July 2014 Newsletter

HGIC has launched an Instagram account! If you are an Instagram user, make sure to follow user UMDHGIC for periodic photos and videos of interesting plants, insects, GIEI and Master Gardener activities, tips, info, and more.

Seasonal Quick Tip:

Typically, July is a very hot month and proper mowing of your lawn is critical to help it survive the summer. “Mow ‘em high and let ‘em lie” should be your slogan. Cut your cool-season turf (fescues and bluegrass) to a height of 3-4 inches and leave the clippings on the lawn where they will decompose naturally. Mow warm season grasses, like zoysia and Bermuda, to a height of 3 inches. More quick tips

Featured Plant for July: Peppers

Capsicum annuum

Text by Lewis Shell, photo by Ellen Nibali

The sweet 'Bell Pepper' needs well-drained but consistently moist soil. While they require lots of sun for flower/fruit development, they will not produce well with extreme hot temperatures for extended periods. Try to provide some afternoon shade. During heat waves, cool them with a mist of water. When flowers begin to develop, side dress with a balanced fertilizer. Pinch off the earliest flowers to encourage more fruit production. Sweet peppers will be sweeter if allowed to ripen to red. Hot peppers can be harvested green or allowed to ripen and change color.

More Featured Plants

Grow100 Update Period 1 Winner

Our 100 square foot growing competition has produced some great gardens so far! We harvested contestants' photos and stories and picked a winner for Period 1: Alison Rolen of Anne Arundel County with her 4-R's category (reduce, re-use, recycle, and re-think) garden.

We also highlighted several other standout gardens and photos that were sent in. Check out the full post on the Grow It Eat It Blog.

Creative Urban Container Gardening with Reuseable Grocery Bags

By Dan Adler
Baltimore HGIC and GIEI user Alicia Morales shared some photos of her unique urban garden on Facebook. She makes use of extra reusable grocery bags as containers for growing. These fabric bags are ideal because they are a good size, provide superior aeration and drainage, plus are more lightweight and transportable than pricier pots. Alicia reports that she has more luck with her grocery bag plants than smart pots, plastic pots, and terracotta pots. She is currently growing corn, green beans, pumpkins, watermelons, Chinese long beans, sunflowers, and tomatoes in the canvas grocery bags and says that the growth rate in the bags is much greater than in other containers. She also composes in a bag hanging from a branch and creates compost tea to feed her plants by wetting the compost and allowing the water to drain out of the bag into a container. She notes that you may need to water plants twice a day during high heat due to the permeability of the bags, but this attribute of the bags also saved her plants from drowning during the early May storms we had.

We think this is a great way to re-use materials and grow a healthy garden in an urban (or any type) environment. Thanks for sharing, Alicia!

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**Double trouble: Squash Bug and Squash Beetle**

By Jon Traunfeld

If squash vine borer or bacterial wilt disease don’t take out your squash plants this summer you will probably be battling an old nemesis- squash bug- and may encounter a new pest- squash beetle. The squash bug is a “true bug” with a triangular thorax (middle insect segment) and piercing sucking mouthparts that leave tiny whitish dots (stipples) on leaves where they feed. They stink when threatened or crushed, but they are not stink bugs.

The trouble with this pest is that adults overwinter and hole in on squash plants in spring as soon as they emerge or are planted. Most gardeners don’t look for the copper to rust color egg masses laid on leaves (usually the underside), blossoms, stems, and fruits. Find and destroy egg masses (see bottom of squash bug page for video clip) and you can prevent population build-up. Ignore this pest at your peril. It can ravage plants and reduce yields. In the mid-1990s I started seeing squash beetle in Anne Arundel Co. and parts of Southern Maryland. For nearly 20 years gardeners have
contacted HGIC wondering about the Mexican bean beetles (MBB) on squash, cucumber, and pumpkin plants. These pests are host specific: MBB feeds on garden bean and squash beetle feeds on squash family members.

The eggs and larvae are quite similar but the squash beetle adult is larger and has 14 spots compared to 16 for MBB. Adults and larvae of both species feed on the tissue between leaf veins producing "skeletonized" leaves. Squash beetle is not a major problem yet. It’s slow moving and easy to handpick adults, larvae, and egg masses. Plants can also be protected with floating row covers applied over transplants or newly emerged seedlings (remove when plants bloom). Direct sprays of horticultural oil or insecticidal soap will kill eggs and nymphs.

**Having trouble telling squash bug from brown marmorated stink bug? This article and photo gallery will help you make the distinction.**

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**ASK Maryland’s Garden EXPERTS your plant and pest questions**

A hot topic for this season! Ask the Experts online here or call:

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

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**What is this gray, fuzzy growth on the underside of my basil leaves? Some of the leaves are becoming brown as well.**

This is basil downy mildew. Symptoms of downy mildew on basil can be quite subtle, starting as a blotchy yellowing on the upper leaf surface. A gray, fuzzy growth consisting of the spore structures of the pathogen can be seen on the underside of yellow or bleached-out leaves. As the disease progresses, infected leaves become brown. If your basil has downy mildew, you should simply destroy the plant. *Peronospora belbahrii* does not overwinter in our area, so no special treatment or soil preparation is necessary for next year’s crop. Basil downy mildew is specific to basil.

**More info and photos of downy mildew on basil and coleus.**

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**Mosquito Protection: Bite Them before They Bite You!**
Mike Raupp, "The Bug Guy" for the University of Maryland Extension, joins us once more to show how to take a bite out of mosquitoes! By using the right clothing, cleaning out standing water and other techniques, you too can keep your mosquito population down and your house pest free.

Watch the video

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