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“Message from Mariah”

Hello everyone. I recently took a vacation to use some of my use or lose! I went on a sailing trip. One of the towns we stopped in was a town called Oriental in North Carolina. In the town, they have “wildlife nesting areas” for dragons. From what I was told, it is because it is “where the dragons be” because it was an old uncharted territory on maps. Oriental takes pride in it’s out of the way, relatively unknown location. They embrace the local nautical culture. And so, all through the town, they have dragons. I thought it was cute, so took a few pictures. I thought you all might also appreciate the “wildlife nesting area” signs. As a disclaimer, I’m not sure if the reasoning is true. I also saw Spanish moss growing on a dogwood in South Carolina, which was cool! I have seen countless cherry trees, azaleas, dogwood, iris, and daffodils in bloom. Hope everyone else is enjoying the spring blooms!

Please keep an eye in your inboxes for volunteer opportunities. If there are any you’re interested in doing, let me know how I can support you. My goal is to support you all in your volunteer endeavors. You do a lot for the community and it is appreciated. Keep up the goodness. — Mariah





Simple Vases

- Prepare a clean vase.
- Make sugar mix and add to 1 qt. water.
 - 2 aspirins
 - 1 tsp sugar
 - 2 drops of bleach
- Select roses and garden flowers with different leaf and petal textures to add interest.
- Remove leaves that could be at or under water to prevent rot.
- Cut stems at a diagonal so that they aren't flush with the vase bottom.
- Use the largest flowers first in the vase and cover the rim of the vase.
- Add smaller flowers and accent greenery.
- After the initial placement of all flowers, cut stems to adjust height to create additional interest.
- Refresh the sugar water mixture every 5 days.








Mixed arrangement by Kimberley Dean

Missing the Warm Day of Gardening? *By: Bill and Marlene Smith*





With the arrival of the winter solstice on December 21, don't let the chill in the air keep you from your love of gardening. From the comfort of your home, you can enjoy many of the past year's St. Mary's Master Gardeners' activities on video! Not only is there a selection of videos from the St. Mary's Master Gardeners, but you can also enjoy some of the recorded activities from our neighboring Charles County Master Gardeners. Check them out on YouTube, and consider following my channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@nikhaven>) to get updates as additional videos are added. Who knows, it might inspire you and help you forget the cold wintery weather outside your window.

Listed here you will find the St. Mary's Master Gardeners videos. The events range from the spring Cherry Blossom Festival to the fall County Fair and Oyster Festival, plus various gardening events at the Leonardtown Library and more!

Event	URL	QR Code
Leonardtown Library Front Yard Project Ribbon Cutting October 8, 2022	https://youtu.be/PGMglsVccCE	

2022 St. Mary's County Fair with the Master Gardeners Coordinator Mariah Dean	https://youtu.be/EJmUZTxa6F0	
St. Mary's County Master Gardeners at the St. Mary's County Oyster Festival 2022	https://youtu.be/Nvk4QaaMTgo	
St. Mary's Master Gardeners at the 2022 Cherry Blossom Festival at Lexington Manor Passive Park.	https://youtu.be/blcpkLaM2sY	
St Mary's Master Gardeners at the St. Mary's Count Fair. 2021	https://youtu.be/N5YGER11OTM	
St. Mary's County Master Gardeners 2021 Year in Review	https://youtu.be/l7c3YQxS6Fw	
Native Plant Workshop (2/19/22) Winter Sowing presented by Marlene Smith	https://youtu.be/onqUTGaqzbc	
Native Plant Workshop Session 1	https://youtu.be/_qkxTI9fg0	
Native Plant Workshop Session 2	https://youtu.be/dWJnEtnY5No	
Native Plant Workshop Session 3 presented by Friends of St. Clements Bay.	https://youtu.be/ThcRxNiMejM	
Native Plants Workshop Session 4 presented by St. Mary's County Master Gardeners	https://youtu.be/MBzSVFu_gJc	

