

## WELCOME FALL!

Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardener

September has ended with perfect gardening weather as we welcome fall; gather pumpkins, gourds, and colorful leaves to decorate inside and outside; and continue our gardening “to-do” lists.

**Pruning and planting:** If you’re doing some outdoor pruning, remember **not** to trim those spring-flowering shrubs and trees until after they bloom next year. You can, however, plant trees, shrubs, and transplant irises and bulbs. Always carry the plant by its ball or in the container, never by the trunk. Cut away any twine and burlap from the root ball before planting. And make sure no roots are wrapped around the trunk (girdling), as that eventually chokes the life out of the plant. Now’s the time to finish storing flower seeds, tender bulbs, roots, tubers, or corms to replant next spring. Pot up other plants you want to overwinter, such as begonias, geraniums, coleus, and sweet potato vine cuttings.

**Garden waste:** If you haven’t already done so, consider starting a compost pile in a bin you build yourself or buy readymade. Check You Tube or other Internet sites for DIY demonstrations and directions, or go to your local University of Maryland Extension web site, <https://extension.umd.edu/mg/locations/composting>. Basically, you’ll want to keep your bin about 3 feet by 3 feet, and under five feet high. Shred your plant materials with a lawnmower to speed up the composting. Layer plants, vegetable kitchen scraps, fallen leaves, old mulch, and grass clippings. Water between layers. Keep diseased plants, twigs, branches, and other woody materials out of the pile.

Whether you’re making your own compost pile or putting yard waste in yard waste bags, make sure you put diseased plants in containers headed for municipal waste, not municipal compost. Only spent plants or those infected with common pathogens like powdery mildew and early blight should be hot-composted (at least 140° F). “Some very destructive diseases, such as boxwood blight and late blight of tomatoes/potatoes, should not be composted at home or at municipal compost operations. These infected plants should be bagged up with household trash and sent to the landfill,” notes Dr. Jon Traunfeld, UMD Extension Service.

Fellow Master Gardener Pat Strawder also explains that “Not everything needs to be cleared and chopped to the ground.” She recommends planting ground covers, such as Daikon radishes, pink clover, hairy vetch or buckwheat. These help to bind nitrogen to the soil and enrich it when the garden is tilled in the spring.



**HAIRY VETCH**



And, she says, even though you are cleaning up garden beds, you’ll want to leave some plants standing until spring. It may seem contradictory, but birds and insects will thank you. While insects make their home in soil and in the debris of leaf litter, birds forage all winter long for those same insects and eggs to eat; in addition, they eat from the seed heads of cone flowers, black-eyed Susans, spearmint, and other plants.

**UNIDENTIFIED BIRD IN GARDEN FLOOR DEBRIS**

**Vegetables:** Did you plant carrots this summer? You're in luck. Cover their beds/rows with a deep straw or leaf mulch, and you can continue to harvest them throughout the winter. We mentioned in our August column that you could start some late plantings, such as spinach, arugula, and kale, through the middle of October. You'll need to use a cold frame or floating row cover (FRC) to keep the soil moist and protect seedlings from pests. The young plants will go dormant and re-grow in spring.



***FLOATING ROW COVER***

As you probably are aware, Frederick County Master Gardener seminars still are not available. However, for other information about gardening, watch for the Master Gardeners' column in the *Frederick News-Post* on the first Thursday of each month; sign up for the *What Can We Do for You* e-newsletter; explore the University of Maryland's extension service web site, <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening>; or call us at 301-600-1596.

*For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.*

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