Trumpet Vine

Knowledge for the Community from Loudoun County Extension Master Gardeners

Fall 2020

Volume XVI, Issue 4 www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org

Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener Events

Virtual Open House

Learn about the 2021 Training class to become a Master Gardener. September 24, 2020, 7:00 pm. See Page 2 for details.

Please check the calendar on the front page of our website for scheduled events. Currently all library programs are canceled.

For more information, visit our website at loudouncountymastergardeners.org.

Visit us on Facebook: Extension Master Gardeners of Loudoun County, Virginia.

Time for Transition

Fall is always bittersweet. There's a chill in the air, the days are shorter, there's a sense of urgency, time for garden work is no longer endless. The weather can abruptly curtail plans to do more chores for the remainder of the season.

Prioritize your tasks. Pull all the weeds that have not yet gone to seed. Plant bulbs and native seeds. Divide perennials. Plant a tree, plant native perennials. Whenever the soil is damp use the opportunity to pull invasive plants such as vinca major and minor, and English ivy. Avoid bare soil, cover with leaf mulch or shredded wood mulch or wood chips.

Clean up your vegetable garden and plant a ground cover.

Follow a minimalist approach to cleaning up ornamental beds, especially those with native plants. Tidy up around the edges but try to leave most plants standing to provide food and shelter for wildlife over the winter. Butterflies, native bees and many other beneficial insects rely on those plant stems and that leaf litter to shelter them through the winter. Birds continue to pick at seeds and eat the insects hiding in the litter. If you need to cut down tall plants, let them lie on the ground in the bed where insects will spend the winter in the stems.

Hold your thorough clean-up for spring.

Beautyberry

Pumpkins and Squash

Goldenrod, Asters, Sedum

Photos by Normalee Martin

Seeking Volunteers for Master Gardener 2021 Training Class

How would you like to make a difference in your community and the world through stewardship of the Earth? Loudoun County Extension Master Gardeners (LC EMG) would like to welcome you to our enthusiastic group of educators who do precisely that! Under the direction of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), Loudoun County, EMGs are trained to provide environmentally sound horticulture education and programs to the community.

We are now accepting applications for the 2021 EMG Volunteer training class. Everyone who has been through our program loves the incredible learning experience we provide. Each volunteer receives a minimum of 60 hours of training, including labs. Graduating to an Intern after, there is a *hands-on learning internship* of 75 hours in selected area programming completed by the end of the year. As a tenured Master Gardener, you then complete a minimum of 25 hours of volunteering and 8 hours of continuing education each year. Many have found several interests within the program!

The **2021 training will be a hybrid class, either in-person or virtual, depending on your comfort level**. In-person location is 750 Miller Dr., SE, Suite F-3, Leesburg. Daytime classes are on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. **Do you work full-time? We have options!**

Class begins on **January 26 and ends April 13, 2021**. The fee for the course is $235, for the 500+ page Virginia EMG Handbook, and any additional course materials. The training schedule includes classes in basic botany, water quality, fruits, trees and shrubs, vegetables, disease and insect diagnosis, and related natural resource subjects. The course includes scheduled lab work.

The mission of Master Gardeners is to *encourage and promote environmentally sound horticulture practices through sustainable landscape management education and training.*

Extension Master Gardeners in Loudoun County provide valuable services to the community including Help Desk and Garden Clinics, Starting a School or Community Garden education, Water and Tree Stewardship, Demonstration Garden, an annual Symposium, Children's Education team, and much more.

Please join us for a virtual ***Information Meeting on September 24, starting at 7 p.m.*** You must RSVP to gain access to the session (click link for details). We will be accepting applications through October 23, 2020.

For an application, skills questionnaire, reference form, and more information, see: http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/become-a-master-gardener/.

Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening

Due to restrictions related to COVID-19 and the warm days of August, we have been staying inside a lot this summer. Therefore, it would be nice to get outside and do some gardening. September is a great time to start a fall and winter garden.

What do we mean by fall and winter gardening?

Fall gardening includes planting crops that we can harvest before and after frost and crops that can overwinter for spring harvesting. The growing season can be extended by gardening in cold frames, greenhouses, or row covers. Fall and winter gardening also includes planting cover crops to add organic matter and nitrogen and minimize weeds in the spring.

Why garden in the fall

The soil is perfect--warm, soft, and workable.

