EARTH-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPE EARS BAY-WISE CERTIFICATION
Margaret Hindman, Frederick County Master Gardener

An Okame cherry tree with graceful cascades of pink blooms is surrounded by a small swath of manicured lawn and curving beds of brilliant daffodils in the backyard of Frederick City residents John Day and Peter Brehm in mid-April. The two have created a landscape that is both beautiful and earth-friendly, earning Bay-Wise certification from the Frederick County Master Gardeners. It will be on the Beyond the Garden Gates Tour May 16-17.

Native plants are interspersed with non-invasive exotics, providing food and shelter for birds, butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects essential to the health of the environment. Trees, bushes and flowering plants provide season-long color and sustenance—beginning with the blooms of native witch hazel (Hamamelis virginiana) in winter, followed by the dazzling spring display, the lush blossoms of summer perennials and shrubs, and in fall the red berries of winterberry holly (Ilex verticillata) and bright yellow and purple leaves of ash trees (Fraxinus species).

Brehm and Day use no insecticides or herbicides and rarely water, even in the heat of summer. A porous walkway, groundcovers and mulched beds reduce storm water run-off. Yard waste and food scraps are composted and used to enrich the soil, and organic fertilizer is applied to the grass and plantings based on the results of periodic soil testing.

"Ever since moving to Frederick, we have strived to actively promote environmental sustainability," Brehm said. "And attaining Bay-Wise certification has been educational, fun, and satisfying," commented Day, who is a Master Gardener.

Bay-Wise certification is available to all county residents who are managing their landscapes in ways that help safeguard the environment. Most Marylanders live within a half-mile of a storm drain, stream or river—most of which eventually drain into the Chesapeake Bay. The misuse of pesticides and fertilizers, lack of soil management and poor plant selection can all contribute to the degradation of Maryland’s streams, rivers, and the Bay.

The first step in the Bay-Wise certification process is completion of the “Yardstick,” a form that lists best practices in landscape management and awards points (or inches) for actions that contribute to: controlling storm water runoff; encouraging wildlife; protecting the waterfront (for those who live along a stream or river); mowing grass properly (at least three inches high) and watering efficiently; managing yard pests through Integrated Pest Management (considering all options and using pesticides as a last resort); mulching appropriately and recycling yard waste; fertilizing wisely; and planting wisely.
Once the Yardstick is completed, Frederick County Master Gardeners trained in Bay-Wise landscape management will meet with residents at their homes, free of charge, for an informal and informative review of the document and to answer questions and offer suggestions. Those whose answers on the Yardstick add up to at least 36 points, or “inches,” (out of a possible total of more than 80) will receive a distinctive blue Bay-Wise yard sign certifying their commitment to healthy gardens, communities and waterways.


For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.
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