Pick the best shovel for the job

A typical length shovel weighs about 5 lbs. which can be unwieldy and tiring for many gardeners to use. Other options, however, are not hard to find and can be several pounds lighter. The drain spade (also known as a transplant spade) offers a shorter handle with a longer narrower blade. The narrow blade handles well in tight spots, such as between plants, plus the reduced width means the edge has a narrower impact area. Less resistance means less force necessary to shove it in the soil. This spade is especially useful in rocky soils where its narrow width is less apt to encounter a rock, can maneuver between rocks, and is great for levering out those it finds. Another favorite for light garden chores are
“mini” shovels, which also have a D-handle. Available in about 26-28” lengths, some feature a blade narrower than a standard shovel. Most gardening chores do not require deep holes, and this spade is perfectly adequate.

March Tips

- Pansies can be planted now for an early display of color in garden beds. Pansies are great for cold wet springs; they can easily tolerate freezing and snowfall even when in full bloom.
- Late February through the end of March is the second best time (the optimum time is late August through mid-October) to overseed your lawn to make it thicker or to cover bare areas. Good seed to soil contact is necessary for germination (HG 102).
- When ants come indoors, bait stations are very effective at controlling them (HG 7). Carpenter ants are attracted to wood that has been damaged by water (HG 115).

--- More seasonal tips ---

General Assembly to Consider House Bill 1102: Celebrating Maryland Native Plants and Pollinators License Plate

Above design is a working concept

HB1102: Celebrating Maryland Native Plants and Pollinators License Plate is currently under consideration by the Maryland General Assembly. If passed, this legislation would create a specialty license plate to support Maryland native plants and pollinators. Revenue from the plate would fund a statewide University of Maryland Extension education program that would facilitate the conservation, production and use of native plants and promote the protection of native pollinators.

Please refer to our page on the bill to learn about the need for this program and how proceeds from the specialty plate would be used. If you would like to contact elected officials in your district to share your views about this bill, please do before March 9th. The hearing for this bill is scheduled for March 10th.

What’s so special about native plants and pollinators?
Of Maryland's 2500 native plant species, 710 are now listed as rare, threatened, endangered or extinct.

Many native bees and nearly all butterflies require native plants to feed their young. (Pictured right: Bumblebee pollinates gray goldenrod)

As native plants and the insects that feed on them decline, we also lose our songbirds, game birds, raptors, and other species that rely on native plants and insects to survive.

The non-native plants in our lawns and landscapes, as well as the invasive plants in our natural areas, cannot support our ecosystems.

--- Visit the HGIC Native Plants section
--- Visit the HGIC Pollinators section

--- Watch on Youtube

Dave Clement details how to effectively care for and propagate African violets.
Here’s a double-feature for you this month, as this one was mistakenly left out of last month’s newsletter! Dave Clement details how to effectively care for your orchid houseplants.

→ Watch on Youtube

My community has asked what products I can recommend to reduce the mosquito population. They are aware not to leave standing water and other good practices but many of them claim to have serious reaction to mosquito bites and want to spray our community. Can anyone give me some guidelines on what to use and when to use it?

A Spraying for mosquitoes is not a task a community should tackle itself. First of all, for individual properties we do not recommend blanket spraying because of the negative impact it has on beneficial insects and pollinators so spraying an entire community is not necessarily the best solution.

Most often, these sprays do not even reach where the adult mosquitoes are living and breeding. The sprays are not long lasting and would require multiple applications. The most effective means of mosquito control is prevention. Reducing areas where mosquitoes breed is the most important control and prevention measure. It is more effective to control the larvae than spraying the adults. As you mention, emptying and refreshing standing water is prudent. Also treating ornamental ponds and rain barrels with non-toxic 'mosquito dunks' of Bti (Bacillus thuringiensis var. israelensis) will reduce breeding sites. Cleaning rain gutters, covering the opening of black corrugated drain pipe with a piece of pantyhose or mesh secured with a rubberband and using a box or oscillating fan (for air movement) when sitting on a deck or patio will also reduce pesky mosquitoes.

If people are sensitive to bites they need to protect themselves by wearing long sleeves, pants, and a hat (you can even find clothes treated with insecticides that repel insect pests). Repellents containing Deet work. Make sure to follow label instructions and consult with your pediatrician before applying to children.

→ Read more on mosquitoes
→ VIDEO: Mosquito Protection

Have a plant or pest question? University of Maryland Extension’s experts have answers!

Send in your questions and photos here.
origin, marital status, genetic information, political affiliation, and gender identity or expression.

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