



January/February 2009

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Grow it! Eat it!

There's nothing like the flavor of a locally-grown tomato and there's no location more local than your own backyard. Creating your own small food garden in 2009 could be an answer to many of life's big issues. Food prices rose sharply in 2008 and economic pressures forced many Marylanders to reduce spending. At the same time, health experts told us to eat more vegetables and fruits, get more physically active, and introduce our couch-potato children to the great outdoors!

Last year many people told us that they want to start some type of vegetable garden but did not know how to begin. Our response is to launch the Grow it! Eat it! campaign in 2009- a joint venture between The Maryland Master Gardener program and the Home and Garden Information Center- to encourage more food gardening in Maryland. Master Gardeners are organizing Grow it! Eat it! teams at the local level and will receive special training early in 2009 so they can teach basic food gardening classes to the public. To schedule a talk in your community/school/church/library, just contact the Master Gardener program where you live- <http://mastergardener.umd.edu/local/index.cfm>

Our educational campaign will be supported by a new Grow it! Eat it! web site and blog. Horticulture

consultants at HGIC will be prepared to answer all food gardening questions via the toll-free hotline and e-mail Q&A service.

We recognize that there's a learning curve for all skills, including growing food. If you provide the desire and effort, we'll provide the basic information and support. Whether it's a container with one tomato and one basil plant, or a small, in-ground garden, we can help you have a successful new food garden in 2009! The campaign is not limited to new gardeners; we can also assist you experienced gardeners with everything from growing unusual crops to extending your growing season with a floating row cover or cold frame.

Our goal is to help start hundreds of new food gardens in 2009 AND create a network of enthusiastic growers that can learn from one another and tap into University of Maryland resources. Stay tuned for more announcements in the New Year, and please send me your comments and suggestions for this exciting new campaign.

jont@umd.edu

Jon Traunfeld

Melting Ice Safely

by David Clement

Ice melting products are a practical way of providing safe footing on sidewalks, driveways and steps during the winter months. However, careless use or use of the wrong product can

cause damage to the environment or your property. **It is important not to use plant fertilizers or products that contain urea to melt ice or snow because the nitrogen or phosphorus in them can harm local streams and the bay.** The runoff created by melting ice and snow from one small sidewalk may not cause much harm, but the cumulative effects across a region can create harmful levels of salts and nutrients that eventually pollute the bay. Follow the products directions and if possible keep them away from the root zones of plants.

Salt Damage to Plants:

Symptoms of salt damage include:

- Poor or stunted growth or browning of the foliage especially next to walks, driveways and streets
- Marginal leaf browning or leaf scorch on trees and shrubs



Excessive salt levels in the soil kill plant roots by desiccation. To confirm salt damage have your soil tested (link to soil test labs) by a soil lab for soluble salt levels. Salt problems can be treated by soaking the area with 1 inch applications of water 3-4 times in the spring to flush the excessive salts past the root zone. Gypsum can also be added to reduce sodium levels caused by products that contain rock salt. Soil replacement may also be an option in small beds.

More information can be obtained from Fact Sheet 707, "Melting Ice Safely."

Start a No-Dig Vegetable Garden in January?

by Jon Traunfeld

The cabin fever is getting to you and those extra holiday pounds are weighing you down. My suggestion is to fight the winter blues by going outside and starting a little vegetable garden. Yes, the soil is too cold, wet, and heavy to dig in. But there is another way. It's called sheet composting or "lasagna gardening" (a term coined by Pat Lanza who has written a few books on the subject.) Armed with newspapers, cardboard and lots of organic matter you can start a no-dig garden in the dead of winter and get a jump start on the growing season.

Here are some basic principles and easy steps to guide you:

- Mark off a flat, sunny spot close to your home that drains well- no standing water after it rains. The area should be no more than 10 ft. X 10 ft.
- Take a soil test (call for instructions) and send it off. You can go ahead and start your garden before you get the results back from the lab.
- Leave your shovel inside.
- On a windless day, cover the marked off garden spot with overlapping pieces of flattened cardboard (non-waxed) or whole sections of newspaper.



- Then add layers of leaves (shredded is best), compost, or decomposed farm manure. You should strive for a 6-8 inch layer of organic matter.



