From Georgia’s Desk

An interesting meeting in College Park this week on the subject of creating impact statements. This is required for all UME faculty but since it can be a challenging assignment, an instructional workshop was offered. Impact is about making an impression. In Extension, it is the positive difference we make in people's lives as a result of programs we conduct. Yet, the results our program achieves must ultimately change people's attitudes or behavior, or benefit society in other ways. Proving program impact is important too:
— Justify the investment of time and effort, as well as the dedication of public and private funds.
— Earn and build professional, organizational, and political credibility and support.
— Satisfy the requirements of political bodies and funding agencies.
— Determine to what degree participants achieve intended results.

We know our efforts impact upon Howard County residents: The challenge is to provide the data which corroborates that- in fact our efforts have had tangible results! I share these thoughts because I believe it is important for all of us to understand why we need to collect data: the number of contacts, the gender, ethnicity of contacts, numbers of youth and adults, number of volunteer hours because that has an economic value, and to consider ways in which we might examine the results of our programs through surveys/ follow-up studies? So, I truly recognize and appreciate the extra task of submitting data for our report, but do keep in mind why this information is needed. I am responsible for submitting reports to our Area Extension Director and to the State MG Coordinator so it is important to have the information from your records. Also, if a client tells you how valuable your help is, please ask for a written, anonymous statement which can be sent to me for incorporation in reports! I welcome your input, suggestions and support. I know everyone is doing a great educational job in our community- let's prove it with the facts.

On a lighter side, come share a holiday event, Tuesday, December 15, 9:30-11:30, UME, MG Pat Greenwald will share some of creativity by showing demonstrating a few holiday decorations! Of course, with your help we'll enjoy some light refreshments and have a chance to chat!

One other event, on Tuesday, December 2, 7:00-9:00 p.m. at the Howard County Conservancy, Jim Caldwell, Director Howard County Office on Community Sustainability will be talking about- guess what— sustainability!

Best wishes for safe and enjoyable holidays.

Georgia Eacker
Master Gardener Coordinator
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Educating People to Help Themselves

The University of Maryland Extension programs are open to any person and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, marital status, genetic information, political affiliation, and gender identity or expression.
Submit Your Hours!

The clock is running down, so send in your volunteer hours today! The deadline is December 15. It takes a few days to calculate and review all of the reports, and the University of Maryland closes early for the upcoming holidays. So, if you delay you'll be at risk of not having your volunteer hours count. That is not a good thing. Get your hours in now.

Questions? Email contacts are Carolyn Kulp or Kathy Hartley: ckulp@umd.edu or hcmgwebmaster@gmail.com.

From the Editor

As you may know, I am resigning as editor of the Looseleaf, effective as of the end of 2015, and the search for the next editor is continuing. The job comes with unique perks—you can set your own hours, and get all your volunteer hours in and never get your hands dirty!

If you are interested, or think you might be interested, or just want to learn a bit more, please contact Communications Committee members Roy Heath (therents@yahoo.com) or Janine Grossman (janinegrossman@gmail.com).

If I can answer any questions you may have, feel free to email or give me a call at 410-903-6809.

Special MG Holiday Get-Together

Let’s all get-together on Tuesday, December 15, 2015 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Extension office for a special MG holiday event. MG Pat Greenwald will display and demonstrate natural creations we can all hurry home to replicate. Why purchase holiday decorations when your garden and the woods are full of the supplies needed to instill your home with the warm scents and sights of the season?

Please sign up to attend by December 8 at http://www.luckypotluck.com/potluck/HolidayMGGettogether. You are welcome to bring coffee, tea, juice, baked goods or other mid-morning treats to share. Contact Karin De-Laitsch kdlaitsch@gmail.com for questions.
Whipps Garden Cemetery

Whipps has completed a very ambitious year. An Eagle Scout project, along with several historic iron work projects, adding new benches, and updating the cedar gate in front of Whipps’ family graves have increased the amazing features to see around the cemetery. All of this has been completed thanks to donations and volunteer hours by many Master Gardeners, Glenelg Country School student volunteers, THRIVE, and many community members who have helped from time to time.

