Hello Master Gardeners!

If you weren't able to attend our holiday dinner in December, you really missed out. As usual, the food was wonderful and it was a great time for all to relax and enjoy one another. Sonny Stollings performed several Elvis numbers and he was great - even got a few of us out on the dance floor! We owe a huge thanks to Carrole Kesselring for organizing the overall event and to Diane Mitchell and Susan Schluederberg for organizing the silent auction and raffle basket. The results were fantastic - unofficial numbers are $148 for the Bay-Wise raffle basket and $580 from the silent auction for the scholarship fund. Thanks to everyone who made auction donations. There were some wonderful items and I think everyone went home happy. Also, for the first time, we had a Boy Scout troop take down and put away the tables and chairs for us. They did a great job - even swept the floors!

My garden is not a very impressive place at this time of year. When I returned from Italy (which was fabulous!!), I found plants that had been declining, none had totally given up the ghost - black, slimy and unsightly. I want to get out and clean up, but it's been rainy, cold, and/or windy ever since I got home. I'm sure one of these winter days will be suitable for outdoor work soon. Meanwhile, I'm just closing my eyes to the unsightly mess.

On the MG Administrative front, I'm delighted to report that we have a complete slate of officers for the elections in February - best Christmas present ever! I'll let our VP Eleanor Cone make the formal announcement of nominees. We would like to also have a couple of members become "alternate" board members. They wouldn't hold office, but would commit to being involved with the board with the view of perhaps becoming an officer in the future. Let Eleanor know if you'd be interested in being an alternate board member.

Joan Parris '09
We are proud to announce that 2015 is our second year for MG participation in Harford County STEM. We started big, continue to grow and are steadily gaining a reputation!

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is a world wide effort to encourage youth to explore and consider occupations in science related fields. STEM nights are held at schools throughout the county. Typically 4th, 5th and 6th grade students are invited to STEM nights at the various middle schools.

Master Gardeners offer both a display table at STEM events and a classroom session. Our MG display table includes good bug/bad bug displays, Bay-Wise handouts, MG classes on GIEI & Garden Series and general information about gardening. MG’s are available to answer visitor questions and offer information about Master Gardeners. The hands-on component allows the visiting students to examine natural objects under a digital and light microscope.

Our classroom session is titled Gray Funnel—Green Filter. Here is the published description: “Would you eat out of a litter box or swim in a dumpster? Find out what you can do to help nature work to keep the Chesapeake Bay clean. Come make a mess and help us clean it up.” The activity focuses on how the Earth protects the Bay and how people can help the Earth protect the Bay. Using a watershed model, the teachers discuss various kinds of pollution and ways to stop the pollution. Students brainstorm and use materials provided to slow down or stop pollution on the model.
During the 2013/2014 school year, Master Gardeners visited two middle schools in the county. During those sessions we made contact with more than 350 youth and parents at the display table. Teachers and assistants participated in six classroom sessions during these events. More than 25 Master Gardeners have participated in creating or running STEM events.

Upcoming in 2015 are four STEM night sessions. These schools are: Fallston Middle (February 4), Edgewood Middle (February 11), Patterson Mill Middle School (February 25), Mountain Christian School (April 27).

In the early part of the school year we served at the John Carroll High School STEM night. Ten MG volunteers greeted 145 visitors at our table. As a result of our participation, we are invited to Mountain Christian School (April 27). Although most STEM nights run from about 4:30 to 8 PM, our MG volunteers don’t have to be present the entire time. If you are interested in participating in STEM this year, please make note of these dates. As these dates move closer, a request for volunteers will be emailed to everyone. I am looking forward to working with last year’s volunteers and welcoming new volunteers as well. There is always room for more help at STEM night! Email questions or early sign-ups to me at dgracew@comcast.net

Grace Wyatt ’99

SOS! Septic Owner Stewardship Clinics

Article from Headwaters Publication of Maryland Sea Grant Extension Watershed Educators
Vol 4 2014 by Jennifer Dindinger Watershed Restoration Specialist with UMD Sea Grant Extension Program

One of the lesser known, but still important, sources of nutrient pollution in rivers and streams is septic systems. The MD Department of the Environment estimates that there are about 420,000 houses in Maryland that use septic systems, and the systems are responsible for approximately 8% of Maryland’s nitrogen load to the Chesapeake Bay.

So, what’s the big deal? The big deal is that a perfectly functioning system still contributes about 24 pounds of nitrogen per year to groundwater. If systems are not properly maintained, nutrients and bacteria can leach into groundwater and cause well contamination, sicken your family and your pets, and increase pollution to your local stream.

With this in mind, the Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health and UMD Sea Grant Extension recently partnered on a homeowner outreach program called Chesapeake SOS: Septic-Owner Stewardship. Supported by a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, this program offered free clinics in Wicomico, St. Mary’s, and Calvert counties (with one in Dorchester County planned for January 2015) to teach people how and why to maintain their septic systems. The clinics were well received by the communities, and some clinics could only offer standing room to hear from local environmental health directors and representatives from the Maryland Onsite Wastewater Professionals Association.
“Maintaining houses with private wells and septic systems can be tough. Even though these homeowners are responsible for protecting, testing, and treating their drinking water, and maintaining their well and septic systems, they don’t get operation manuals for these things when they buy the house. Homeowners often just don’t know what they need to do,” explains Daphne Pee, Coordinator of the Chesapeake Water and Septic Homeowner Education project at the University of Maryland. “We want to teach homeowners what they need to do to protect their families, their neighbors, and the environment.”

