November 2013 Newsletter

From the Director...

“The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies.” This is the first line of the Thanksgiving Proclamation given by Abraham Lincoln (written by William Seward) in 1863. Thanksgiving makes me think of food, farming, gardening, and our beautiful planet. As gardeners we are fascinated by plants that nurture and delight us, and the insects, birds and other animals that interact with the plant world. When we look more closely and deeply we begin to appreciate the amazing interaction between the living and non-living parts of our ecosystem. So let’s also give thanks to the air, soil, and water.

And now that we are properly thankful let’s take some steps this fall to protect and conserve these under-valued resources that we depend on for our existence:

- Let’s stop ignoring the grass clippings and leaves that end up on our driveways and streets. We are responsible for them! It’s our job as good neighbors and Earth stewards to rake and sweep up organic materials that land on hard surfaces. Otherwise, they wash into storm drains adding to the sediment and nutrient load of surface waters.
- Slow it down, spread it out, and soak it in...I’m speaking of storm water, of course. After you clean out your gutters, check to see that water is flowing freely from your leaders to level ground or a depression where it can soak into the soil. Attach inexpensive, flexible drain pipe to the ends of your leaders to carry the water away from your home and hard surfaces.
- Cover bare garden soil with fallen tree leaves to reduce erosion and nutrient run-off.
- It’s not too late to plant native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous perennials that beautify your landscape and support and Maryland’s ecosystems (think birds and bees!)

For help with these gardening ideas and practices call the plant and pest experts on the HGIC hotline (800-342-2507) or send a question through the HGIC website.

Have a great November and take a walk in the woods to get better acquainted with your planet.

- Jon Traunfeld
HGIC Center Director

By Ria Malloy
Root Vegetables for Thanksgiving?

Your non-food gardening Thanksgiving guests might not jump up and down with excitement – or even RSVP – if you tell them that root vegetables will be the theme for this year’s side dishes! So don’t tell them. Just tell them that they’re in for a sensory extravaganza! We’ll even throw in some squash and greens recipes.

Check out our compilation of succulent Thanksgiving recipes.

Master Gardeners Learn About Native Plants

By Sara Tangren, Ph.D., Master Gardener Trainer, Native Plants & Sustainable Horticulture

UME Master Gardeners (MG) have been busy this fall learning how to identify common native trees and collect seed from native plants in the wild. I’m the instructor and the classes are being coordinated by Robin Hessey, Advanced Training Coordinator for the MG program.

Why are native plants so important? Urban and suburban sprawl has led to the rapid disappearance of native plant communities, and even the loss of some native plant species. Did you know that 25% of the 3,069 plus plants growing “in the wild” in Maryland are exotic, and that of the 2,292 native species, 20% are rare, threatened, endangered, or already wiped out? In many cases, the remaining native plant communities are so fragmented that cross-pollination is limited, and species dwindle simply from lack of access to diverse genetic partners.

The loss of native plants also contributes to storm water run-off and nutrient...
pollution of waterways. And animals that depend on native plants for food and shelter are displaced by the loss of native landscapes. This includes butterflies, songbirds, game species, and perhaps more importantly, many of the native bees that help pollinate food crops.

People are becoming more aware of native plants and the Master Gardener program is ideally situated to teach the public how to use native plants in home landscapes and gardens to improve water quality, support pollinators, and reduce the impact of habitat fragmentation. More advanced training classes in native plants are being planned around the state for 2014. Learn more about the UME Master Gardener program.

FEATURED VIDEO

Kent Phillips, UME Master Gardener shows off his food garden and speaks about when he plants and harvests his fall vegetables.

Harvesting Fall Vegetables

Check out other HGIC videos on our YouTube Channel.

ASK Maryland’s Garden EXPERTS your plant and pest questions

Common or interesting questions from last month. Ask your own question online here or call:

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

Compiled by Debra Ricigliano

Q Can you tell me what is dropping from the oak tree on my property?

It seems to be raining these small tannish-green, seed-like pellets. My deck and sidewalk are covered with them. In the last five years that I have lived in this house I cannot remember this happening before. I really love my oak trees and hope this isn’t serious. Thanks for your help.

A Your oak trees are most likely dropping galls. Galls are abnormal plant growths found on leaves and twigs caused by insects, mites, bacteria, fungi or nematodes. While feeding or laying eggs insects can inject chemicals into plant
tissue causing them to swell. Galls are generally formed in the spring and remain on the tree throughout the season. They may however, drop from the leaves. Twig galls can remain on trees for more than one season. Galls may disfigure leaves and stems but they do not cause long-term damage to trees. Control is not necessary.

Lawn fertilizer reminder!

The last day homeowners can fertilize their lawns is November 15th!

Download the Maryland Lawn Fertilizer Law Fact Sheet (PDF)