Limited work to include a leaf shredding day is proposed for December whereby the bagged leaves will be pulverized and returned to the gardens and/or given away. More details will be forthcoming.

Yearly planning begins with the preparation for Daffodil Day, Saturday, April 9, 2016, and the plant sale Friday, May 13 and Saturday, May 14, 2016. If you would like to participate with either event with plant donations or the event itself, please contact me at agravelle@verizon.net or 410-410-274-7795 (cell). More information will be forthcoming on the listserv.

Again, thanks for all your contributions of time and donations, Whipps continues to be a beautiful and historic garden cemetery. Thanks go to everyone who have visiting or helped at Whipps throughout the year. There are too many names to mention them all, but each person and your time at Whipps is greatly appreciated. Special thanks goes to Dorothy Moore for her unrelenting hours, David Dower for transporting many loads to the landfill and picking up our new Whipps cedar gate in New York, Paul Kozjar for installing the gate and brick work, Jim Lumsden for tree work and additional brick work, and Tom Gardener for his helpful advice.

We have another exciting, full year ahead and look forward to seeing you next year 2016 at Whipps. Thanks again for helping and visiting the cemetery during the past year. If you have never visited the cemetery, please do so. A self-paced walking tour is available in the brochure box at the parking pad. Everyone is welcome to stroll through the garden at any time. Thank you and Happy Gardening to All.

ALETA GRAVELLE, MG
Whipps Garden Cemetery

No matter the season, Whipps is a lovely place for a walk.

Photographs: Paul DiCrispino
Doings at the Howard County Conservancy at Mt. Pleasant

Now that our growing season is finished I would like to thank all the Master Gardeners who worked every week this summer to make it a very productive year. The regular crew consisted of Monica May, Michelle Bryden, Bob Kiwak, Paul DiCrispino, Tom Kusterer, LJ Mauceri and Rita Moy. This group came regularly every week from March through October. Thanks to them we contributed 943 pounds of produce to the Howard County food bank. There were a number of others who helped out occasionally and we appreciate their help as well, although I will not attempt to name them.

Last month we had a very nice picnic lunch and planning session attended by all the regular workers. It’s always good to taste the fruit of your labors. Over the winter I will be looking for people to start and grow seedlings for our spring plant sale. I have some native seeds which I can get to anyone who is willing to take on this task. Please contact me at jrusso1104@comcast.net if you are interested.

In the fall the Conservancy is open Wednesday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until at least 3:00 p.m. with occasional evening programs. Check the website www.hcconservancy.org for Saturday and evening programs at Mt. Pleasant and the new Belmont site. Come out to Mt. Pleasant to hike the trails and see what is currently in bloom.

By JoAnn Russo, MG
jrusso1104@comcast.net

‘Tis the Season … for Norfolk Pines

There is an abundance of Norfolk Island Pines for sale at nurseries, dept. stores, grocery stores and small shops at Christmas time A great container grown coniferous house plant. Norfolk Island Pine or Australia pine is native to the Norfolk Islands where it grows to 200 feet in height with 15 lb. cones. This tree will grow outside year round in the US in parts of Florida and California in zones 10 and 11. They are a tropical plant and do best in temperatures of 50--55F at night and in day temperatures of 69--72F. Soil pH should be about 4.5--6.0.

When you bring the plant home place it in indirect light (though it can tolerate direct sun in small amounts). Turn your tree every week to maintain its shape. Your first pot will last one year but transfer it to a larger pot every four years. If your home is dry, place your Norfolk Island Pine on a tray of rocks and cover the rocks with water for humidity. Water soluble feeding every 6--8 weeks (10-10-10): do not feed in the winter.

One species of this genus is Araucaria Excelsa--it looks like a miniature Christmas tree with long needles. It is easily grown in Northern bright light and needs consistently moist soil. Deep water once a week (put in a bucket of water then drain excess). It likes its roots pot bound and usually grows to 48 inches. Propagate by air layering. This plant will be beautiful for years.