- If you have no organic materials on hand, borrow your neighbor's pick-up truck and purchase 1-2 cubic yards of compost, like Leafgro, from a local distributor, and spread it out on your cardboard or newspaper layer.



Note: Bagged compost is great but is more expensive than purchasing in bulk by the cubic yard.

- The organic materials will shrink in volume as they break down and the sod will die and begin to decompose by mid-April. (Newspaper will also decompose; don't worry if you see remnants of cardboard.) This makes it possible to plant a no-till garden. You can use a shovel, bulb planter, or post-hole digger to plant tomato and pepper plants, and a hoe or hand cultivator to make furrows for bean and lettuce seeds.
- You can use this technique for any kind of bed – flowers, herbs, perennials, or shrubs. Give it a try and call us (800-342-2507) if you have questions!

Does Your Firewood Come with Unexpected Guests?

by Mary Kay Malinoski

Several types of beetles may emerge from firewood that is stored indoors. Bark beetles are 1/4 inch or less in length, cylindrical in shape and red, black or brown in color. They may be found around windows, lamps or woodpiles near the fireplace, especially during the winter. Check fire wood logs for small, round holes in the bark.

Larger wood boring beetles may also be seen. They may be metallic wood borers (e.g. two-lined chestnut borer, approximately 1/2 inch long, narrow, variously colored, with short antennae)



or long-horned beetles (e.g. redheaded ash borer, 1/2 inch or longer, narrow, variously colored, long antennae and legs, not metallic).



Sawdust may be found under the firewood and oval or D-shaped exit holes may be present in the bark of logs.

The beetles may emerge from firewood that has been stored indoors for several days or more. As the wood warms, the beetles assume it is spring and emerge. They may fly around the house or congregate in windows trying to get outdoors. Vacuum and dispose

of the beetles in the trash outdoors. Only store enough firewood in the home for a day or two to prevent the beetles from emerging.

Enhance Your Landscape with Some Different Woody Plants

by Raymond Bosmans

Winter is a great time to reflect on enhancing the beauty and enjoyment of your landscape. Your landscape should be a "refuge" where you can relax, refresh your interest and curiosity, enjoy outdoor entertaining or simply enjoy its beauty.

A good plan begins with following some basic landscape principles and selecting the right plant for the right place. Create open spaces for outdoor dining, relaxation, watching wildlife, playing catch, etc. Always group plants together for a coordinated natural look, use accent plants where needed (but keep them to a minimum or they are not true accents.) Woody plants such as large shade trees, smaller trees and shrubs are the "framework" that the entire design is built upon.

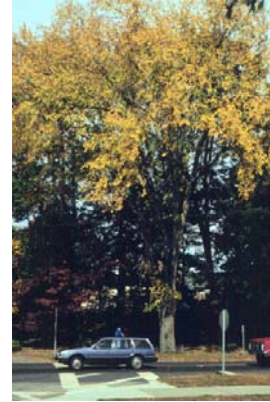
Another important function of a landscape design is to address problems in the landscape. Problem areas such as large bare areas where grass will not grow, an unsafe slope for mowing, a need for privacy, or a wind break from cold winter winds.

Break away from the ordinary and include woody plants that are a little different from the routine woody plants. The plants listed below are a little different than your average landscape plants, they all are easy to grow and have very few insect or disease problems.

Large Trees: 50-100 feet tall

Resistant American Elms- *Ulmus spp.*
The American Elm once was the most

popular street tree in the mid-west and eastern U.S. In the 1930's an epidemic of the devastating Dutch Elm disease killed most of them and Elms were no longer planted. Fortunately, a few years ago disease resistant elms were developed by the USDA. Some cultivars available at local nurseries are: Princeton, Jefferson, Valley Forge, Delaware and New Harmony.



Black Gum – *Nyssa sylvatica*

This beautiful moderately-sized shade tree is native to the mid-Atlantic and Southern regions of the U.S. It has glossy deep green foliage that turns a brilliant red in early fall. Its wood is strong and the growth rate is slow to moderate. No serious insect or disease problems.



