October 2014 Newsletter

It is about time to move those houseplants inside the house. Here are a few tips for your houseplants this season:

Before bringing houseplants back into the house:

- Check plants for ants, earwigs, pillbugs, and other nuisance insects. Wash off insect pests or apply a labeled houseplant insecticide to control any plant pests such as aphids, scales, spider mites and mealybugs.
- If the plants have out-grown their pots repot them into the next size pot or remove them, trim back the roots and repot in the same container. Use lightweight, well-drained soilless potting mixes. Contrary to old established practice, pebbles, stones, and shards from clay pots do not need to be added to the bottom of planting containers. This actually creates a higher water table and may reduce plant growth. When repotting, cut the root ball with a sharp knife at 2-4 inch intervals and remove brown, dead roots.

Find more fall houseplant tips

UMD Crowdfunding: Sentinel Hives - Guardians of Honey Bees

Honey bees are important pollinators—they're responsible for every third bite we eat and their pollination efforts are valued at $15 billion annually. But they are currently threatened by a changing agricultural landscape. For several years, beekeepers have experienced high annual colony losses, which endanger our food supply.
To alert beekeepers of escalating health problems in their hives in real time, University of Maryland researchers are launching a sentinel hive program throughout the state of Maryland. Sentinel hives act as early warning systems by alerting beekeepers of trouble in time for them to intervene to prevent further damage to bee colonies.

Through a new crowdfunding program at the University called Launch UMD, the researchers hope to raise $8,000, which will support the construction, placement, monitoring and data analysis of eight sentinel hives across the state. The hives will allow beekeepers to step in before colonies reach a critical tipping point, staving off colony losses.

Source: UMD CMNS News

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**Straw Bale Gardening - Interesting Alternative to Containers**

By Dan Adler

At September's Grow It Eat It state meeting at the Montgomery County Master Gardener Demo Garden in Derwood, we got the opportunity to take a look at their straw bale gardening efforts.

Straw Bale gardening is a way to do container gardening by using the bale as an organic container. Advantages include the extra height which makes tending to plants easier on gardeners with difficulty bending over, and the bales provide mulch after a growing season.

The bales need to be seasoned before planting which is done by watering the bales for several days to keep them damp, and adding fertilizer for several days to begin the straw's breakdown into nutrient-rich material in which the plants will grow.

Seedlings can be planted into the bales, just like in soil. Seeds may be planted in soil mixed with compost and spread in a layer on top of the bail.

Tomatoes, peppers, cucumber, squash, zucchini, lettuce, strawberries and beans all are great crops to plant in hay bales. Root vegetables are doable, but sometimes have difficulty. Remember to use bales of straw; hay often contains grass weed seeds that will sprout!

Additional hay bale gardening materials and how-to:
Featured Plant for October: Goldenrod "Fireworks"
_Solidago rugosa_
Text and Photo by Ellen Nibali

True to its name, ‘Fireworks’ seems to explode sprays of bright yellow flowers over a long period in autumn. At 3-4 feet in height, it stays more compact and flowers more heavily than the wild species, but its airy growth habit really distinguishes it from common goldenrod. Sometimes mistaken for ragweed and blamed for allergies, this native perennial is highly beneficial. It provides nectar for bees and migrating butterflies in fall. In winter, the seeds feed juncos, finches and other birds. Deer shun it. Give it plenty of sun. It likes moisture but puts up with droughty periods.

More Featured Plants for October

Grow100 Update Period 3 is ending soon

Period three of our 100 square foot growing competition will be ending October 15! Send in your final check ins if you are participating, and meanwhile, check out the results from periods 1 and 2.

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

Q: I found this 4 foot tall weed that sort of looks like corn in my yard. What is it?

A: That sounds and looks like a type of sorghum. It is a monocot, grows like corn, then produces a plume of grains. Some types are grown for food, and likely this came from a bird seed mix. Is there a feeder nearby? Some varieties of commercial
birdseed include it in their mix, and here it would be called 'milo'. Most songbirds do not prefer this type of seed, and it ends up not being eaten, but it is often included to bulk up the bag.

Featured Video - Bamboo Plant Support Structures

Master Gardener intern Joel Warren shows how to construct trellises and support structures for your plants with bamboo.

Watch the video

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