December 2013 Newsletter

From the Director...

Now that I’ve finished the last of my fall garden chores- mulching the garlic bed, planting trees and shrubs, and dumping bags of my neighbor’s leaves around a fig tree- I mainly go out to the garden to bury kitchen scraps. I love this task regardless of the weather because it’s such a win-win for gardeners; the “garbage” not going to the landfill feeds soil critters and plants, and improves soil quality. How satisfying is that! This is a good time of year to reflect on how our small, thoughtful practices outside produce cumulative benefits for ecosystems and gardens.

It’s been a year of big changes at HGIC. In April, we moved our website into the new system set-up by our College of Agriculture & Natural Resources and adopted the national eXtension “Ask an Expert” system for answering your web-based gardening questions. Two fantastic individuals joined our staff in 2013: Dan Adler, Web and Communications Manager, who puts together this attractive and informative newsletter reaching 4,000 subscribers each month, and Sara Tangren, Ph.D., Associate Agent who serves as Master Gardener Trainer, Native Plants & Sustainable Horticulture.

We have plans to add lots of new content to the HGIC website on gardening topics you’ve told us are important to you, such as organic gardening, pollinator gardening, and native plants. Watch for new videos and gardening tips and stories from around the state. Thank you for your 2013 questions and feedback. We look forward to being a gardening partner and supporter for you in 2014.

- Jon Traunfeld
HGIC Center Director

Holiday Gifts for Gardeners

By Jon Traunfeld
Sweaters, socks, chocolate-coated espresso beans are among the gifts that, for me anyway, fall into the essential and expected holiday gift category. But if you want to wow the gardeners in your life this year consider these ideas from the past and future wish lists of your friends at the Home and Garden Information Center...

Read the HGIC Staff's holiday gift suggestions

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THIS MONTH’S QUICK TIPS

Fruit | Flowers | Houseplants | Lawns | Insects | Wildlife | Soil, Mulch, Compost | Trees/Shrubs | Vegetables

River Birch
Purchase a multi-trunked plant to best show off the fabulous bark.

FEATURED VIDEO

This month, we're featuring a great video by University of Illinois Extension about choosing a poinsettia for the Holidays.

Check out HGIC videos on our YouTube Channel.

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Flowers

Now is a good time to select and order fruit plants from mail order companies. Read more

Amaryllis bulbs should be watered sparingly until the flower stalk emerges. Read more

Insects

You may notice insects came in unnoticed on your tree. Simply escort them outside. Read more

Click here for more HGIC quick tips

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ASk Maryland’s Garden EXPERTS your plant and pest questions

Common or interesting questions from last month. Ask your own question online here or call:

800-342-2507 in Maryland
410-531-1757 outside Maryland.

Compiled by Debra Ricigliano

Q What is the best way to care for my cut Christmas tree? I usually buy it at the local tree lot. Do I need to add any preservatives to the water to keep it from drying out and what is the best way to store it before I bring it indoors?

A Begin by selecting a healthy tree. Test for freshness by bending some of the needles. They should be pliable and have a good green color. Check for needle retention by gently shaking the tree or grasping the trunk midway up and tapping it on the ground a few times. It would not be unusual for some of the...
older, interior needles to drop, but the
needles toward the ends of the stems
should for the most part remain attached. Once you arrive home, cut off a \(\frac{1}{4} - \frac{1}{2}\)
inch disc from the bottom on the trunk, if this was not already done where you
purchased the tree. Then place it in a bucket of fresh water. Plain tap water
without preservatives works best. Outdoors, store the tree in a cool, protected,
and shaded spot such as in an unheated garage. Once inside, do not place the
tree near a drying heat source and check the water in the stand on a daily basis.
Never allow the water level to fall below the cut end of the tree. Taking these
steps should allow you to enjoy your tree indoors for the entire holiday season.

Buy a local Christmas tree this year and support Maryland’s Christmas tree
growers. Find a farm near you.

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