If you are interested in bringing a clinic to Harford County please let Joyce know and we will coordinate a program. For more resources on septic system maintenance, please visit these websites:

http://extension.umd.edu/learn/septic-systems-and-their-maintenance
http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/subpages/septic.cfm

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**BATS ARE IMPORTANT**

**All About Bats and Their Importance**

Summary by Elaine Dodd from Bat Conservation International batcon.org and other sites

There may be more myths about bats than any other animal. Some people think bats are blind bloodsuckers that fly into your hair and carry rabies. In fact, these flying mammals are extremely useful to humans and are gentle, intelligent creatures.  (Taken from http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/bat)

As the primary predators of the night flying insects, bats play a vital role in maintaining the balance of nature. A single little brown bat can catch 1,200 mosquito-sized insects in an hour. The big brown bats are predators to some of America’s most costly crop pests - Cucumber beetles, June beetles, bark beetles, stink bugs, leafhoppers, cutworm moths, corn earworm moths, armyworm moths, termites, assassin bugs, ants, roaches, crickets, and grasshoppers are just some of the pests known to be consumed by up to 40 species of bats in America. In spite of their diversity, bat populations are in alarming decline due to decades of unwarranted human fear and persecution.

Not all bats spend their days roosting in caves. Some roost in trees, abandoned mines, buildings, bridges, etc. They have adapted to their environments in creative ways to take advantage of the many shelters available to them – i.e. trees, barns, houses, abandoned vehicles, garages, etc.

Because of habitat loss many bat populations are threatened. Each species has its own special roosting requirements. Scientists have studied the roosting requirements of a number of bat species in order to provide artificial homes for them called, bat houses, which have been very successful for some species, when properly located.

Bats and birds developed their ability to fly independent of each other. They belong to different animal classes: birds are in a class called Aves, while bats are in the class Mammalia. Bats, just like humans, are warm-blooded, have hair, bear live young, and feed their babies milk.
Contrary to what some people incorrectly believe, all bats can see, but some use echolocation, a special sonar system to aid them. These bats make high frequency calls, either out of their mouths or noses, which bounce back echoes from the objects in view. By listening to reflected sounds they form pictures in their brains just like we form pictures by interpreting reflected light with our eyes. In this way bats move comfortably in total darkness avoiding predators, maneuvering around obstacles, and locating food (insects).

Unlike the bodies of other animals, bats are best adapted for hanging upside down. Specialized tendons hold their toes in place. This allows them to cling to their roosts without expending energy. In order to let go of the roosting surface to fly, bats flex their muscles to release the surface and drop into flight. Hanging upside down also provides bats with roosting space in ceilings of caves, in trees and buildings that few other animals can use. This location also gives good protection from predators.

“The more than 1,300 species of bats” – about one-fifth of all mammal species – are incredibly diverse. They range from the world’s smallest mammal, the tiny bumblebee bat that weighs less than a penny to giant flying foxes with six-foot wingspans. Bats live in almost every habitat on Earth except for extreme desert and polar regions. They have lived on Earth since the age of the dinosaurs.” (http://www.batcon.org).

Bats are often considered “keystone species” that are essential to some tropical and desert ecosystems. These systems could gradually fail without the pollination and seed-dispersing services bats provide. Plants in these regions would fail to provide food and cover necessary for wildlife species near the bottom of the food chain. For instance, the great baobab tree of the East African savanna is often called the “African Tree of Life” because it is so critical to the survival of so many wild species. While it provides food and shelter to other species it depends almost entirely on bats for pollination. Without local bats the Tree of Life could die out and threaten one of our planet’s richest ecosystems.

The economic value of bats is tremendous to crop growers throughout the US. A survey by county throughout the United States shows the 2011 economic impact was anywhere from 0-$73,000. www.biologicaldiversity.org/.../bat.../Boy

Earth without bats would be a very different place and deficient of an important pollinator and predator. They are effective pest controllers and seed dispersers keeping the ecosystem working for all of its inhabitants, including humans. It is important to remember these animals are everywhere. They are misunderstood, threatened and important for the ecosystem. Also, their droppings (guano) are valuable as a rich natural fertilizer. Think before doing something that could be detrimental to these interesting and valuable animals.

Repeat! Repetition creates unity and rhythm in a planting. Picture a mountain view, with overlapping ridges as far as the eye can see. Each successive ridge gets paler, until earth and sky meld. Plants farther from the eye should be lighter in color, which accentuates the illusion of depth. Fine texture juxtaposed with bold texture creates the same effect.