Japanese Zelkova – *Zelkova serrata*

The Zelkova was introduced from the orient as a substitute for the American Elm after they were wiped out by Dutch Elm Disease. Today they are

very popular and continue to do very well in this area. Zelkovas have the same classic vase-shape as the elm. They are known for their very strong wood that is quite resistant to breakage by ice storms. However, unlike the elm they do not have as much fall color.

Ginkgo or Maiden Hair Tree-*Ginkgo biloba*

The Ginkgo was introduced to the U.S. in the late 1940's from China. Long thought to be an extinct "fossil tree" some were discovered growing in a monetary high in the mountains of China. They are very hardy and adapt well to a variety of situations. The fall color is a spectacular bright yellow. Young trees are very sparsely branched but they fill in nicely as they mature. The Ginkgos produced today are clones of males; females are very undesirable because of their very smelly fruit.



Bald Cypress- *Taxodium distichum*

The bald cypress typically grows in the swamps of the southern U.S. There is a native stand in a swamp in southern Maryland. Although thought of as a wetland tree it is remarkably adaptable to landscapes. It looks similar to the dawn redwood (*Metasequoia*) sharing the same pyramidal form and leaf texture. Like the dawn redwood it also is deciduous.

Katsura tree- *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (40-60 feet tall)

The katsura is a wonderful tree that is often underutilized by landscapers. Its

leaves resemble that of the redbud. New leaves are purplish when opening and become dark bluish green when mature. Fall color is apricot orange color. It provides good shade especially well suited for smaller sites. Unfortunately, it may not be as readily available as other trees but definitely worth the search.



Small-Medium Size Trees: 15-30 feet tall

Crepe Myrtle-*Lagerstroemia indica*

Crepe myrtles are southern gems that have great popularity in Maryland. Many new cultivars have been developed over the years, some with very attractive bark and good cold hardiness. Crepe myrtles are great when used as an accent or as shade tree for small courtyard and patios. There are even dwarf forms that remain as shrubs.

Sweet Bay Magnolia- *Magnolia virginiana*

The sweet bay magnolia, also known as the swamp magnolia, is another great native tree. It has very attractive glossy medium-green leaves and produces exceptionally fragrant white blossoms in the early summer. It is a semi evergreen, which may hold on to its foliage for most of the winter in the southern and eastern shore regions of Maryland. It grows equally well in wet, moist or normal soils.



Witch hazel- *Hamemaelis*

Witch hazels are native large shrubs/small trees found growing in wetlands and the edge of streams. There are more than one species. All are deciduous, some bloom in the fall others in the spring, depending on the species. The flower is yellow with long thread-like petals. The fall color is a very attractive golden yellowish-orange.



Shadblow Serviceberry - *Amelanchier canadensis*

Serviceberry is a native shrub/small tree that grows in the mountains and along stream valleys throughout western Maryland. Blooming with attractive 2 inch long small white flower it is one of the first woody plants to bloom in the spring. It can range in size from a large shrub to a very small tree. (6 to 20 feet tall). Its fall foliage color is a beautiful yellow-gold.



Shrubs:

High bush Blueberry

Use blueberries in the landscape? Their attractive form, beautiful fall coloration and the treat of eating fresh blueberries make them perfect for any landscape planting. Blueberries have a form similar to some of the taller deciduous azaleas. The soil should be well-drained and acidic. As an added bonus, the fruit attracts many species of songbirds.

Dwarf Fothergilla-*Fothergilla gardenii*

This is a native 2-3 feet tall plant that may not be very well known to gardeners. Also known as the button bush because of its small round white flowers in the spring before the foliage sprouts. Fothergilla grows very well in a variety of Maryland soils, it is pest and disease free, and in the fall becomes a very attractive golden yellow-orange to red. It is a valuable for use in foundation or a landscape border planting.



Boxwoods-*Buxus sempervirens* and *Buxus koreana X sempervirens* hybrids

Boxwoods are reminiscent of well-manicured, historic estates. Boxwoods have an attractive compact, formal shape with dark green foliage. One of their best qualities is their slow growth that makes them very desirable for foundation plantings. There are several species to select from: the English Box, Korean-English hybrids, and the little leaf boxwoods. Each species also has several cultivars. All do equally well in our region.

Nandina-*Nandina domestica*

Nandina, also called heavenly bamboo is a very attractive shrub that has an open form and dark green bamboo-like foliage. In the late fall and winter it has large clusters of brilliant red berries.

