May 2014 Newsletter

From the Director...

Many of us have removed winter damaged branches, limbs, and entire plants from our gardens and landscapes. Some plants (fig, hydrangea, crape myrtle) may appear dead now but could push out new growth from the crown (plant base). It’s best to be patient and wait until mid-May to make replacement and/or drastic pruning decisions.

Looking for compost? Check with your county/city landfill or public works department. Some are making and selling good quality compost by the cubic yard. Ask about their programs for distributing free backyard composters for making your own.

Looking for nearby farmers markets, grass-fed beef, halaal products, or farm-made ice cream? Check out Maryland’s Best - the most complete listing of locally-grown and processed foods.

The Extension Service in the U.S. turns 100 in 2014! HGIC, Master Gardeners, and Grow It Eat It are all part of University of Maryland Extension, the outreach education arm of the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources. We proudly serve you with the latest, science-based information to help you grow sustainable gardens and landscapes. The demand for our education and services grows each year and we value and appreciate your support and patronage.

Happy gardening!

- Jon Traunfeld
HGIC Center Director

Relocating intruding snakes with a homemade tool - the "Snake Stake"

By Dan Adler

Using a homemade tool to grab a snake who wandered indoors and safely place it outside.

Read on for more about building your own Snake Stake
Okra
Nutritionally, okra is a good source of vitamins B and C, magnesium and fiber.

Strawberries
Strawberries are easy to grow and Maryland's climate is ideal for growing them.

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**Tomato Time**
By Jon Traunfeld

Hands-down, tomato is the most popular vegetable (yes, we eat tomato fruits but it's classified as a vegetable) grown in the U.S. It just would not be summer without ripe home-grown, or at least locally farm-grown, tomatoes.

**Learn about or brush-up on tomato growing through our online resources:**

- Tomato Profile with links to tomato videos
- GIEI tomato blog posts:
  - Hardening off tomato plants
  - Planting tomatoes
  - Tomato plant protectors
  - Using grafted tomato
  - "Pushing the season"

**Tomato tips:**

- It's ok to plant tomatoes in the same spot if that's your best/only spot. Otherwise, it's always good to rotate your vegetable crops to different garden locations.
- Troubles with wilt diseases that live in the soil, such as bacterial wilt and Fusarium wilt? Grow your tomato plants in containers in a mixture of compost and soilless potting media, OR try grafted tomato plants. These have strong resistance to these diseases. Call around because not all garden centers carry them (many mail-order seed companies sell them).
- If you want early tomatoes purchase early season cultivars (ripen 55-65 days after transplanting) such as ‘Early Girl’ and ‘4th of July.’ Laying down black plastic mulch 2 weeks before planting warms the soil and accelerates growth.
- Don't crowd 'em! Most cultivars need a minimum of 18-in. between plants and 3 to 4-ft. between rows.
- Be prepared to cover plants with paper bags or light blankets if frost is predicted after plants are in the ground.

Add to the fun this summer by sharing photos on our Facebook page of any unusual, cool, or spectacular tomato plants.

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**Barley Cover Crop: Smother, Mow, Turn Under**

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**Fruits**

The floricanes (canes with flowers) of June-bearing raspberries should be pruned back to a height of 3-4 feet to encourage lateral growth.

Read more

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**Ornamentals**

Plant all warm season annual plants at this time. Purchase stocky, transplants with healthy, white root systems.

Read more

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**Insects**

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Ticks are very active all summer. Wear light colored clothing and get in the habit of checking yourself.

Grow100 is Growing!

We've got 47 gardeners participating in the inaugural Grow100 Challenge which asks "What Can YOU Grow in 100 Square Feet?", and we've moved into the first update period where participants are beginning to send in information and photos about their progress so far. Next month, we will share some interesting highlights from Update Period 1.

There is still time to register! Registration deadline is June 15.

Think Before You Buy Plants at the Garden Center
by Debra Ricigliano
A hot topic for this season! Ask the Experts online here or call:
800-342-2507 in Maryland
410-531-1757 outside Maryland

Before making a trip to your favorite plant nursery or garden center to replace those winter damaged, deer damaged, or problematic plants in your landscape, take the time to think before you buy. Snap decisions can lead to plants that do not establish well, are damaged by wildlife, or outgrow their space.

Points to Consider:

- Right plant for the right site. How much sun or shade does the site receive? Does the soil drain well? Select plants accordingly.
- Know the mature size of what you are planting and provide ample space. Assuming you can keep a plant pruned to a certain size does not work.
- Research the trees and shrubs you are interested to see if there are disease and insect resistant varieties. Call or send a question through our website to the HGIC Certified Professional Horticulturists to help find the information for you.
- Incorporate some native plants into your landscape. Do not plant invasive species.
- Concerned about deer damage? Make sure what you buy is deer resistant and not invasive. Also consider using deer repellents.
- Plant some edible plants, even in your ornamental beds. Herbs, small fruits (like blueberries) and vegetables (like Swiss chard) are very ornamental. They provide beauty and function.

Taking the time to think about and plan your landscape before you purchase plants will save you time, money, and will give you an attractive and functional outdoor space to enjoy for many years to come.
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.