Hello Master Gardeners!

This will be my last official article for the newsletter as my tenure as President draws to a close. It has been a terrific three years working with all of you. I think back on the things we have accomplished - in addition to the "normal" activities of plant clinics at the libraries and farmer's markets, Bay-Wise certifications, special fairs and festivals, work at Liriodendron, Eden Mill and Rockfield Manor Gardens, not to mention GIEI classes, we launched several new programs that have been very successful. The Garden Series continues to attract many interested residents to learn more about ornamental gardening. The STEM series is reaching many middle school students and their parents, with the possibility of even more outreach in some of the schools. We've worked with several groups helping build their established Community Gardens. It has been very gratifying that every time there has been a new opportunity, LOTS of you have stepped up to volunteer! You're a great group to work with and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I'll happily hand the torch to the new board in February, confident that you all will continue to be eager participants as we continue our mission to help educate residents of Harford County in safe, sustainable landscaping practices. Thank you!!

Joan Parris '09
At the January meeting I talked about the interesting soil test anomalies that I recently experienced. I had sent a soil sample to UMass in November and it came back indicating that phosphorous levels in my soil were excessive. That was so different from the last test that I had done in 2011 that I decided to do a re-test. I sent samples to both UMass and to Penn State who had done the 2011 test. The results from UMass again indicated excessive phosphorous levels. The results from Penn State indicated that I needed to add phosphorous. What a puzzle!

I emailed the 2 labs and asked for an explanation - and I sent each lab the other's test result. Much to my surprise, both labs responded immediately. A lab tech from Penn State called and left a message for me and I haven't been able to contact him yet. However, UMass sent an email with a plausible (and important) explanation.

I learned the two labs use a different testing method for nutrient extraction. The quantification method for phosphorus measurements are also different. When you convert the nutrients to the same scale, the actual level of phosphorous in my soil is about the same in both lab results.

The big difference between the two labs is interpretation of the data. UMass indicated that the soils in New England are sandy and acidic resulting in more phosphorous leaching into the waterways. Therefore they have a lower level of what they consider optimum for phosphorous. UMass indicated that soils in the region around Penn state are finer grained and less acidic and therefore the Penn State lab has a different standard of optimum nutrient levels.

Bottom line - first, when you choose a soil test lab, it's probably best to use one close to your geographic region because nutrient recommendations, given by the labs, are based on the regional soil standards of that area. Secondly always use the same lab, as different labs use different testing methods. This was certainly an interesting experience for me and I hope it proves useful for many of you as well.

Joan Parris '09
The Master Gardeners of Harford County, supported by University of Maryland Extension, are offering a scholarship in the amount of a onetime $500 award to a graduating high school senior who resides in Harford County. The recipient must be a student who plans to attend an accredited college or university to pursue studies in Agronomy, Botany, City Landscape Planning, Conservation, Entomology, Environmental Science, Forestry, Horticulture, Landscape Design and/or allied subjects. The completed application will be due in April 2015. For more details, go to the Harford County Master Gardeners website from our webpage: http://extension.umd.edu/harford-county or visit the Extension Office for an application.

With just a few oak leaves barely hanging onto trees, the forest near my house looks barren. Most trees have shed their leaves. The golden hues of autumn have been replaced with grays and browns.

But amidst this monochromatic scene, a tree stands out with glorious color. Ignored most of the year, the American holly (*Ilex opaca*) now takes center stage with bright green leaves and ripe red berries.

Like all evergreens, the American holly does not lose its leaves at the end of the growing season. The leaves of the holly are thick and leathery which prevents the loss of water that causes other trees to shed their leaves. The leaves have large, remotely spined teeth and are alternately arranged. They are 2–4 inches long, smooth, satin green above, and yellowish-green below.
The American holly:
~ is only one of several hundred holly species found throughout the world.
~ It is the state tree of Delaware
~ can be found scattered from Massachusetts south along the coast to Florida. In the South, it ranges west to eastern Texas and southeastern Missouri.
~ tolerates shade as an understory tree and thrives in full sun.
~ grows best on well-drained, sandy soils, but will tolerate those that are somewhat poorly drained.
~ the only temperate or tropical region naturally lacking any holly species are western North America and Australia.

People have long been fascinated with these evergreens. Druids viewed holly as a tree never abandoned by the sun they worshipped. Romans presented holly boughs with gifts to esteemed friends. And many cultures “deck the halls” with holly, using them as seasonal decorations.

People aren’t the only ones who benefit from these evergreens. Hollies provide excellent shelter for many types of birds who are the principal holly berry consumers. The list includes Northern flickers, gray catbirds, cedar waxwings, mourning doves, ruffed grouse, northern bobwhites, cardinals, blue jays, northern mockingbirds, white-throated sparrows, eastern towhees and wild turkeys. In addition birds are important in dispersing holly seeds. Large winter-migrating flocks of small birds such as the cedar waxwings and American goldfinches are perhaps the most important in this role.

