Welcome, Alicia!

We are happy to announce that Alicia Bembenek started working this month as the new Advanced Training Coordinator for the UME Master Gardener program. Alicia holds a Ph.D. in Experimental Social Psychology from the University of Arkansas, and a Certificate in Public Health Practice from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Prior to beginning this position, Alicia served as Assistant Professor of Psychology at Georgia College & State University and then as Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology at Towson University.

Alicia became a Carroll County MG in 2013. The large majority of her volunteer hours were spent with the Carroll County Grow It Eat It team, in which Alicia was responsible for client communications and program evaluation. Alicia enjoys committing her time to projects that enhance public health and also allow her to apply her skills as an educator and researcher. She feels very fortunate to have obtained the Coordinator position, knowing that her day-to-day contributions enable her to achieve those aspirations.

WELCOME Alicia! And please visit http://extension.umd.edu/mg to access information about becoming a Master Gardener, obtaining the Master Gardener Handbook, the Basic and Advanced Training available for Master Gardeners, and information about the Annual Training Day.

-Jon Traunfeld
HGIC Director and Extension Specialist

January Tips

Do not attempt to melt ice this winter with granular garden fertilizers. They are very corrosive to concrete and metal, can burn plants and contribute to waterway pollution. Select alternative materials containing combinations of magnesium chloride or calcium magnesium acetate. Other formulas containing sodium chloride, potassium chloride and calcium chloride are also suitable but can be corrosive and burn plants if not applied correctly. Avoid products containing urea. Keep all ice melting materials away from landscape plants. Sand or kitty litter are good for improving traction on slippery surfaces. See publication Melting Ice Safely FS707.

Find more seasonal HGIC tips

Get Into Seed Swapping

Seed saving by our ancestors is largely responsible for the bounty of food crops we grow and eat today.
More and more gardeners are learning about the benefits and joys of saving and sharing seed from garden plants. National Seed Swap Day is the 4th Saturday of January each year (Jan. 31 this year). Seed swaps are a great way to get to know gardeners in your area and take home seed from new vegetables you’ve been wanting to try, or from new cultivars of familiar vegetables, herbs, and flowers.

Nancy Radcliffe is a UME Master Gardener and Public Services Librarian who recently announced that the Calvert Library, Southern Branch, is holding a Community Seed Swap on January 24 from 1-4 pm. Together with the Calvert Master Gardeners, the library will host this swap to pull together gardeners of southern Maryland in order to share in the exchange of seeds, stories, and information.

Washington Gardener Magazine is hosting their 7th Annual Washington Seed Swap at two locations (Maryland and Virginia). For details, click here.

Consider checking out this handy website pickacarrot.com which will let you search for a type of seed and present listings for businesses which carry those seeds for online ordering.

**Winter Indoor House Plant Woes**
David Clement, University of Maryland Extension Specialist, Plant Pathology

Despite their best intentions many beginning gardeners have trouble with their indoor house plants during the winter months. The number one reason for dying plants is usually overwatering.

Overwatering of indoor plants will lead ultimately to root rots usually caused by fungi or fungal-like organisms. Symptoms of root rots/crown rots include yellowing, browning and dieback of the leaves and browning or blackening of the crown and or roots, and poor growth. Root rots may also paradoxically cause wilting even when the soil is wet because the roots are so damaged that they cannot transport water to the leaves.

The number one strategy for avoiding root rots has to be proper watering. Other strategies include, only using clean or new pots for planting, avoid regular garden soil (utilize a sterile potting media), remove and separate infected plants, from healthy plants and always carefully inspect newly purchased plant material before placing them with existing plants. Throw away severely infected plants and only take stem cuttings from healthy tissue.

[Read the full article here](#)

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**GIEI Blog - Happy Year of the Bean and Pea, Black-Eyed Pea Edition**

Erica Smith introduces the Grow It Eat It Theme for 2015 - The Year of Beans and Peas. [Click to read the blog post](#).

Visit the GIEI blog often for the most current updates or enter your email address in the "Follow by Email" field to get the new posts delivered to your inbox.
Several mature large boxwoods have patches of brown leaves. I am unable to find any lesions on the stems. Other plants have no patches.

A: The browning of the branches on the boxwood looks like volutella, a fungal disease. At this point, all you can do is prune out the affected portions. Remove all old diseased leaves in the shrub and on the ground. Proper pruning includes thinning. Boxwoods have growth buds all along the stem. Hopefully, the plant should put out new growth next season. Monitor the plant throughout the growing season for additional symptoms. See our boxwood publication for more information.

Q: I noticed that only one side of my Holly tree had berries. It looks like I have two trees growing? Should I cut down the side that does not have berries, so that berry side of the tree will fill out better?

A: If you have two holly trees and only one is producing berries, the berry producing tree is a female tree and the other one is a male tree. In order for the female tree to produce berries, there must be a male tree nearby. If you remove the male tree, the female will not produce berries unless there is another male tree nearby. Holly trees are among a group of species known as dioecious trees, i.e., having separate male and female flowers. Monoecious trees have what are called 'perfect' flowers, i.e., each flower has both male and female structures, or a single tree may produce separate male and female flowers.

Featured Video - Composting: Varieties of Composting Bins
Master Gardener Bettye Ames gives a run through of different types of compost bins you can use to get your compost pile started.

Watch the video

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