The Norfolk Island Pine makes a thoughtful gift at Christmas for those housebound, hospice and nursing home patients and those financially challenged. Trees come 2 feet tall to 5 feet tall and can be purchased decorated. Little space and little care make this a much appreciate gift.

The Norfolk Island Pine is the perfect size for small children to decorate--nothing like your own little tree to show-off. The fragrant little tree is a reminder of Christmas all year long.

By JanMarie Williams-Nguyen, MG
vcn999@aol.com
Leaf Parties

We have a new initiative in Howard County, a partnership between Columbia Families in Nature (CFIN) and Transition Howard County (Transition). This is the second year of Leaf Parties. We got the brainstorm two years ago that it's hard work to transition even a small section of lawn back to an ecosystem functioning area. But if friends joined together, like the old barn-raising, or a Tupperware party, we could help each other, one garden at a time. So Transition's Ecosystem Landscaping Committee and CFIN teamed up, and now two pollinator gardens planted last spring are growing, full of butterflies and bees and happy children. Master Gardeners Ann Coren, Anne Cottle, and Barb Schmeckpepper participated.

We held two more Leaf Parties this fall. We gathered at the homes of two different CFIN members and worked together to prepare a portion of their lawns to be transformed into pollinator supporting gardens in the spring. We enjoyed tasty snacks, played with the leaves, and eventually got all the leaves up into the areas we will be turning into gardens. Paper and cardboard were laid on top of the grass and the leaves went on top of that, a process called lasagna mulching that will kill off the grass over the winter so we can come back for a ReLeaf Party in the spring and plant lovely native, pollinator supporting species.

BY ANN COREN, MG

Photographs: Chaira D'Amore, CFIN
Let Fallen Leaves Lie

As fond memories of summer butterflies fade with the waning sunlight, we often don’t think about where our little backyard friends go in the winter.

Lush, nectar-filled flowers and juicy foliage aren’t the only habitat elements needed to support the life cycles of pollinators and other animals. Just as we seek refuge under cozy blankets, countless creatures spend these darkening days under rich leafy layers.

Beneath the coral honeysuckle vines are the pupae of one of North America’s most beautiful moths, the snowberry clear-wing. Under sumacs are the young of red-banded hairstreak butterflies, whose mothers lay their eggs on the fallen leaves. Buried in the rich soil are fireflies in the making; as larvae, they serve as helpful predators in the leaf litter, feasting on snails, slugs, and insects. As adults, they delight us by lighting up our summer nights.

All this life in the decay makes a rich feast for thrushes, juncoes, sparrows, robins, and other ground-foraging birds. American toads and box turtles will join the banquet when they emerge from their winter slumber. Warm spring weather coaxes hibernating queen bumblebees out of their winter homes in the leaves and, after a short time of gathering strength from

A Redbanded Hairstreak Butterfly on Boneset. Photograph: Nancy Lawson
early-flowering plants, each mama bee will begin a new bumblebee colony all by herself. To nurture this biodiversity in your garden, let fallen leaves lie where possible. If you need to move them, add them to beds or under groves of shrubs and trees. Though shredding your leaves can quickly enrich the soil in cultivated areas like vegetable gardens, whole leaves can do the same in less cultivated areas, while preserving the developing life and creating the rich layers where many of our tiny gardening friends thrive.

Leave the bare stems and dead seed heads where many pollinator and predatory insect larvae overwinter. Some emerge from their winter slumber in early spring while others emerge later. If you avoid cutting the stems and seed heads down, the larvae will chomp on other tiny herbivores who like to eat our flowers and vegetables. In the meantime, enjoy the winter artistry, the shapes and shades of brown and gray seedpods that add interest to your winter garden while sheltering our tiny friends. Watch the birds forage for the larvae and pupae, getting their essential winter protein. It's a happy, biodiverse winter ecosystem full of life!

BY ANN COREN AND NANCY LAWSON, HOWARD COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

Recycle and Repurpose that Christmas Tree

It’s that most wonderful time of the year again when we indulge in food, family, and festive decor. All too soon, however, the holiday season ends and we’re faced with two dreaded repercussions: diets and Christmas tree disposal.