Hollies attract wildlife especially in the winter as birds flit among the branches for cover and food. Many other animals feed on American holly, including white-tailed deer, gray squirrels, chipmunks, meadow voles, red foxes, raccoons, cottontail rabbits, white-footed mice and box turtles.

Although birds and other native wildlife benefit from holly, keep cats and dogs from eating its leaves and berries, which can cause severe gastrointestinal symptoms.
Hollies are dioecious, which means that a single tree will have either male or female flower parts. Both male and female flowers are small and creamy white. They appear in late spring or early summer and are pollinated by bees, wasps, ants and moths. Only the female trees bear fruit.

Usually looking more like a large shrub or small tree, the American holly is a slow grower. In time they can reach up to 60 feet in height. The fruit, known as drupes, ripen from September through December and stay on the tree throughout the winter.

This native holly makes a wonderful landscaping tree when planted singly and given sufficient space to grow. It is important to plant both male and female flowering hollies if prolific berry production is desired. Ideas for homeowner landscaping is to group them as hedges to screen the yard from activity and noise or to serve as a background planting.

The wood of American holly is known as one of the whitest woods containing white sapwood and ivory-white heartwood. It is used for specialty items such as fancy inlays, wood engravings, scroll work, measuring scales and rules for scientific instruments.

Hollies are not only beautiful to look at but are great for the soul. We chase away dreary winter doldrums by decorating our homes with their sprigs and our gardens with their berries.

Kathy Reshetiloff on January 04, 2015
Condensed for Harford County MG newsletter
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Heigh Ho, The Holly**

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man’s ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.
Heigh ho, sing heigh ho, unto the green holly;
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, Heigh ho, the Holly!
This life is most jolly.

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remember’d not.
Heigh ho, sing heigh ho, unto the green holly;
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, height ho, the holy!
This life is most jolly.

William Shakespeare

**SNOW POLICY**

With winter here we may have schedule changes. MG activities at the Extension Office follow Harford County Public School (HCPS) closures. If HCPS are closed, MG activities for that day are cancelled. If HCPS open late, activities will occur as scheduled. If HCPS close early, evening activities are cancelled. Occasionally, there will be activities at another location, such as libraries or Eden Mill and those locations generally follow Harford County government closures. If you have any doubt about whether an event will happen, call the chairperson in charge to make sure of the schedule.
Santa Rosa Garden’s Tips for Winter Gardening

Winter can be a time of rest for the gardening community but it can also be a time of restlessness for those of us who crave those active days outside in our gardens. To keep that passion stoked, Santa Rosa Gardens has compiled a list of some activities that you can do to make sure that you’re off to a good start for the upcoming spring season.

First, they recommend planning for spring now through a few methods. It’s helpful to look over last year’s garden journal or notes and put any necessary information into the new gardening journal. Also, fertilizers can be purchased now for springtime. Santa Rosa suggests a 0-20-20 (nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium) spread for the beginning bed dressing since perennials do not need much nitrogen and a 5-10-5 for a side dressing of the plants in spring and summer. In addition, they say to place your orders for spring plants now. Look for new varieties that are being introduced and replace poor performers. You can also plan for new garden areas by drawing up a plan and ordering the plants that you wish to have in that space.

Next, you can tackle some indoor chores. Houseplants should have their watering and feeding cut back but a light misting could be helpful since the air is drier this time of year. Check them for insects and give them a soapy bath if necessary. While potted plants are semi-dormant, check if they need to be repotted and do so if they are pot-bound. Cuttings can be started and given to friends and family if you have extras. You can also hop online and see what plants add beauty to a winter landscape if you wish to add some in the future. Another beneficial chore to do is to clean your tools and sharpen them. If you have a potting shed or space that needs organizing, that can be a useful activity to take care of now as well. Santa Rosa states that wooden handles on tools can be sanded with medium grit sand paper and coated lightly with linseed oil to prevent splitting. Furthermore, shovels can be sharpened by running a file over the edges at a 45 degree angle about 2 or 3 times. Any plants that you have received as a gift should be allowed to drain well by removing the foil wrappings or piercing the wrap and using a drainage dish.
If you can’t stand to be indoors anymore, Santa Rosa has plenty of outdoor activities as well. They recommend covering newly transplanted perennials with breathable mulch. They suggest taking evergreen boughs and covering them with dry leaves to shade the soil from the winter sun and keep it at a consistent temperature. Remember to remove the coverings as the temperatures warm up. Blueberries and raspberries can be pruned in late winter before the buds swell and thinner twigs can be removed from the base and thicker branches. To keep a nice shape, cut off long pieces that go too far out from the bush and remove crossing branches. On your perennials, cut back the remaining foliage to send the energy to the roots. If you have a fireplace or pit, collect the wood ashes for natural potassium in your perennial beds in spring. Another suggestion that Santa Rosa makes is that you should keep your bird feeders full but keep in mind that old perennial blossoms from *Echinacea*, *Rudbeckia*, *Coreopsis*, *Eupatorium*, and *Panicum* ssp. can be natural sources of seed for birds if left to stand through the winter.

