News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: 4/2/2013

Gardeners Protect the Bay with Bay-Wise Gardening

Did you know that we live in the Chesapeake Bay watershed? Everything we do in our gardens and homes affects the health of the Bay and our waterways. It all matters.

To improve water quality and conserve natural resources, we teach environmentally smart gardening techniques through the Bay-Wise program. Master Gardeners and I offer classes and do yard reviews to certify landscapes as Bay-Wise.

A Bay-Wise landscape is planted, watered, fertilized, mulched and mowed properly. Pests and runoff are managed responsibly. Wildlife is encouraged, waste is recycled and the waterfront is protected. That’s the Bay-Wise top 10.

Let’s look at how you can build a Bay-Wise garden.

Excess fertilizer pollutes water. To know what fertilizer your plants need – and don’t need – get a soil test every few years. Leave grass clippings on the lawn as free fertilizer. Choose organic or slow-release fertilizers. And fertilize lawns only in the fall.

Save water by watering in the morning, using soaker hoses or drip irrigation, and by planting drought-resistant plants. Let your lawn go dormant in the summer. It’s resting – not dead.

Mowing matters in Bay-Wise gardens. Mow high – 3 to 4 inches – to discourage weeds, encourage deep roots, and build pest and disease resistance.

Rainwater can whoosh away quickly to carry pollutants into our waterways. Stop it by directing downspouts into lawns or beds, adding rain barrels or a rain garden.
Mulch preserves moisture and adds organic matter. Keep mulch at 2 to 3 inches and consider natural materials like compost, dried leaves and grass clippings.

Compost builds healthy soil, grows healthier plants, keeps waste out of landfills and is easy to make. So, start a compost pile in your Bay-Wise garden.

Manage pests responsibly by looking for them regularly and preventing problems with barriers and traps. Attract beneficial insects with companion plants like basil, parsley and alyssum. And control bad bugs with non-chemical techniques like handpicking or organic controls.

Plant wisely by using native plants which are naturally pest and disease resistant and need less water and fertilizer.

Encourage wildlife by adding a birdbath or pond. Plant trees, shrubs and perennials that offer food, shelter or nest sites. Provide shelter with birdhouses, toad houses and brush piles. And add butterfly host plants and nectar-rich plants for hummingbirds.

If you live along the waterfront, protect it by establishing a Bay-Wise plant border and keeping fertilizer, grass clippings and animal waste away.

Would you like to have your yard certified as Bay-Wise? E-mail me to request a copy of the Bay-Wise yardstick, a self-test that shows you how your yard measures up. Once I get your completed yardstick, I’ll contact you to set up a yard review.

Master Gardeners will visit your property, review your yardstick and make suggestions. If your yard measures up, you will get a handsome Bay-Wise sign to put in your yard to tell everyone you care about healthy gardens, communities and waterways.

Bay-wise is better. I hope you will consider making your garden Bay-Wise.

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.