Hello Master Gardeners,

Hello Master Gardeners! It's February and that means Horticulture Day at Longwood Gardens. What a treat to pass from piles of snow outside to lilies, orchids, and all kinds of other wonderful, fragrant, tropical plants in the Longwood Conservatory. The speakers could not have been more diverse. We heard from the head gardener of Levans Hall in England - a 300 year old estate with formal gardens surrounding the castle. Next up was Marcus de la Fleur, a 6'7" horticulturist who specializes in sustainable projects to control rain water. Kerry Mendez was full of energy as she told us about her favorite "tough love" perennials that need minimal care. We ended the day with a wonderful rose expert. He is president of the Heritage Rose Foundation and has begun an all-volunteer project to restore heritage roses.

Lunch featured the famous Longwood mushroom soup, roasted vegetables, and other delectable foods. And then there was the fabulous plant and book sale. You always have to plan how many people are in your car so that you can fit in all the plant purchases! The Longwood horticulture day has become a tradition for me which takes the sting out of a long cold winter.

January was a busy Master Gardener month as we kicked off our participation in the STEM program at North Harford Middle School. As Grace Wyatt previously reported, it was a huge success. Our group consisted of 15 Master Gardeners who were deployed to interact with over 200 students visiting our display table of bugs and microscopes. Joyce and Beth Poggioli gave a great presentation on controlling storm water runoff and got all the kids (and parents) involved. We'll do two repeat performances in February.

The Garden Series at Bel Air Library continues to be a big success - over 40 participants came to our first presentation. Grow It Eat It starts on February 19 with Seed Starting. Thanks to everyone who has worked and continues to work hard to make all these programs such great successes! Mark your calendars now for our Volunteer Recognition celebration on April 3 at Liriodendron. This will be our chance to congratulate one another on a job well done and to recognize our Volunteer of the Year. Don't miss it!

Joan Parris 2009
MEETING AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Joan Parris ’09

Advanced Bay-Wise training will be offered at the Harford County Extension Office on March 11, 18, and 25. The first two Tuesdays will be classroom training from 9:30AM - 3:30PM. On the last day of training we will conduct a practice home certification at a local landscape.

This training is only offered in Harford County every few years so don’t miss the opportunity! We need 25 participants or we risk cancellation - so – please consider furthering your training in Bay-Wise landscaping techniques today.

Topics taught by University of Maryland Extension authorities will be Well Water Protection, Septic System Maintenance, the Hydrologic Cycle, and Soil Compaction – it is a serious course with lots of great information we all need! Cost is $50 and includes a huge packet of materials. Call the office to register 410-638-3255.

STATE RECOGNITION FOR HARFORD COUNTY MGs

The following Harford County Master Gardeners will be recognized for their service for 5, 10, 15 or 20 years in the next state MG newsletter. Thank you for serving!

Harford - 15 Years- Class of 1998
- Eleanor Cone
- Anne Lee
- Germaine Vadas
- Regina Hart
- Maxine Lynch

Harford - 10 Years- Class of 2003
- Suzanne Arthur
- Marianne Mathews
- Melody Karbley

Harford - 5 Years
- Lee Ann Anderson
- Wallace Chaillou
- Mary Driver
- Ruth Ann Leubecker
- Mary Trotta
- Joyce Browning
- Rebecca Cody
- Helene Klaier
- Ellen Post

DAYTIME STUDY GROUP

The next Daytime Study Group will meet at HCEO at 1:00 PM on Wednesday, March 19, 2014. Our speaker will be Melody Karbley as she visits the Secret Gardens of England. In addition she will be demonstrating the easy to use soil block maker. This economy tool compresses moist potting mix into neat cubes for seed starting.
The Basics of Flower Arranging

Linda Masland - 1999

The December 2013 meeting of the Daytime Study group featured a workshop on the Basics of Flower Arranging. Master Gardeners who participated showed amazing creativity and had lots of fun making arrangements using mostly plant material from their own gardens. Congratulations on a job well done to those who attended the meeting. If you missed it, here are some basics I hope you will put to good use!

When cutting foliage and flowers from your garden, avoid the heat of the day and have a bucket of water with you in which to place cuttings. Put the bucket of cuttings in a cool place for at least several hours – preferably over night so the cuttings can take up lots of water. If using flowers from the grocery store, re-cut the stems when you get home then follow the same procedure. For woody stems, cut a one or two inch slit in the stem to get better water absorption. These procedures are called “Conditioning” and they will make your arrangement last as long as possible.