A tip from landscape consultant C. Colston Burrell on Am Hort Society website:
Four Women in Ag “Supper Seminars” Upcoming in Harford

After offering to the agriculture community the Univ of MD Annie’s Project and Managing For Today and Tomorrow classes, Harford County coordinators Sara BhaduriHauck and Nicole Fiorellino are switching gears for the 2015 season.

Join us for a series of Supper Seminars for Women in Agriculture on Wednesdays this winter. Each seminar will begin at 6 pm with a hot meal, followed by a guest speaker and concluding with a round table discussion that will wrap up at 8:30 pm. All sessions will be held at the Harford County Extension Office in Forest Hill. Register for all or just the sessions that interest you! Registration is open to all women with a passion for agriculture, but each session is limited to the first 20 participants. The registration fee of $10 includes dinner.

Register by calling 410-638-3255 at least a week in advance of each session. For questions, contact Sara at sbh@umd.edu.

1. February 4, 2015 – “Speaking to the Public on ‘Hot Topics’ in Ag” Jennie Schmidt, MS, Registered Dietician, and farmer (thefoodiefarmer.blogspot.com)
Public perception of agriculture is shaping consumer preference and spending and even legislation. When customers ask you about hot topics like GMOs, organic versus conventional, or pollution from farms, how will you respond? Jennie will prepare you with the tools to effectively and professionally communicate with and relate to customers searching for answers.

Rajiv Goel, Esquire, Offit Kurman Attorneys at Law
Farm businesses are built from a foundation of hard work and dedication, and farmers should protect what they’ve established by having certain legal documents on file. If you were injured or killed unexpectedly, what would happen to your business, your land, and your children? Raj will explain what legal documents every farmer should have and will help you make decisions and gather information you will need before you visit with your lawyer. Come ready with your questions!

Jim Kilgalen, Director and Senior Clinician, Kilgalen and Associates
Farming families face unique challenges when it comes to communication: speaking freely about business issues is difficult when your boss is your parent or your hired help is your child. Do you have thoughts about the farm that you keep to yourself because you’re afraid how your family will react? Jim will dissect the complex relationship of the farm family and provide you with practical strategies to successfully discuss business while preserving the family dynamic.

4. April 22 – “Farming Liability and YOU”
Ashley Newhall, Agriculture Legal Specialist, University of Maryland Extension
Farmers face liability risk at every step along the production and marketing cycle; being educated about these risks is the first step toward reducing them. If your produce makes someone sick, if a car traveling down your road hits an escaped cow, or if your neighbor reports pesticides from your farm killed her flowers – are you protected? Ashley will discuss some common areas of liability on the farm and steps you can take to reduce your risk of liability.

Catering 3/4/15 will be provided by Broom’s Bloom

Catering 4/22/15 will be provided by the Laurrapin Grille
Susquehanna Beekeepers- January meeting is open to everyone and MG’s might find the topic of interest. Tom from Flying Plow Farm will be speaking on Chemical-Free Farming. This general meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 14, 7 pm at Fallston United Methodist Church on MD-152 in the Providence Hall. Some of you might know them from the Farmers Market in Bel Air since their booth is adjacent to the MG’s!


1-day Education Seminar by Manor View Farm & Perennial Farm - Friday, February 27, 8:30 am-3:30 pm at the Conference Center at Sheppard Pratt $84. For more information http://www.manorview.com/

Beyond the Lawn: Landscaping with Nature – January 17, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm, Carroll County Extension Office, Westminster MD. email ccforestryboard@gmail.com or visit the Events Calendar for a registration form: http://extension.umd.edu/news/events/sat-2015-01-17-0800-beyond-lawn-landscaping-nature

Environmental Challenges Backyard and Beyond - March 7, 9 am - 4 pm at The Maryland Zoo in the Baltimore Mansion House, Baltimore, MD; Expert speakers will provide you with answers to questions on wildlife and how to properly manage your forested property including how invasive plant and insect species affect our native flora and fauna. Wildlife topics include: how deer impact the urban/suburban landscape, how the ever-present deer tick population "ticks" and how you can protect yourself from tick exposure. The answers to these questions and more will be provided during this workshop sponsored by the Baltimore County Forestry Board. As a special bonus the workshop includes a tour of rare, notable, and champion trees located at the Maryland Zoo. $30 registration fee includes breakfast, lunch, and all materials ($50 per couple). Contact Glenn Ferenschak at 410-428-4748 or sciencegf@msn.com for more information. Registrations will be accepted through February 13, 2015. Contact HCMG Carol Lancaster at Recyclecfl@aol.com OR Joyce for a registration pdf. brochure.
January 8 – MG Monthly Meeting 10 am
January 14 – Susquehanna Beekeepers Mtg. 7 pm; Fallston Methodist Church
January 17 – Garden Series -Grow It Eat It Organically; 10:15 am - noon; BA Library
January 21 – MG Evening Study Group 7 pm; HCEO
January 24 – Pruning Class at Abingdon Library 10:15 am - 12:15; Taught by Master Gardener Maxine Rising; Register with the library 410-638-3990
January 29 – MG Planning Meeting 10 am

The University of Maryland, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources programs are open to all and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry or national origin, marital status, genetic information, political affiliation, or gender identity and expression.

THE 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.