Lastly, any hydrangeas that are smooth or panicle type can be cut back to the ground in late winter to encourage large summer blooms or you can cut them back to 18” of branching to support new growth with smaller blooms. Butterfly bushes can also be cut back hard if you want large blooms. Santa Rosa encourages you to cut them back to 6” for dwarf varieties and 24” for larger varieties.

With these indoor and outdoor activities in mind, it can be easy to keep busy during the winter season and remember that spring is just around the corner!

*Julia Melka ’13*

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**COCONUT CARROT BREAD RECIPE**

**Ingredients**

- 3 eggs
- 1/2 cup salad oil
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 cups regular all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp soda
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 cups finely shredded carrots
- 2 cups coconut
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

**Directions:** In a large bowl, beat the eggs until light. Stir in salad oil and vanilla; add carrots, coconut, raisins and nuts, and mix until well blended.

Combine the flour, salt, soda, baking powder, cinnamon, and sugar; sift into the first mixture. Stir just until well blended.

Spoon into a 9 by 5-inch loaf pan that has been well buttered and dusted with flour. Bake at 350 degrees for about 1 hour, or until it tests done.

Remove from pan and cool thoroughly. Its flavor and texture improve if wrapped and refrigerated for several days. It freezes very well.

Makes 1 loaf. ENJOY!

*Diane Jones 2014*
Seed Swaps at the Harford County Libraries

Thursday February 5 4-6:30 pm at the Joppa Library
Saturday February 28 1-3:30 pm at the Whiteford Library

Swap seeds with your fellow green thumbs!
Make sure your seed packets are labeled with the variety and when they were harvested.

THE FIRST LOCAL SEED SWAPS

Thank you for the hundreds of hours you gave so freely to our MG program.
Penn State Extension GardenWise 2015
Saturday March 14, 2015  8-4 pm
extension.psu.edu/.../gardenwise
Please note our new location at Central Middle School, York, PA; 1950 N Hills Rd, York, Pennsylvania 17406
Registration Deadline: Saturday, March 7, 2015
This year’s program features some of gardening’s hidden topics:
- How to build a strong soil food web - Dr. Elaine Ingham
- Biological weed management - Dr. Elaine Ingham
- Gardens and bird migration - Scott Weidensaul
- Milkweeds - Jim McCormac
- Insects we can’t do without
- Fly gardens

Join us for a great day of learning and stewardship!

2015 Bay Area Fruit Meeting with University of Maryland Extension
Wednesday February 25, 2015  8:30-3:30
University of Maryland Wye Research and Education Center in Queenstown, MD;  410-827-8056
University of Maryland Scientists and Extension Specialists will discuss:
- Performance of Rabbiteye, Southern Highbush and Northern Highbush Blueberry Cultivars
- Spotted Wing Drosophila Management
- Asian Pear Variety Performance and Culture
- Basics of Nematode Management
- Disease Management Following a Wet Year
- Major Blueberry Disease Management Strategies
- 2015 Updates on Pre-bloom to Bloom Time Fungicide Use for Grey Mold Control in Strawberry
- Tree Fruit Pests: The New, the Bad & the Ugly

Pesticide credits will be offered for attendance at this meeting and re-registration will be required.
For more program information, contact Michael Newell 410-827-7388 or mnewell@umd.edu

Mt Cuba Center Classes - Birds and Beans with Scott Weidensaul
Saturday, February 7, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm; (snow date: Sunday, February 8, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm)
Registration:  $35
Mt. Cuba Center, 3120 Barley Mill Rd., Hockessin, DE 19707
Naturalist and author Scott Weidensaul explore the wonder and mechanics of migration, and the simple, effective ways we can help preserve our migrants, from what we plant in our gardens to what we pour into our morning mug of coffee. Be part of the solution!

Mt Cuba Center Classes - Shake Up Your Foundation with Renee Kemmerer
Wednesday, February 25, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm; (snow date: Friday, February 27, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm)
Registration:  $30
Landscapers often install Bradford pear, burning bush and Japanese pachysandra in foundation plantings. Substitute these invasives with native trees, shrubs and perennials that feature multi-season interest, support songbirds, and provide fall color. With the knowledge gained in this class, make the transformation from an ecological desert to a beautiful, bountiful oasis one plant at a time.
THE MARYLAND MASTER GARDENER MISSION STATEMENT

The Maryland Master Gardener mission is to support the University of Maryland Extension by educating Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.

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.

Joyce Browning
Urban Horticulturist
Master Gardener Coordinator
Harford County Office

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