Still looking for more activities to warm your winter days? Here are a few events from our neighboring Charles County Master Gardeners. CCMG began partnering with the Neighborhood Creative Art Center's (NCAC) in the spring of 2021 for NatureFest, which has grown into an annual spring event. And most recently CCMGs have partnered with NCAC and Charles County 4H on a pollinator project, which included a teen led service project, Nurture Natives, that included a free Native Tree and Shrub Giveaway this fall. This project has grown from a county initiative to a state initiative, as the Nurture Natives team will participate in Maryland Day this spring at the University of Maryland campus in College Park to offer free native trees and shrubs to state residents.

Event	URL	QR Code
Nurture Natives Tree and Shrub Giveaway 2022	https://youtu.be/izqPgAZFsel	
NatureFest 2022	https://youtu.be/-udvQmo3xvY	
NatureFest May 1, 2021 Interview with Georgia Bonney	https://youtu.be/8mdmEwRBli0	
NatureFest May 1, 2021- Short	https://youtu.be/QH1WBxdkqxM	

And finally, if you are like me and want to keep your hands in the soil this winter, why not try your hand at winter sowing. It's an easy and inexpensive way to germinate seeds outside in the middle of winter with high germination rates. It has been a game changer for our gardens, allowing us to add hundreds of native plants to support pollinators. You can watch a presentation by the Charles County Master Gardeners "All the Dirt on Winter Sowing" (<https://youtu.be/mhqT1kUVSk0>), or even attend their upcoming winter sowing workshop on January 7 at the extension office in Bel Alton (<https://www.facebook.com/charlescountymastergardeners/posts/5676890139085683>). Happing solstice and happy winter sowing!

My Favorite Time of Year

By: Linda Crandall

I enjoy working in my garden any time of the year. Planting is an especially enjoyable experience, taking baby plants and putting them in the ground is a wonderful act of love for me, and although I don't love weeding, if the weather is pleasant I don't mind it usually. But, one of my most favorite activities "for my garden" does not happen "in my garden", it happens either in front of my computer screen or in real life at one of the many gardening symposiums/conferences that happen this time of year. Late winter, after the holidays, but before you can usually predictably work in the garden seems to be the boom time for garden workshops, conferences, and symposiums all over the country, and especially in this area. I like to really take advantage of the information shared there, and over the last dozen years or more I have met new gardening friends, purchased locally raised plants, and talked — sometimes in person— with experts on a variety of subjects. It is at these workshops that I begin to visualize the changes I will make this year in the landscape, as I look for solutions to some of my long term garden problems.

I have plans to participate, either in person or virtually, in four (4) or five (5) symposiums this month (March) and I really enjoyed both days of the Winter Symposium, CVNLA Short Course at Lewis Ginter in February. As I am attending a conference/symposium I often find myself really wishing I could make an especially wonderful speaker appear — as if by magic— to all of the St. Mary's County Master Gardeners I know at a MG Quarterly Meeting during the continuing education portion to share some of the great ideas they talk about during the conference. This was especially true the first day of the short course when one of my all time favorite, super inspiring speakers, Landscape Architect Thomas Rainer gave a talk entitled, "A World Unto Its Own: The Residential Garden in a Post-Pandemic World." Many of you will be familiar with Thomas Rainer, he and one of his partners at Phyto Studio, Claudia West, wrote the book, "Planting in a Post-Wild World", and they have been a part of designing landscapes for the U.S Capitol Grounds, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, and the New York Botanical Garden. Phyto Studio was recently a part of designing and implementing the award winning landscape at the Pollinator and Bird Garden at the Arboretum at Penn State (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeHd4AAq_Uc&t=87s).



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I have pages of notes from his presentation, and would like to share them all, but can't. Here are just a few of the gems of information I learned that day.

