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.

Learn more about The Master Gardener Program

Have you seen this?

Tree Galls

Raking and handling leaves bring some strange growths into view that spent the summer unnoticed high up in trees. Concerns are raised. Appearing in incredibly diverse colors including green, red, yellow and white, and forms from fuzzy round to almost acorn-like, almost all galls are benign. Though admittedly abnormal, galls are the leaf’s reaction to the feeding or egg-laying activities of living organisms such as tiny wasps, mites, bacteria, fungi, even nematodes. Galls begin to form early in the growing season and not much can, or should, be done about them. A few types of galls occur on woody stems, cutting off the flow of water and nutrients above them. Control measures may be required for these galls.

More about galls

November Tips

- Spinach, lettuce, arugula, kale, and other cool-season crops should be protected from freezing with a cold frame, plastic sheeting or floating row cover.
- Cluster flies resemble very large, hairy houseflies. They are slow flyers and move into homes in the fall to escape cold weather. They are very active in November but as weather continues to get colder their activity will greatly decrease. Caulk, weather strip and seal up all cracks and entry points around your house foundation, vent openings, windows and doorways to prevent them from coming indoors.
- Boxelder bugs and lady bird beetles are also looking for a warm place to overwinter.
Snake Season!

A healthy outdoor environment teems with a variety of animals. Each animal plays a role in the total picture, including snakes. We should not attempt to control every aspect of it, but learn to accept the variety present in the environment.

Black rat snake

There is no need to kill snakes. However, there are some locations, such as in a building, where a snake’s presence may not be welcome. Exclusion from entry is the only effective recommendation. To accomplish that, seal all holes, cracks or crevices around the structure. Inspect the weather stripping on doors and basement windows for tightness of fit. A common entrance for small snakes is along small gaps between the top of the basement walls and the siding of frame houses. Snakes are very good at slipping through these small openings, so check carefully for such spaces. Essentially, any space large enough for mice to get into a building is also adequate for a snake to gain entry.

Most snakes in Maryland are harmless. The two venomous snakes in Maryland are both pit vipers. A “pit” is a heat sensing hole on each side of the head between the eye and the nostril. Pit vipers have vertical pupils much like a cat’s eye in the daylight. These are the two features that distinguish them from harmless snakes in Maryland.

Take a look at our publication on snakes in Maryland to learn more.
Featured Video

Digging Deeper - Mushrooms and Trees' Symbiotic Relationship

David Clement, Extension Specialist and Plant Pathologist, explains how fungi grow on and feed tree roots under the ground and sprout above ground as mushrooms to reproduce during wet fall seasons. Mycelium provide soil nutrients used by the tree and the tree provides sugars for the fungus to grow.

Watch on Youtube

More fungus fun: Print these fungi flash cards and take a hike. Thanks to University of Minnesota Mycology Club.

Grow100 Challenge 2015 Summary

For those who are not familiar, Grow100 was a challenge issued by Grow It Eat It to see what participants could grow within 100 square feet.

Over the 2015 growing season, participants sent in photos and stories about their gardening methods, challenges, and successes. 2015 seemed to be a tough season for certain crops, plagued by cabbage worm, cucumber wilt, early blight, and rabbits!
There was plenty of success as well, with several gardeners producing loads of vegetables. The Montgomery County Germantown Branch Public Library using the garden for children's education and donated the crops to a food bank.

--- Read the 2015 Grow100 Summary on the GIEI Blog

Q&A

What is the best way to control voles and moles in a home vegetable garden?

It is important to distinguish between moles and voles. Moles are 'good guys' in that they are excellent insectivores. They do not eat plant material. Moles typically tunnel through the lawn at root level looking for grubs, beetles, and earthworms. In the process, they aerate the lawn soil, which is a good thing.

Voles, on the other hand, are the true nemesis of the home gardener. As you have observed, they can devastate a garden from top to bottom. There may be 80-100 voles in a single colony. This is a good time of year to control voles. Their food sources are dwindling as autumn approaches, so now is the time to place 6-8 mouse traps baited with peanut butter or a small piece of fruit, on the soil surface around your shrubs and ornamental beds. (One homeowner had success by tying a cotton ball to the bait trip and dousing it with marischino cherry juice). Once you start catching them, continue putting out the
traps.

We do not recommend rodenticides since they can be moved off-site and other animals or children may find them. By using traps, you can measure your success.

→ Read more on voles

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