Decide where you will use your arrangement before you begin. An arrangement designed for a low coffee table will look much different if placed on a high mantel. If you’re creating a dinner table centerpiece, make the design low enough that guests can see over it or place it on a high, clear pedestal so guests can see through. Placing several small arrangements and candles around the table is a fast and easy way to create a dramatic effect. Remember balance when doing an arrangement – larger blooms towards the bottom, smaller ones at the top. Even if your design will be set against a wall, including some plant material at the back of the design will add visual depth and interest. Don’t overcrowd your blooms – let them all show off!

A word of caution – metal containers almost always leak so make sure they have a liner or save them to use with dried plant material. White and shiny containers can overpower your design so be careful. If using white, include some white flowers in the design. For either white or shiny - allowing some plant material to drape over the edge of the container can minimize container dominance. When using oasis, make sure to cut it large enough that it will extend at least 1/4 inch above the rim of the container. This allows you to place plant material at angles and not just straight down in the container. Make sure the oasis is thoroughly wet before you begin and check the water level frequently. Some plant material drinks up water more quickly than others. Adding fresh water helps extend the life of the arrangement.

Don’t limit your plant material simply to foliage and flowers - fruits and vegetables make great additions to an arrangement. Wooden picks or skewers can act as their stems. Other fun additions are colored wire or wired ribbon that can be bent and twisted through the arrangement; feathers; gnarly or sparkly branches; driftwood; shells, etc. An all-foliage arrangement can also be very eye catching by the use of different leaf colors, shapes and textures. Finally, the more you work with foliage and flowers to create arrangements, the more you’ll enjoy it. The next time you have friends over for dinner, don’t just plan the menu – plan a flower arrangement to go with it!
Did you know that trash can be turned into fuel? According to an article by Michael G. Williams (The Erikeson Tribune, August 2008) a biology-based renewable energy company, Coskata, Inc., has found a way to produce ethanol from a renewal source other than corn. This source is trash - garbage, tires, plant waste, wood chips and diapers. By using a 3-step process these materials are gasified to produce “systhesis gas,” which feeds microorganisms which then excrete ethanol.

Bill Roe, CEO of Coskata, Inc, agrees that the process could give oil companies a run for their money. He further explained that the production cost of a gallon of gasoline is $2 on average while his company can produce ethanol for less than $1 per gallon. This means the consumer could conceivably pay $2 or less per gallon for ethanol produced from trash. The cost savings comes in part from the expensive process used to produce gasoline. According to an analysis by Argonne National Laboratory gas production uses 7.7 times the amount of energy required to produce ethanol.

Mr. Roe said there are two other disadvantages to using renewable sources like corn to produce ethanol. This process requires large amounts of water. In towns where ethanol is produced citizens are concerned about the reduction of aquifer water supplies. The Coskata process uses 1/3 to 1/2 as much water even without taking into account the amount of water used to grow the corn. Another disadvantage to ethanol production from grains is the fact that this process increases consumption of feed stocks like corn, which drives up the price of meat and milk. Thereby, the high cost of one necessity is replaced with another.

The marketing of ethanol is not without problems - one being availability of ethanol pumps and ethanol vehicles to consumers. This is a problem that is not only shared by Coskata, but by others. GM, for instance, has been working on biofuels for over 25 years when they started working on FlexFuel in 1990. As of 2008, GM had 300 ethanol pumps, know as E85, in 15 states. Florida is an area where there were over 5,000 FlexFuel vehicle owners in 2008. As a result there was development of more pump stations in the greater Miami area. Another factor with the use of ethanol although it is cheaper fuel it is less efficient, providing ¼ less mileage per gallon than gasoline.

In June, 2014, an international conference on ethanol production will be held in Indianapolis, IN. People from around the world will be attending the conference to share what, where and how ethanol is being produced and new technologies. One important agenda item is how to produce ethanol without depleting another vital resource, such as water.

The federal government has passed the Energy Independence and Security Act, which calls for an increase in biofuels to 36 billion gallons in 2022. As a result, Mr. Roe estimates that by 2030 35% of the gasoline consumed could be replaced by these biofuels.

A big advantage to producing ethanol from trash is there will be less waste reaching landfills making a cleaner environment. In addition this process will not increase costs in other areas, such as food and it saves precious resources such as water. Using something that has been thrown away to make fuel is an environmentally sound practice!
Years before I became a serious gardener, I was interested in watching the comings and goings of birds. I had bird feeders long before I ever planted my first perennial. But about twenty years ago the two hobbies merged, and I found I could entice a lot more birds into my environment with my gardening choices. I have since added fruiting bushes, shrubs, and trees to my yard; planted flowers with seed heads for the finches; left some small brush piles in corners of the yard; added a variety of feeders, and kept two birdbaths clean and filled.