As we move forward from the pandemic years it is important for us to realize that our yards and gardens are not just open land between the road and house or places to grow flowers for cutting, or vegetables to eat. They are a space where we can fill the human need for both refuge and connection to nature. While they are doing that, they can also perform the ecological function of building soil health and supporting all of the beneficial birds and insects that basically support life on earth.

Here are two 'overarching ideas' to help with that goal. Consider incorporating as many of the threads listed here as possible in your garden planning tapestry this year.

- **Make it IMMERSIVE.** Create spaces within your lawn and garden to immerse yourself and others in nature. Consider using the "Black and White Method" when doing landscape planning. To do this you can start with a BLACK piece of paper. Consider this your front (back, side) yard, and think of all that black space as plantings. Everything on the page is now completely covered in (mostly herbaceous) plants that are from knee to hip height and quite dense. This herbaceous level was planted originally perhaps on 12" centers and has spread out. Next, out of pieces of white paper create the places for people to go. Places where they will be surrounded by the abundant garden space... larger walks and narrow paths, or terraces, decks and patios. Instead of putting in a 'bed' here or there within your mostly short, monocultural, grass filled yard... carve your walkways (and perhaps a much smaller lawn) out of this full, natural space where you can go to escape the stress of the modern world. Now, once you have this perspective on the proportional ratios of plantings to 'hardscape', start planting, and densely. When planting consider the balance and legibility of your plan, color palettes that will change through the seasons, and using low ground covers as 'green mulch' instead of adding wood chips.
- **Make it LIVING.** Paths, walkways, and even lawns can be attractive, but they are not really alive. The same can be said for beds that are mostly full of wood mulch. None of these usually provide the natural connection most of us need, and they also do not have true biological functions. Plants, and especially native plants, are a connection for us to nature and provide so many ecological services, at this point, we may not even understand them all. What we do know is that a densely planted garden can provide these services:
 - **Stability-** Year round ground covers prevent topsoil runoff and weed/invasive plant colonization.
 - **Soil Health-** Diverse root systems, with as many roots as possible, activate microbial life in the soil.
 - **Soil Structure-** Herbaceous plantings help create soil aggregates.
 - **Nutrient Cycling-** Unlike 'woodies', herbaceous roots are deciduous and contribute organic matter to the soil. There are sugars in the root tips that feed microbial life and can also help to sequester carbon, something we are beginning to see the need for.
 - **Resiliency-** Diversity creates redundancy, redundancy is an important component of resiliency.
 - **Pollinator Health-** Phenologically-rich (and native) plantings provide a buffet for pollinators.

When planning your plantings, remember to provide a design layer for visual appeal, a structural level (small trees and shrubs) to help create separation in your garden and break up wide open or empty spaces into logical and functional 'rooms', a seasonal theme layer to help create your changing color palette, and always a ground cover as a functional layer.

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One more thing to remember: diversity doesn't need to be visually complex. An assortment of similar prairie grasses will have different seed heads, flowering cycles, and root structures and each type of grass will fulfill different environmental goals while looking mostly the same.

I am hoping these ideas and information will inspire you to create gardens that are both more dense and that provide more ecological functions. Happy Gardening!!

Spring Bay-Wise Tips For Your Lawn and Garden
By: Linda Crandall

As Master Gardeners we are volunteers who have been trained as horticultural educators to support the University of Maryland Extension's mission of educating residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices. The horticultural practices we have learned through our MG training and continuing education programs are those that will build healthy gardens, landscapes, and communities. Sometimes when we are fulfilling this mission we are out in public; staffing information booths or doing workshops, other times we are working individually or as a group planting or weeding local gardens. Another way you can help accomplish the UME mission is by incorporating UME recommended landscape practices in your own landscape, having your landscape Bay-Wise certified (with a sign!), and then being prepared to give your neighbors a quick explanation of what you are doing and a bit about the Bay-Wise program.

Here are three (3) Bay-Wise tips you can incorporate into your Spring routine that will help build a healthy ecosystem in your garden.