While dieting is a personal endeavor, Christmas tree disposal has plenty of community support! Since 1993, Howard County has maintained its Merry Mulch program to recycle these trees for composting and mulch. In addition to curbside tree collection, there are several Christmas tree drop-off sites throughout the county.

To benefit from curbside tree pickup, trees must be cut into less than 4-foot lengths and bundled. But once your tree is cut up, why not keep it to use in your own yard? Here are some ideas for repurposing your Christmas tree after the holiday:

- Mulch your garden beds. Pine needles dry quickly and decompose slowly, which are great mulch attributes. Placing cut branches over perennial beds will help protect them from snow, or you can strip the needles from branches for a neater appearance.
- Submerge cut tree branches in a private pond to provide shelter for overwintering fish, if you have such a feature on your property.
- Create natural, delightfully asymmetrical garden stakes, using stripped branches and even the trunk.
- Burn the wood in outdoor fire pits. Never burn your Christmas tree in indoor fireplaces because highly flammable oils can build up and cause chimney fires, but pine trees make great fire starters for outdoor fireplaces. Be sure to remove any tinsel and remnant decorations to avoid noxious smoke.
- Provide shelter for small animals and birds by simply placing the tree on its side in a garden or wooded area, until nature reclaims the tree and enriches your soil. A similar purpose can be served by leaning the tree against your garage or another tree until you’re ready to use the wood for your summer fire pit gatherings.
- Make cookies! If you’re feeling adventurous, check out this Douglas Fir & Orange Blossom cookie recipe.

DARCY BELLIDO DE LUNA, HOWARD COUNTY MASTER GARDENER
Montgomery County Restricts Pesticide Use – An Opening to Discussion and Debate?

The bottom line goal of Montgomery County Bill 52-14 is to inform the public about pesticide application and minimize the use of pesticides for cosmetic reasons – in other words, to simply make your lawn ‘look better’. The Bill has nation-wide implications and should surely give pause for thought by neighboring Howard County.

The Bill relies strongly on the premises that many commonly used lawn care pesticides pose some health and public welfare concerns (e.g., may be cancer causing), that considerable waste and abuse occurs in the treatments, and that there are sufficient non-pesticide based treatments available to help make lawns look good. The over-use of pesticides also has strong environmental implications as our sprawling suburbia is dominated by lawns. This Bill will effectively force both homeowner and commercial operators to carefully consider how best to manage acres of lawn.

The following are the six (6) main tenets of the Bill which is an Act to:

1. Require posting of notice for certain applications of pesticide,
2. Prohibit the use of certain pesticides on lawns,
3. Prohibit the use of certain pesticides on playgrounds, children’s facilities, and certain County-owned property,
4. Require the County to adopt an integrated pest management (IPM) program for certain County-owned property,
5. Require the Parks Department to take certain steps to reduce the use of certain pesticides, and
6. Generally amend the County law regarding pesticides

The lawn care provisions are not due to take place until 2018, but some of the County Park regulations will be in effect in 2016. The County needs to conduct public outreach and education before implementation, provide lists of noxious weeds and invasive plants, provide a list of prohibited pesticides, etc. There are exemptions for controlling noxious weeds and invasive species. This Bill will be a stimulus for discussion and debate – which is good. There may well be aspects of it which will be challenged in court. But the bottom line goal of the Bill is to inform the public about pesticide applications and minimizing the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes has great merit. BTW – the Bill does not directly affect the use of pesticides on gardens. So, what do YOU think about this Bill??

Did you know …a favorite resource is online?

It seems to me that we can’t have too many resources to support our site visitations or talking to neighbors. As a big fan of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping—Chesapeake Bay Watershed, I was delighted to learn there’s a searchable database based on the publication at: http://www.nativeplantcenter.net/?q=database. It’s especially helpful because you can stratify your request for specific conditions.

