December 2014 Newsletter

HGIC to end phone service; will focus on digital outreach and services

Since its inception in 1990 HGIC has adapted to the changing needs of our audience, both in gardening topics and teaching methods. Recorded phone tips, inventories of printed pubs, and a snail mail newsletter are some of the information delivery methods we’ve used, and discontinued, over the years.

In the mid-1990s we developed a website; in 2004 a web-based Q&A service. Over the past five years we’ve added videos, this newsletter, and social media tools. Increases in website, blog, and YouTube traffic, along with the growth of the MG program, has coincided with an 80% reduction in phone calls (from a peak in 1992). This decline is no reflection on our fantastic horticulture consultants, known for their professionalism, expertise, and practical answers.

We are ending our phone service as of December 22, 2014. This difficult decision will allow our horticulture consultants to focus on "Ask an Expert," improve and expand the website, and increase social media outreach. This will help us reach a larger and more diverse audience and provide you with the up-to-date information you’ve come to expect.

If you’ve been calling the 800# please get in the habit of sending questions through the website. Just click "Ask Maryland’s Gardening Experts" on the homepage. Questions can be sent day and night. Please attach photos if possible. An e-mail answer from one of our horticulture consultants will be delivered within 48 hours.

We appreciate your support and look forward to being a trusted gardening resource for you in 2015. Best wishes for a healthy and peaceful holiday season.

-Jon Traunfeld
HGIC Director and Extension Specialist

Winter Tips

The winter season is approaching, and with that comes seasonal houseplants and Christmas trees, plus insects into your warm home. Take a look at these seasonal tips for December:

- Keep garden beds covered with shredded leaves, straw, or bark mulch to minimize the risk of soil erosion and nutrient run-off.
- You may notice insects and spiders emerging from around your Christmas tree. They came in unnoticed on your tree. Simply escort them outside or vacuum them up.
- Miscellaneous beetles, like long-horned beetles and bark beetles may emerge from firewood stored inside the home. These are nuisance pests; they are not a threat to the wood in your home.
- To keep holiday plants looking good longer, keep them away from dry, drafty locations.
Do not place near heat vents, doorways or drafty windows. Increase humidity around plants by placing them on a tray lined with pebbles, shallowly filled with water. Make sure the water does not enter the drainage holes. For information on caring for Poinsettias read HG 30.

Find more seasonal HGIC tips

---

**Locate Your Christmas Tree!**

Check out this link to marylandsbest.net to locate a Christmas tree farm in Maryland near you.

Once you've brought home your tree, make sure to read publications HG45 - Selecting and Caring for the Cut Christmas Tree and HG46 - Caring for a Live Christmas Tree.

---

**Take Care of Your Amaryllis (a.k.a. Hippeastrum) - a Favorite Holiday Plant**

Text by Ray Bosmans, Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland Extension

Hippeastrums are usually sold in a dormant state ready to grow in a gift box kit complete with peat moss and a pot. All one needs to do is plant it and place it in a sunny window. Keep it watered according to the instructions on the package and in about three weeks enjoy the gorgeous blossoms that emerge. The bulb should be watered sparingly until the flower stalk emerges. After the flower stalk is up more frequent watering is needed.

Hippeastrum will grow to about 24 inches tall and when properly cared for may live for several years. There are many hybrids bred for larger more colorful blossoms. Just like the bulbs grown in gardens outdoors these tropical bulbs also have a rest period when the leaves will dry up and are shed.

Read on about Light and Watering Requirements, Fertilization, and Propogation
Q: What is your opinion about using pruning paint on a young tree to repair deer-caused bark damage by a deer?

Our very young red oak (just planted this season and only about 5 feet tall) had a foot or so of bark stripped off by deer. We have taken steps to prevent this damage going forward, but were wondering if we should do anything to repair the damage. I have heard different opinions about using a wound repair coating versus leaving the tree alone to heal itself.

A: Smooth any jagged edges the best you can, otherwise let mother nature repair your tree. Pruning paint is not recommended as it can hinder the tree from repairing the wound. If it is badly damaged, you might consider replacing the tree since it is small and keeping the trunk of the replacement tree surrounded by a hardware cloth fence.

Find more info on deer issues

Q: What are these white spots on the leaves of our maple tree?

We have seen these small white spots on virtually every single leaf on this maple tree. It almost appears to be white mold spots while some appear to have been eaten by insects. Please let us know what this is and is it going to permanently affect the tree. Also what we can do to correct this problem.

A: Late in the season it is not uncommon for the leaves of a tree to be affected by a minor leaf spot...
as well as some insect feeding damage. There is no cause for concern. Your tree should leaf out fine next spring. Monitor your tree next season and contact us, if you notice additional symptoms.

Featured Video - Kent's Favorite Gardening Tools

Master Gardener Kent Phillips' talks about his favorite gardening tools. Watch what he thinks are the best tools to use in the garden to help your vegetables grow.

Watch the video

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.

©2014 University of Maryland College of Agriculture & Natural Resources