Air temperatures are cooler--fewer wilting (plants and people), fewer hours of scorching sun.

Moisture levels are up--generally higher with greater precipitation.

Fewer insect pests are buzzing around--Insects are busier in the spring and summer season, mating, laying eggs, and chomping through our gardens. The cooler weather helps to slow their activity and end their growing season.

Warm days and cool nights produce added sugars in some vegetables--adding flavor and crispness. A light frost is said to improve and sweeten the flavor of kale and Swiss chard and the crispness of carrots.

Fewer weeds--Fall vegetables have less competition with annual weeds that are mostly finished for the season as September and October roll around.

Fresh crops for a longer time--As retail vegetable prices are increasing, you can be harvesting fresh vegetables from your garden.

A fall garden gives you a chance to try again any spring failures you might have encountered. Some crops grow well only in the fall in certain areas. Cauliflower and Chinese cabbage are two examples of crops that do not produce well in mountain areas in spring because they cannot reach maturity before the cool weather ends. Spinach bolts in the spring as the weather gets warm but doesn't bolt in the fall.

Planning for a fall harvest

Many varieties of vegetables can be planted in midsummer to late summer for fall harvests. Succession plantings of warm-season crops, such as corn and beans, can be harvested until the first killing frost. Cool-season crops, such as kale, turnip, mustard, broccoli, and cabbage, grow well during the cool fall days and withstand light frost.

To calculate the time to plant a vegetable for the latest harvest, you need to know the average date of the first killing frost in your area. In Loudoun County, that date ranges from October 19 to October 29. Next you need the number of days to maturity for the variety grown. Choose earliest

maturing varieties for late plantings. Use the formula below to help determine when to start your fall garden.

Formula

Days to germination

+ days to maturity,

+ fall factor (about two weeks),

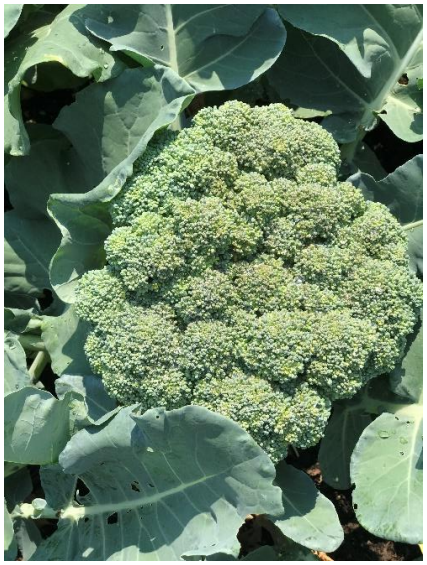
+ frost tender factor (if applicable): two weeks =

Days to plant before first frost date

The fall factor takes into account that fall crops grow more slowly than crops in spring due to cooler weather and shorter days and amounts to about two weeks. The Frost Tender Factor is added only for those crops that are sensitive to frost (corn, beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, and squash), as these must mature two weeks before frost to produce a reasonable harvest.

Turnip.

Cabbage.



Broccoli. Photos by Georgi Hall.

How to start

Decide what to do with your remaining summer plants. Some of them may be looking a little ragged. You may want to keep some plants if they are performing well and can withstand a light frost. Just remember the sun begins sinking lower in the sky during the fall. Areas with full sun in the summer may get more shade as the sun gets lower and shadows increase.

Remove weeds from previous crops. Old foliage allows pests and disease to overwinter. Loosen soil so seedlings can break through and roots can penetrate. If ground is dry, give it a thorough soaking.

Work a light layer of compost, aged manure, or a small application of complete chemical fertilizer into top few inches of soil to replace nutrients used by spring and summer crops.

What to plant

Select crops that prefer cooler weather and those that have a shorter growing season.

Vegetables that tolerate light frost can have a longer growing season. Most semi-hardy (beets, cauliflower) and hardy (broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, collards, kohlrabi, mustard, parsnips, radishes, turnips) and very hardy (endive, kale, spinach, Swiss chard) vegetables will require little or no frost protection.

The more tender cool weather vegetables (cauliflower, kohlrabi, leaf lettuce, Swiss chard) can survive a light frost but should be harvested before a heavy freeze. A heavy freeze is one that will freeze standing water.