Oak Leaf Hydrangea-*Hydrangea quercifolia*

This is an excellent hydrangea that grows 4-6 feet high with large oak leaf shaped leaves and large white panicle flowers produced in early to mid summer. The flowers remain and turn a purplish pink and then brown. The brown flowers last through the winter. There are several cultivars to choose from. A compact form called 'PeeWee' that grows to only 2-3 feet tall is especially nice to use.



To learn more about these and other woody plants visit www.hgic.umd.edu and its many links to landscape plant sites.

Photos courtesy of Dr. Mark Brand, University of Connecticut, Department of Plant Science; UConn Plant Database

CSI

by Ellen Nibali



HGIC: Good morning, how can I help you?

Caller: There's white mold growing on the soil of my houseplant. What can I pour around the plant to kill the stuff?

HGIC: Usually that's associated with overwatering. Do you water a lot? Is the soil staying soggy?

Caller: Not really. I neglect this plant pretty badly. It barely gets watered.

HGIC: That's good actually. The #1 killer of houseplants is overwatering.

Caller: This plant is tough, though I have been good about fertilizing when I do get around to watering. But now its leaves are turning brown.

HGIC: Is the entire leaf brown? Are the leaves falling off?

Caller: No. The ends of some are brown. And edges.

HGIC: Is the white substance on the soil wet and slimy or dry and crusty?

Caller: Let me check. [Pause] It's

completely dry and hard.

HGIC: That sounds like salt. Fertilizer contains salt. Fertilizer salts build up over time. You can see the accumulation of it on top of the soil. Below soil level, it is burning the roots of your plants. Because of root damage, your plant can't take up and move water so the leaf tips and edges turn brown.

Caller: What should I do now?

HGIC: Scrape off the salt crust. Then dissolve and flush the remaining salt by drenching the soil until water runs freely out the bottom drainage hole. Repeat a few times. Or you can replace the soil with fresh potting soil.

Caller: It's too big for me to do that. I'll flush out the salt.

HGIC: Do you have a water softener?

Caller: Yes, I do.

HGIC: Water softeners use salts, too. In the future, you may want to water your plant with distilled water or rain water. And only fertilize when the plant is actively growing and absorbing fertilizer, which is usually spring to fall.

Ask the Experts...

by Debbie Rigicliano

Questions and Answers

Question:

This spring I want to plant a vegetable garden. Seeds that I have ordered from various catalogs are beginning to arrive. Next month, I plan on starting some of the seeds indoors. Never having done this before I was wondering if you could provide some tips so that my garden is a success. Thank you.

Answer:

Growing your own vegetables can be very rewarding and also a great way to stretch your food budget. First, check the seed packet for important information such as when to sow the seeds, how deep, germination time, and spacing. It is not necessary to buy special containers. Egg cartons, yogurt or any empty plastic food containers work well as long as drainage holes are created on the bottom. Sterilize containers that previously had soil in them using a 10% bleach and 90% water solution. Buy sterilized soilless potting mixture; do not use garden soil. Fertilize with a weak solution of a balanced, water-soluble fertilizer when the seedlings develop a set of true leaves. After germination, seedlings require 14-16 hours of light a day. Supplement light using two 40-watt, fluorescent tubes. Place the seedlings one to two inches below the light; adjust the light fixture as the seedlings grow. Depending on the crop, keep them at temperatures between 60°-75°F. Water with a fine mist keeping the potting media moist; do not let the seedlings dry out or let the soil become too wet. For additional information refer to the following publications on our website [FS 551, "Growing Vegetable Transplants"](#), and [FS 552 Hardening Vegetable Transplants](#)", which explains how to harden off transplants before planting them in your garden.

Question:

My daughter gave me an orchid last year for my birthday. I believe it is a *Phalaenopsis* or a Moth orchid. It bloomed for a very long time, but I cannot seem to get it to bloom again. What am I doing wrong?

