News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: 5/7/2013

Gardeners Conserve Our Natural Beauty

As redbuds flash purple along our roadways and tulips blink red and yellow at our doorsteps, I am reminded that natural beauty is both awe-inspiring and worth protecting. Not just on Earth Day, but every day.

Gardeners are some of the best environmentalists, choosing smart practices that help, not harm our natural resources. Every choice you make as a gardener can tip the balance toward conservation.

Healthy gardens grow healthy plants. So build healthy soil to keep your gardens productive and part of a vibrant ecosystem. How? Add organic matter like compost every year to feed the soil community of earthworms, microbes, fungi and more.

Did you know that only 1 in 10 bugs are bad bugs? Yes, most insects are beneficial insects, a flying, crawling army of helpers that help keep bad bugs in check. So, protect the good guys by choosing organic controls that are kind to the environment.

A great guide to going organic is our Home & Garden Information Center website at http://extension.umd.edu/hgie. Click on “plant diagnostics” and type in an insect name in the search box. Up will pop a fact sheet that tells you what it is, whether it needs managing and how to do that organically.

Don’t know what the bug is? Slide down those tabs on the diagnostics page to ‘vegetables’, ‘shrubs’, or ‘flowers’ to see pictures of problems and likely culprits. Or, bring me a sample to identify. I have the scoop on organic controls, too.

Environmentally-minded gardeners have a bagful of tricks to thwart bad bugs without chemicals. We use floating row covers to block them, rotate crops to fool them, and...
plant companion plants to encourage good bugs. We squish eggs, pick off beetles and hose off aphids. It works.

Are you recycling? The whole idea of sustainability is using what you have on site to meet your needs. So turn your leftovers, leaves and clippings into compost. Use tree trimmings as trellises. And let grass clippings lie as a free source of nitrogen for your lawns.

Water is a finite resource, so it’s important to manage it wisely. Use rain barrels and soaker hoses. Mulch beds. Plant natives and other drought-resistant plants. And never, ever water midday when you can lose more than half the water to evaporation.

Lawns can make or break your environmental score card. Mow high – 3 to 4 inches – to naturally thwart weeds. In the summer, let your lawn go dormant. And skip the 9-step lawn care plan and fertilize only in the fall.

What else can you do to rack up points as an Earth-friendly gardener? Remove invasive plants that bully out natives. Use slow-release or organic fertilizers. And support wildlife by providing food, water and shelter.

I hope these tips will inspire you to do more to care for the environment and feel good about all the smart gardening practices you already use. Let’s make every day Earth Day.

_Annette Ipsan is the Extension educator for horticulture and the Master Gardener program in Washington County for the University of Maryland in Washington County. She can be reached at 301-791-1604 or aipsan@umd.edu._