The Maryland Master Gardener Program, a volunteer education program taught and administered by University of Maryland Extension (UME), puts research-based knowledge and environmental power into the hands of people who want to create sustainable gardens and landscapes, and protect and improve natural resources.

Have you seen this?

Gypsy Moth Egg Sac

What a thrill that the gypsy moth is not decimating Maryland trees as it once did. However, it still lurks, waiting for the opportunity to surge back. What mostly saved our trees is a pathogenic fungus which infects and kills the young caterpillars in spring. Spring is normally a wet season, and the fungi need those conditions. In a dry spring, the fungus cannot do its work and gypsy moths rebound. So, it still pays to keep an eye out for the beige-colored egg cases of gypsy moths. They show up well against winter tree trunks, in wood piles, or anywhere they adhere. The flattened masses appear felt-like and can harbor up to a 1000 eggs. Scrape them off, taking care to not inhale the fuzz.

---More about gypsy moths

January Tips

- Get a headstart on spring lawn projects by having your soil tested now. (Read HG 110) Keeping the soil pH in the 6.0 - 7.0 range is very important in maintaining healthy turf.
- Don’t store firewood inside your home. Only bring in enough to burn at one time. Bark and other wood boring beetles may emerge inside the home.
- Bare soil is prone to erosion and should be covered with mulch, cover crops, groundcovers, or turf.
- This is the mating season for foxes. Late at night
Melting Ice Safely

By Dave Clement

Ice melting products are a practical way of providing safe footing on sidewalks, driveways and steps during the winter months. However, careless use or use of the wrong product can cause damage to the environment or your property.

It is important not to use plant fertilizers or products that contain urea to melt ice or snow because the nitrogen or phosphorus in them can harm local streams and the bay. The runoff created by melting ice and snow from one small sidewalk may not cause much harm, but the cumulative effects across a region can create harmful levels of salts and nutrients that eventually pollute the bay. Follow the products directions and if possible keep them away from the root zones of plants.

Salt Damage to Plants: Symptoms of salt damage include:

- Poor or stunted growth or browning of the foliage especially next to walks, driveways and streets (pictured above)
- Marginal leaf browning or leaf scorch on trees and shrubs

Symptoms often don’t appear until months afterward and may not appear until the following growing season.

Excessive salt levels in the soil kill plant roots by desiccation. To confirm salt damage have your soil tested by a soil lab for soluble salt levels. Salt problems can be treated by soaking the area with 1 inch applications of water 3-4 times in the spring to flush the excessive salts past the root zone. Gypsum can also be added to reduce sodium levels caused by products that contain rock salt. Soil replacement may also be an option in small beds.

Fact Sheet 707 - Melting Ice Safely
Salt/Fertilizer Damage - Trees and Shrubs

Featured Video
Digging Deeper - Caring for Poinsettias
Do you have poinsettias in your house from the holiday season? David Clement, Extension Specialist and Plant Pathologist, explains how best to care for these houseplants.

Watch on Youtube

What does the warm December 2015 mean for your garden?

El Niño has sure been sending us some interesting weather. In December, your yard and garden might have looked more like a normal October, not December, due to the unseasonably warm temperatures. Many plants have been tricked into blooming like it is spring during the wrong season. Have you seen tulips, daffodils, or hyacinths poking out of the ground? One Master Gardener spotted a friend's coral bells blooming on Christmas Day (pictured left).

What does this mean for your garden? Is it a problem? Not really. In fact it might be a blessing. Your fall crops have just recieved a healthy boost from the warm weather. However that means the weeds have too, so you will need to be extra vigilant this spring. Plants that are blooming out of season may have reduced bloom during 2016 but it may not be noticeable. Another concern is injury caused by very cold weather to woody plants that didn't harden off properly during the warmish fall/early winter. Maryland native plants will have the advantage here.

If you have a cold frame or row cover, it may be a good idea to place it over some of your fall crops to make harvesting easier during the winter. Other than that, gaze outside and enjoy the extra green in your yard and garden.

Q&A

My palm's leaves are turning brown and looking sick. What can I do to help it get better?

There are many types of palms that grow indoors. This time of year you may notice weak growth and yellowing of leaves. Make sure they have good drainage and they may need more light.

Palm grow best with relatively warm conditions. Protect them from drafts near doors, windows, and air conditioning. Most palms prefer temperatures of 60 °F at night and
between 70 and 80 °F during the day.

Browning of leaves can also be caused by dry air and/or lack of moisture in the air. Indoors, if the humidity level is below 50%, the pot saucer can be filled with gravel to increase the moisture level without rotting the plant roots. A room humidifier may also be used or mist weekly with a spray bottle.

--- Read more on the care of indoor palms from this page on the Clemson HGIC

Have a plant or pest question? University of Maryland Extension’s experts have answers! Send in your questions and photos here.

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