April 2014 Newsletter

From the Director...

"Hello HGIC, when can I plant my _____ (fill in the blank)?" This is a common question gardeners have been asking us and each other. Spring got off to a slow, wet start and we are all excited about this week’s warm-up and the chance to do some garden and yard work. But Mother Nature is not nice to those who rush things: digging in wet soil can turn it into a cloddy mess and planting in cold soil slows seed germination, making seeds more attractive to insect pests and diseases.

You’ll also find planting information in all of our Vegetable Profiles.

We have three planting date guides for vegetable gardeners. Take a look and see which works best for you:

- **GE 007** - Vegetable Planting Calendar for Central Maryland
- **GE 008** - Spring Planting Guide for Vegetables: A Dynamic Chart for Maryland Gardeners (requires Microsoft Excel)
- **HG 16** - Planting Dates for Vegetable Crops in Maryland

And check out the recent blog posts by Master Gardeners on seeding peas indoors, low tunnels, and growing seedlings under lights, with great photos and tips for gardening success.

Some spring planting tips:

- Once the soil dries out, make a shallow narrow trench (furrow) with a stick or gardening tool and plant peas, kale, mustard, spinach, carrot, radish and other cool-season crops.
- Soil is generally dry enough to till or “turn” when you can pick up a handful, squeeze it together, toss it up and down in your hand and it falls apart.
- Pre-germinate pea, bean, and corn seeds for a fast start. Soak beet, spinach, and chard seeds in water for 24-hrs. prior to planting outside.
- Fertilize seedlings and transplants with a soluble fertilizer for a strong root system.
- Floating row cover protects plants from pests and promotes faster growth.
- Start tomato plants now indoors under fluorescent lights.
- Last year we had some warm April weather that caused people to buy and plant warm-season crops like tomato, pepper, and basil. These plants were injured or killed in many cases by early May frosts, including one on the Monday after Mother’s Day! So hold off on planting these crops until the soil has warmed and the chance of frost has passed.
- This is a great time to plant trees and shrubs. Learn more about Planting Tips for Trees, Getting Started with Small Fruits, and Getting Started with Tree Fruits.

- Jon Traunfeld
HGIC Center Director

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**Spring Vegetable Profile: Sweet Potatoes**

Like spider plants, Apostle plant is ideal for a hanging basket.

Flowers for an incredibly long time with petals in smoky purple, speckled mauve, white, and pastel green.
April is a great time to start your sweet potatoes which provide an excellent source of beta-carotene (converts to Vitamin A); also contains Vitamins B6 & C, potassium, calcium and magnesium.

Watch the video to see how to start your own sweet potatoes and check out the full vegetable profile for sweet potatoes on the HGIC website.

**Reminder - Sign up for the Grow It Eat It Grow100 Challenge!**

Compete in one of three categories to see whose 100 square foot garden impresses us here at the HGIC. We'll be sharing photos and stories from contestants all through the growing season via this newsletter, and our GIEI Facebook and Twitter pages.

Registration deadline is **June 15**.

[Click here to find out more and sign up!](#)

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**Winter Foliage Damage**  
*By David L. Clement and Mary Kay Malinoski*

Injury that occurs during the winter or early spring can result from exposure to drying winter winds, low temperatures, late frost or freezes. Leaf scorch, salt injury, blighting and browning, blasted blooms, dieback, and yellowing may be issues that are caused by a harsher winter like the one we had this year.

[Read on for more about winter foliage damage and management strategies](#)
Indoor Plants

Maintaining and watering live plants can be tedious and unrewarding. The HGIC recommends artificial plants. One word: Plastics.

Read more

Click here for more HGIC quick tips

A hot topic for this season! Ask the Experts online here or call:
800-342-2507 in Maryland
410-531-1757 outside Maryland.

After this past winter we are all looking for any sign of spring. Thoughts of flowers and green lawns make us excited to be outside again. Another certain sign of spring are commercials promoting the application of lawn fertilizer. If you have a healthy tall fescue lawn it will naturally green up this time of year. Fescue is a cool season grass species that thrives when daytime temperatures warm-up into the fifty and sixty degree F. range and nights remain cool. Fall applications of nitrogen fertilizer are the most important for fescue lawns. Keep in mind that applying weed and feed products to control crabgrass and broadleaf weeds are also applying nitrogen to your lawn. Look for a crabgrass preemergent without fertilizer. These products can be more difficult to find but are available. Spot treat broadleaf weeds with a liquid herbicide if necessary.

Proper mowing is an important spring lawn task. The first cut removes grass blades that were damaged over the winter and promotes growth. Sharpen your lawnmower blades and set the height at 3 inches. Spring is a time of rapid turf growth so it may be necessary to mow twice a week. Mow less often as growth slows down. Spring is not the time for major lawn renovation projects. Disturbing the ground now opens up the soil to potential weed problems. But seeding bare areas is okay providing you did not use a crabgrass preemergent. Renovating in late summer into early fall is your best option for success. So contrary to media messages refrain from applying too much fertilizer to your lawns now. For additional information see our grass maintenance calendar and How to Fertilize Your Lawn Responsibly.

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