1. **Mow Properly** - Before winter is over our lawns begin to grow. Before you start mowing your lawn, make sure your mower has been properly serviced. Here are just some of the things you should do >at least< annually;
 - Thoroughly clean the mower
 - Sharpen the mower blades
 - Balance the blades
 - Replace the air filter and clean the area
 - Replace or top off the oil
 - Replace the spark plug
 - Set the mower to mow the lawn at least 3" – 4"

There are several places online to look for more information, here is one;

<https://www.homedepot.com/c/ah/lawn-mower-maintenance/9ba683603be9fa5395fab90384c7981>

2. **Plant Wisely** - As you make your landscaping plans for the spring and summer, consider removing invasive exotics while the weather is still cool and adding native plants. Native plants, once established will be easier to maintain and will also attract and support local pollinators. For other ways to support pollinators check out this website: <https://www.pollinator.org/>, and make sure to check out their regional planting guides.
3. **Mulch Appropriately and Recycle Yard Waste** - Start an active compost pile and use finished compost, or chopped (mowed) leaves that dropped last fall to mulch trees and planting beds. Check here for more information about composting; <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/soil-compost-and-fertilizer-home-garden>

Using Burlap as a Weed Barrier

By: Bradlie Quick

Weed prevention is a topic that all gardeners, large-scale and small-scale, know and think about often. Weed barriers and herbicides are the go-to for controlling the unwanted guest in our gardens, but they are not everyone's favorite. Herbicides are concerning for some who plant very diverse gardens or have pets and people in their gardens often. Weed barriers, such as black paper and black plastic, can be difficult to work with as they do not break down quickly and can cause the soil to be over-saturated and undernourished because of its tight weave. For those who are looking to garden more organically or environmentally friendly but do not want the hassle of weeding their gardens and flower beds constantly there is an effective alternative.

A great alternative to the traditional weed barriers and the use of herbicides is natural burlap. Natural burlap works exactly like weed barriers and landscaping paper, except it breaks down faster than traditional weed barriers and it offers better air and water penetration. It is much more customizable too as you can even choose the weave density according to the penetration levels you desire. It is similarly priced to traditional weed barriers and landscaping paper, and can be found at most garden centers, either in store or online.

Natural burlap, or untreated burlap, has been being used in gardens for generations. Burlap sacks were reused in gardens and flower beds as a way to give purpose to old flour, potato, and grain sacks and decrease the amount of time spent performing the tedious task of pulling weeds.

How to Use Burlap in Your Garden

Burlap can be used the same way weed barriers are. For use in row gardens, it is best to lay the burlap over freshly tilled land and secure it with metal stakes. Then, treat it as you would your typical black paper or plastic. In some cases, two layers of burlap or a layer of straw and then burlap may be the most effective.

For flower beds or areas that will be mulched, there are a number of different ways you can go about using the burlap. The most commonly recommended way of using the burlap weed barrier when mulching an area is to lay a layer of straw first, then lay your burlap and secure it, and finally place your mulch on top of the burlap. This technique offers sufficient air and water penetration, but restricts sunlight enough that weeds are not able to germinate under the layers. Burlap can also be used for lining hanging pots, protecting plants from frost, or wrapping roots for transportation. There is no right or wrong answer to using burlap in your garden, just what works best for you.

It is important that the burlap you use in your gardens is natural, untreated burlap. Treated burlap is often coated in chemicals that make it harder to break down. The chemicals used to treat the burlap are not considered harmful to plants, animals, or people, but it is a much less organic approach to gardening.

Purchasing Natural Burlap

Purchasing natural burlap is just as convenient and easy as purchasing traditional weed barriers. Natural burlap is sold in many different lengths, sizes, shapes, and densities, much like landscaping paper. Purchasing burlap sacks to cut apart may even be an option for those gardening or mulching in smaller areas. Natural burlap rolls, squares, and sacks can be found in the lawn and garden sections of most hardware stores and can be ordered from Amazon. Burlap is slightly more expensive than typical weed barriers, thus it might not be the most economical option for very large gardening operations. Nevertheless, it is an excellent choice for those looking to garden fully organically and do not want to spend all their time pulling weeds. If you choose to reuse old burlap sacks as your weed barrier, make sure to thoroughly wash the sacks to ensure that there are no unwanted seeds or materials being introduced into your gardens.

