21030
Date: Mondays, June 2 and June 9; 9:30am-3:30pm
Registration Fee: $49
Registration Deadline: May 23, 2014
Instructor: Michael J. Raupp, Ph.D., Professor and Extension Specialist, Entomology
University of Maryland

Course Description:

Bugs are fascinating. Learn how to recognize them, how they work, and how to safely deal with them as you begin to better understand how they fit into the ecology of the garden. Join the University of Maryland's pre-eminent bug man, Mike Raupp, as he teaches you the wonders of the bug world and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as only he can do. We are planning some hands-on experiences, outdoor explorations and new learning tools.

In addition to some fascinating insect CSI, this year's expanded 2-day course will include the fundamental concepts of population biology, community ecology, ecosystem functions and services as they relate to urban ecosystems and IPM. Some topics to be highlighted:

1. Role of native plants.
2. Planting to conserve diversity and attract pollinators and other beneficial insects.
3. Managing water and soil resources for maximum benefit of insect populations and ecosystem function.

This class will satisfy the Entomology requirement for all of you going for your Plant Diagnostics certificate and will be of great help to those of you working at Ask a MG events.

VEGETABLE INTENSIVE TECHNIQUES AND SMALL SPACE GARDENING

Location: UME Kent County - 709 Morgnec Road, Suite 202, Chestertown, MD 21620.
Plus 3 field trips to nearby locations
Date: Saturday, June 21, 2014
Registration Fee: $49
Registration Deadline: June 13, 2014
Instructors: Jon Traunfeld, Director, Home and Garden Information Center and Specialist in Fruits and Vegetables, UME, Kent Phillips, UME Master Gardener, Howard Co., Sabine Harvey, UME Kent County and MG
**Course Description:** Get more out of your vegetable gardens with less work and expense. Find out how to increase production per square foot using sustainable and cost-effective practices. Learning for this class will be mostly hands-on and will take place in different gardens.

We’ll share, discuss and evaluate specific practices, such as interplanting, succession planting, vertical gardening, square foot gardening, drip irrigation, and season extension. You will be asked to complete some pre-class online assignments so we can maximize our hands-on time in class.

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**VEGETABLE PLANT AND PEST DIAGNOSIS**

with Jon Traunfeld

Sharpen your plant diagnostic, pest identification and control strategy skills in the vegetable garden. We plan a collaborative, hands-on learning experience with troubleshooting in a vegetable garden, examination and diagnosis of samples, and discussion and effective prevention, monitoring, and control strategies. We’ll take a close look at non-chemical controls and the effectiveness of available organic pesticides. There will be some pre-class online assignments so we can maximize our hands-on learning time in class.

How come I’m not getting any squash this year? What’s killing my tomato vines? Are there any good organic controls for stink bugs? The gardening public looks to us for answers to thousands of food garden questions each year. Now we’ll be better able to answer all of them!

This course will count as one of the units you will need to get the advanced vegetable gardening certificate.

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**OTHER MG CLASSES**

Check the MG website [http://extension.umd.edu/mg/advanced-training](http://extension.umd.edu/mg/advanced-training) for all of the details on these upcoming classes.

- Plant Diseases – September in Frederick Co.
- Youth Vegetable Gardening- September in Montgomery and Anne Arundel Counties
- Native Grasses – October in Harford Co.
State MG Announcements

MG POLICIES AND GUIDELINES
New to the MG program or unfamiliar with all of the MG policies? – be sure to read the MG Policies and Guidelines again for working with the public, using the MG title and other important topics.

GIEI NEWS- Year of the Cucurbit
We have declared 2014 to be the year of the Cucurbit so MGs working in the GIEI program are busy educating the public about this important vegetable group (includes the squash, pumpkin, cucumber, gourd, watermelon, and cantaloupe). You can go to one of their presentations or Jon Traunfeld’s presentation at MG Annual Training Day.

GIEI NEWS- 100 Square Foot Garden Challenge
We’d also like to challenge MGs and the gardening public to take the 100 square foot garden challenge. Enter the 2014 Grow It Eat It contest and show us “What Can YOU Grow in 100 Square Feet?” OPEN to all gardeners- city, suburban, country; experienced and first-time gardeners; backyard, community, or school garden. We have lots of examples and resources to help you. Use your imagination- the sky’s the limit.

For rules, how to register and some great resources go to the Grow It Eat It website.

University of Maryland Master Gardener Program
Our Vision: The Maryland Master Gardener vision is a healthier world through environmental stewardship.

Our Mission: to support the University of Maryland Extension mission by educating residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes, and communities.

Harford County Master Gardener Coordinator Joyce Browning jbrowni3@umd.edu

The University of Maryland, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources programs are open to all and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry or national origin, marital status, genetic information, political affiliation, or gender identity and expression.