SUBMITTED BY RUTH VRIEND, HOWARD COUNTY MASTER GARDENER INTERN

BY DICK HAMMERSCHLAG, HOWARD COUNTY MASTER GARDENER INTERN
About the Cranberry, *Vaccinium Macrocarpon*

Cranberries are a tart, red berry used in deserts, sauces, juices and dried. Well known for high concentrations of vitamin C and antioxidants. Most Americans have cranberry sauce with the main holiday meals. The cranberry is a native American fruit. They grow from the east coast to central US and Canada, and from southern Canada in the north to the Appalachians in the south. There is a 16-month production cycle from the initiation of the flower bud to the harvest of the fruit. Full fruit maturity is 80 days after full bloom. The plants are low-growing evergreens, but turn reddish-brown or become purple tinged in the winter. Plants produce one pound of fruit for every square foot of areas planted.

Yes, you can home grow cranberries in pots or plots. Best grown in cooler climates in zones 2–5. Plots of 4 feet by 8 feet will do. Fill plot with peat moss, sand, compost and add 1/2 lb. bone meal or blood meal. If you are only growing one plant-- a 2 foot by 2 foot square or pot will work. Buy plants 3 or 4 years old. Plants start to produce in the fourth year. Leave 3 feet between plants. Plots sustain themselves indefinitely. Fertilize the soil with high nitrogen the 1st year -- 3 times: once at the beginning of growth; once when the flowers bud (pink flowers); and once when the berries start forming. After the 1st year stop fertilizing--then the uprights (where berries form) will grow and the runners will be inhibited. The 2nd year and thereafter use a non-nitrogen fertilizer. The 2nd year and onward cover the soil with 1/2 inch of sand; this helps root the runners. Potted plants will need to be replaced every few years. Weed plots frequently. The main pest is the cranberry fruit worm. The gray moth lays her eggs inside the berry and when they hatch they eat from the inside out. Infested berries turn red before ripe and are picked off and disposed of. Spray plants with organic cooper-based fungicide between late June and early August. The third year, and thereafter, prune the runners to encourage uprights (where the flowers form and eventually berries). Once the plants are producing, harvest berries in September and October. Commercial growers harvest their bogs by flooding the fields making the berries float making it easier to harvest. Just like on TV commercials. Berries are harvested before the first frost. Cranberries stay fresh up to two months in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Dried cranberries last up to one year. Before winter arrives the growers cover the fields with leaves, pine needles or mulch. Plastic is never used as it raises the temperature and kills the plants.

We can appreciate all the work and attention that goes into growing our traditional holiday treat.

By JanMarie Williams-Nguyen, MG
vcn999@aol.com
Our winter holiday celebrations sometimes bring our focus indoors, away from the garden, going outside only to cut some holly for a wreath. But the garden outside is a delightful busy, living space, even in winter. The stems, seed heads, and leaf litter are full of winter beauty as well as sheltering caterpillars and other beneficial larvae. Leaving stems in place gives us garden beauty all winter long.

Shown here are a few of the lovely seed heads decorating the native plants in the schoolyard habitat. Since we used whole leaf litter as our ‘mulch’, the seeds will drop naturally to the ground, naturalizing in the garden, Mother Nature will have done our spring replanting for us. Since the seeds choose where they like to grow, the garden is an ever-changing landscape. Part of the fun of native plant gardening is enjoying the ever changing, evolving display that changes with both the seasons and the successional stages of plant species as the landscape matures.

Many of the seeds and larvae will be winter food for thrushes, sparrows and other ground foraging birds. Leaving the seed heads, stems, and leaf litter gives them winter forage and they can celebrate the winter as well. There’s nothing more delightful on a winter morning than a flock of goldfinches feasting on seed heads.

BY ANN COREN, MG

An overview of a section of the pollinator garden, showing the decorative effect of the autumn stems and seed heads.

Rudbeckia triloba, Brown-eyed Susan
Patuxent Research Refuge Schoolyard Habitat
Celebrating Stems and Litter

Solidago nemoralis,
Gray goldenrod

Chasmanthium latifolium,
Wild oats

Pycnanthemum muticum,
Short-toothed mountain mint

Conoclinium coelestinum,
Blue mistflower

Photographs by Ann Coren in the Schoolyard Habitat.
Wishing you and your Family
A very safe and
Happy Holiday Season

From
University of Maryland Extension
Howard County Office