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Using Natural burlap as a weed barrier is a great, more organic approach to weed prevention in flower beds and gardens. It may take a little experimenting to find the best fit for you and your gardening style, but, in the end, this natural weed barrier is a great alternative for any gardener.

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Taking Scraps and Making Garden Gold

By: Jon and Sara Beth Everheart 2-27-23

Did you know that worm farming saves you money and creates the most nutrient rich compost by-product (that you can maintain yourself) year round? Yes, even in the winter (with some modifications of course).

Worm farming, known as vermicomposting, consists of feeding worms broken down organic kitchen scraps along with brown materials for bedding. The worms break down the organic materials and create a high nutrient filled compost that you can use in your garden. This is an important method of composting because you are reusing your kitchen scraps and shredded paper and/or used paper towels (items that would normally be discarded) and saving on the volume of waste sent to the landfill from your household.

Meat, dairy, citrus, or anything in the onion family is not recommended to be used in vermicomposting. Egg shells do not break down in vermicomposting, but they do provide extra mineralization and a great structure to the compost itself. You will need a supply of shredded paper - you can shred or cut up discarded mail (just not anything that contains plastic on it), thin cardboard, or used paper towels that are not soaked in dairy, citrus, oils, or meat juices. Do not use your greasy pizza boxes!!!!

There are many varieties of countertop composting containers - ours is very simple. This option is very inexpensive (less than \$10-see below). There are many different sizes, and we like this one (roughly 2.5- to 3-quart size I would say). Our kitchen scraps will fill this container in about 5-7 days, depending on what we are discarding while cook-



Countertop composting is very easy. You simply put your kitchen scraps in the container and close the lid (the smaller the size of scraps the better, it will decompose faster). Once the materials have broken down in the container, you can place them directly into your worm farm and top them off with the paper materials. If you cannot wait for the materials to be broken down, you can buy an inexpensive blender (specifically designated for this purpose) and blend the materials together with some water to create a baby food type texture. We know this process does not sound the most fun, but recycling kitchen scraps is very rewarding at the end!!

Worm farming can begin anytime, but it is recommended to start in early spring (if you can). We personally would not recommend having this setup inside your house, as the organic smell is not the most pleasant (in addition to the mess and some soldier flies occurring). Soldier fly larvae (better known as maggots) are actually great in vermicomposting and will help increase the production of your worm farm. However, once the larvae turn into flies, then you have another issue. Your garage is covered in flies. At this point, you have a couple of options: bug zappers (can cost a bit of money and are a pain to clean); open your garage doors and set them free to the world daily; or go straight to the source by adding more "brown" materials (newspaper, dead plant clippings, sawdust, pine needles, and/or hay/straw) to the worm farm and bury the actual food scraps under at least 4-inches of bedding material (shredded paper mixed with peat moss and old soil).

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A garage would be a great space to set up your worm house. If you do not have a garage and the worm house has to be located outside, it just needs to be protected from pets and other outside critters (including other bugs), as well as extreme weather conditions (direct sunlight, heavy rain, heat, cold, etc.). The soldier flies will be the only issue during spring and summer months whether you have your farm in a garage or outdoors. A small greenhouse in a shaded area that can be well ventilated would also work.

We have our worm farm setup in the garage on a table that is covered in a tarp (see below). Let's face it, this is a little bit of a messy process. Excuse our mess in this photo though! The jar that is in the front of the worm farm will be explained later in this article.