Answer:

Phalaenopsis is one of the most commonly sold orchids. The care is very similar to African violets. Just as with African violets, lack of light is the typical reason for not reblooming. An eastern or southern exposure is ideal. Place them in a window that has a

sheer curtain, not direct sunlight. The leaves should be light or medium green color, not a deep green. Fertilize with a complete, water soluble fertilizer labeled for houseplants according to label directions. Look for a fertilizer that is higher in phosphorus, which is the middle number of the analysis. This should help to initiate flowering. Water when the potting media begins to dry out and allow the water to run out the drainage holes. Never let orchids sit in standing water.

Question:

My husband and I are in the process of cleaning out our garden shed. We have some open containers of fungicides and weed killers that we used in our garden in the past. Some of the products look very old and have lost their labels. We also want to use organic products in our yard and therefore would like to dispose of these products. What is the proper way to dispose of old garden chemicals?

Answer:

It is very commendable that you are taking the time to find out the proper procedure for disposing of pesticide containers. Disposing of these items in an incorrect fashion can lead to family, environmental and wildlife hazards. First of all, ask your gardening family members or neighbors if they would be interested in any of the usable products that have not lost their labels. Using the products in accordance to the manufactures' label is the recommended and most practical way of getting rid the products. Never dump the material down the drain, on the ground, down a storm drain or place in the trash. Contact your county landfill. Many counties have programs or designated areas and days for household hazardous waste drop-off. Also contact the **Maryland Department of the Environment** for information.

Store pesticides in original containers with the labels intact, purchase only the amount needed for the season and protect from extreme temperatures. Storage areas should also be kept locked.

Do you have a plant or insect pest question? Call our Certified Professional Horticulturalists at 800-342-2507 (8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday - Friday), or submit your question via our website.

Calendars and Tips

If I didn't over-seed my lawn last fall, can I do it now? When should I start sowing my spinach and lettuce seed in cold frames?

Our tips calendars provide a handy reference for January and February.

Great timely tips for the current month are also available on our website (www.hgic.umd.edu). Topics include:

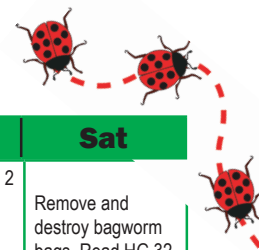
- Lawns
- Woody Ornamental Landscape Plants
- Ornamental Plants
- Fruit
- Vegetable and Herb Gardening
- Soil, Fertilizer, Mulch and Compost
- Seasonal and Indoor Plants
- Indoor and Outdoor Pests
- Wildlife

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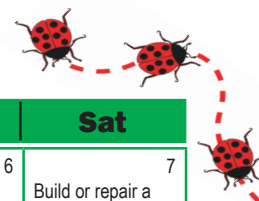
The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources' three units—Academic Programs, the Agricultural Experiment Station, and Maryland Cooperative Extension—work in concert to educate students and citizens about critical issues and to solve problems in agriculture, food systems, and the environment. The college is an equal opportunity employer and provides equal access programs.

JANUARY 2009



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>Have a plant or pest question? Call 1-800-342-2507 or visit us on the web at www.hgic.umd.edu</p>				1 Avoid walking on frozen grass - it will damage the crowns	2	Remove and destroy bagworm bags. Read HG 32 for more information
4 Remove dead or damaged branches from trees and shrubs	5	6	7	8	9 Keep garlic plants covered with mulch	10
11	12	13	14 Vacuum cluster flies if they are in the house	15	16	17 Sand improves traction on icy surfaces
18 Bulbs can still be planted if ground is not frozen	19	20	21	22 Have your soil tested, if the ground is not frozen and it hasn't been done recently	23	24
25	26	27 Keep bare soil covered with mulch	28	29	30	31 Do not feed fish in ponds, since fish cannot metabolize easily in cold water

FEBRUARY 2009



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Plan your vegetable gardens and flower beds on paper	2	3	4 Over-seed your lawn if not done in the fall.	5	6	7 Build or repair a coldframe
8	9 Prune damaged leaves from groundcovers	10	11	12 Don't cultivate wet soil - it can permanently damage the soil structure	13	14
15 Check for ticks when temperatures are above 50°F.	16	17	18 Tightly cover trash cans to protect from hungry wildlife	19	20	21 Download or request HG 16 "Planting Dates for Vegetable Gardens"
22	23 Start sowing spinach and lettuce seed in cold frames.	24	25	26 Start pepper seeds indoors under lights	27	28