Over the years these environmental changes have drawn a lot of interesting birds to my suburban garden and since retirement I joined Cornell University’s Project Feeder Watch to record my sightings. Cornell uses this information from thousands of participants throughout the United States and Canada to study winter bird populations.

I had a disappointing start to my season with a low number of birds and sometimes only six different species to report. But as the snowstorms and blizzards began to roll in, I got excited. When snow covers the usual sources of natural bird food, they will come flocking to backyard feeders.

And flock they did!!!!! By the dozens! They were attracted by the feeders and the extra treats I had set out for just this occasion. I filled a hopper with a mix of oils, safflower seed, peanut hearts and fruits. Another hopper was filled with just sunflower oils. I filled a net stocking and plastic feeder with thistle seed. Peanuts in the shell were spread over the top of my patio table. I bought commercial suet cakes and put them in my four suet baskets. A suet cake, just for woodpeckers, was purchased and put in a wooden suet holder designed for woodpeckers only. And, I filled eight pinecones with a homemade mixture of peanut butter, oatmeal, cornmeal, currants, and oils. Now I was ready, pen in hand, to record the onslaught of cardinals, blue jays, goldfinches, house finches, song sparrows, Carolina wrens, mourning doves, chickadees, tufted titmice, white-throated sparrows, slate-colored juncos, nuthatches and downy woodpeckers that I knew would invade my yard when the first blanket of white snow descended quietly over the banquet.

And invade they did, swooping in by the dozens! They swarmed over the feeders, fighting each other for a helping of my seed. They fought for suet chunks I had hanging in the trees. They scrabbled around the pine cone feeders, ripping two of them from the branches where they had been hung in secluded spots close to the house. They took every space on the branches of my dogwood tree and two white pines, perched and waiting for an opening in the melee below.
The only thing wrong with this scene is that, instead of songbirds, my yard had been invaded by every blackbird within a three mile radius. These noisy, aggressive mixed flocks included grackles, starlings, and a couple of red-winged blackbirds, along with a few huge black crows. Although they were not the beautiful songbirds I had been looking forward to seeing, I still recorded their numbers on the Cornell tally sheet, and the count was sent to the Cornell Lab Feeder Watch Project. But I have to admit that it was a little disheartening, extremely disappointing, and even a little scary to be looking out on a scene that could have been from Alfred Hitchcock’s The Birds. But by reporting the dozens of blackbirds that visited my feeder in Nottingham, MD during the extreme snows this year, I advanced the study of our declining songbird populations and contributed my little bit to helping our environment.

It is not too late to sign up for this year’s Feeder Watch Project. In fact, early sign-up is encouraged for next year. Find out more about the project and how it works at www.feederwatch.org. If you want to become involved you can easily sign up online!

SPRING TAILS

Mary Kay Malinoski, Extension Specialist, HGIC

Springtails are very small insects, 1 to 2 millimeters long, and whitish or grayish in color. They have a forked appendage at the rear that enables them to jump. They do not bite and feed primarily on algae, fungi, pollen and decaying organic matter. They may occasionally be a problem in bathrooms, kitchens, and basements. Infestations in buildings are usually associated with dampness, organic matter and mold. Springtails usually occur in the soil, but may also be found under potted plants, and decaying vegetable matter.

Management: Springtails inside a home or building generally suggest some kind of moisture problem. The moisture may be from a leaky pipe, or excessively high humidity. They may also enter a building seeking moisture when their outside habitat becomes too dry. Drying out the affected area will often eliminate the springtails. Insecticide sprays inside the home are generally not recommended. If springtails are coming in from outdoors, an exterior perimeter treatment with an insecticide may be necessary.

From Univ of MD Home & Garden Center: HG8 Occasional Invaders, More insects from HGIC
REMINDERS

1. Monthly meeting March 6, at 10 am. MG guest speaker will be Fred Ritzel on High Tunnels for early vegetables.
2. Daytime Study Group will meet at the Extension Office, March 19, 1:00 PM
3. Remember to volunteer and turn in your log sheets.
4. Newsletter due date is March 8, 2014.
5. Planning meeting topic will be the yearly budget on March 27, 2014 at 10 am.

Free to a GOOD home! - a Sears lawn tractor with 48" mowing deck and cart that is in great shape but no longer being used. Contact Joan Parris for details.

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.