The top of the bin has great instructions as to the kitchen scrap to fiber ratio, when to feed the worms, and the optimum temperature range. It's a great reminder so you do not have to constantly look up the instructions. They are right in front of you!! (See to the right). The worms will typically break down less organic materials in the winter. When they are in a cooler environment, they tend to move slower. In the summertime, they move around much faster. If you worms get too populated, you can always use them for fishing or put them in the soil



Worm farms (also known as houses or factories in our case) can be purchased at a variety of places (online is the easiest). Ours was purchased from Amazon and was less than \$50 at the time. It consists of four trays that can be rearranged according to the growth and activity of the worms. We even received a book of instructions and recommendations (and also a refrigerator magnet) as to how to use the worm farm. We purchased this one in 2018 and we have kept our worms alive since that time. We did have to purchase the worms separately-we bought the Red Worm variety and they have done very well for us.

Once you have your first harvest of broken down organic materials, it is time to begin feeding your worm farm. Make sure you have plenty of kitchen scraps ready BEFORE you buy your worms! Some worm farms have a little different setup than others, so follow your instructions with your particular worm farm kit. For us, we take the materials from our countertop composting bin and/or blended mix and put them in small scoops in each of the trays of our worm farm. The organic materials will be broken down by the worms to produce 2 types of byproduct. The first byproduct (and the most noticeable) is the black organic liquid that comes out of the spout area on the front. This organic liquid can be mixed with water to water the plants, or it can be mixed directly with existing soil or new soil that you will be using in your garden to increase the organic nutrition of the soil. It is important to note that this organic liquid should not be used in place of water, only added to it on occasion (one pint to 2 gallons of water once to twice a week). You can also recycle a glass jar for the liquid collection (in our case a used (but cleaned) natural peanut butter jar). Keep your lids to the jars and you can store this organic liquid in a cool dry place for years. We basically call this our home grown jars of "miracle grow."

The second byproduct is the most important, your organic compost. You will have to retrieve these materials yourself (have a designated scoop and bin with a lid for collection). If you have a bin with a lid, you can keep this composting material for a long time as long as it retains moisture, or you can use it right away.

In conclusion, this is one of the most economical ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle with minimal effort. In the short run, you will make the money back you used to get the worm farm started because the byproducts that you have at the end are worth far more. This setup will keep producing as long as you keep feeding it. The “liquid gold” and “compost gold” are things that money can buy, but it will be expensive to sustain, so why not let nature make it so you can harvest it yourself? The only negatives are the smell, the mess, and sometimes soldier flies can become a problem if they are not controlled properly. We cannot stress enough how rewarding this is to be recycling scraps and turning them into gardening gold (year round!). Happy worm farming!!!

Fired Green Tomato

Recipe Submitted By: Mariah Dean

In the past year I've gotten to try a few different takes on fried green tomatoes. I've had some with a bready coating which were good, mainly because the tomatoes were in season. I've had some that have been layered with crab meat. I've had some with goat cheese which was really good, try it! I've had some with a light, herby coating served with remoulade sauce. They were all pretty good! Here is a basic recipe for fried green tomatoes from <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/16760/best-fried-green-tomatoes/> so you can try some too.

Ingredients

4 large green tomatoes	½ cup bread crumbs
2 eggs	2 teaspoons coarse kosher salt
½ cup milk	¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 cup all-purpose flour	1 quart vegetable oil for frying



Directions

1. Gather all ingredients.
2. Slice tomatoes 1/2 inch thick. Discard the ends.
3. Whisk eggs and milk together in a medium-size bowl. Scoop flour onto a plate. Mix cornmeal, bread crumbs and salt and pepper on another plate. Dip tomatoes into flour to coat. Then dip the tomatoes into milk and egg mixture. Dredge in breadcrumbs to completely coat.
4. In a large skillet, pour vegetable oil (enough so that there is 1/2 inch of oil in the pan) and heat over a medium heat. Place tomatoes into the frying pan in batches of 4 or 5, depending on the size of your skillet. Do not crowd the tomatoes, they should not touch each other.
5. When the tomatoes are browned, flip and fry them on the other side. Drain them on paper towels.

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