The more tender vegetables with a longer growing season can usually be kept past the first frost with a little extra care. Covering plants with sheets, newspaper, burlap, or floating row covers on those first frosty nights can add to the growing season. Individual plants can be protected by using milk jugs, paper caps, or water-holding walls. Do not use plastic. Plastic transfers the cold through to the plants, moisture condenses on the underside, and plants can freeze beneath the plastic.

Photo by Georgi Hall. **Lettuce under cold frames.** Photo by Nancy Carlton.

Some hardy crops (such as carrots, collards, kale, turnip greens and spinach) planted in the fall may live through the winter or may go dormant for a period in the winter and flourish again in early spring. A cold frame or frost cloth can help protect and extend this growing season. Many of these plants bolt quickly in the spring.

Planting for fall harvest

Cabbage seedlings. Photo by Georgi Hall.

Three ways to obtain vegetable plants:

Starting seeds indoors.

Seeding directly into your garden.

Purchasing plants from garden center or online.

The choice you make depends on your budget, time commitment, personal preference, and plant type. A combination of all three ways is typical.

Plant fall vegetables when the soil is moist after a rain, or water the area thoroughly the day before planting. Cover the seeds about twice as deeply as you would in the spring. An organic mulch on top will help keep the soil cool and moist but should not be deep enough to interfere with germination. Once young plants are established, a heavier mulch may be used to hold moisture and control weeds. Irrigate when necessary so the young plants have sufficient moisture.

Reference:

Fall Vegetable Gardening, Diane Relf, Virginia Cooperative Extension VCE Publication 426-334.

Georgianna Hall, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Pumpkins in the Garden

This spring, I bought a packet of pumpkin seeds. Little did I know that seed would lead me on a marvelous journey learning about this gourd, how it grows, and the fascinating way it moves around the garden.

The pumpkin is a native to Central America and Mexico and is one of the oldest domesticated plants growing in North America as early as 7500 to 5000 BC.

Pumpkins have been used for food and medicine. Their seeds were taken back to Europe by Columbus, but they did not grow well there. However, Irish immigrants to America had a tradition of carving turnips at Halloween for jack-o'-lanterns to scare away evil spirits. Discovering that pumpkins were available and much easier to carve than turnips, the tradition began.

The pumpkin is a member of the gourd family that includes zucchini, cucumbers, cantaloupe, and watermelons. It is a cultivar of winter squash. The most popular variety is *Cucurbita pepo*, the kind with smooth, slightly ribbed skin in a deep yellow to orange color, although white is now a popular color for holiday decoration too.

Pumpkins are hardy plants that like warm weather. The soil temperature should be at least 60 degrees and the soil should hold water well but not be waterlogged. The seed takes between 90 and 120 days to grow, so planting must be timed for your planting zone.

The plant produces both male and female flowers. It is easy to tell the difference between the male and female blossoms. Male flowers grow straight off the vine while females have a small swelling at the base near the stem. This is actually a tiny unfertilized pumpkin.

Male flower.

Female Flower.

All photos in this article by Nancy Feeney.

Read more about male and female pumpkin flowers at Gardening Know-How: Pumpkin Plant Not Producing: Why a Pumpkin Plant Flowers but No Fruit. https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/vegetables/pumpkin/pumpkin-flowers-but-no-fruit.htm. Lack of pollination equals no pumpkins. The flowers must be pollinated for the fruit to mature. One of the biggest problems recently is that the native squash bee (*Peponapis pruinosa*) has been on the decline due to pesticides. Commercial pumpkins are now pollinated by honeybees, using one hive per acre. This practice also allows for the sale of honey from that same field.

However, don't be discouraged at first sight of only male flowers. Sometimes, the plant puts out only male flowers to attract the bees and, two weeks later, the female flowers emerge to bees that already know the plant. If you do not have success with pumpkin fruit on your vines, you may have to hand-pollinate the flowers in the morning by making sure the male pollen is distributed on the female flowers. Also, too much nitrogen will also lead to just vines and male flowers.

Growing pumpkins takes a lot of garden. Each plant can sprawl over 50 to 100 square feet. Every pumpkin fruit needs runners that are at least ten feet long for nourishment. If your garden is not that big, you can provide vertical supports and trellises for your pumpkin plant to climb.

Pumpkin vine climbing a fence.

This year, I allowed some plants to run on the ground and to have others climb a fence, and a trellis structure in the garden. I was fascinated at the ability of the pumpkin to "walk" and "climb" in the garden.

The plant starts out slowly, but sometimes overnight it will grow a foot by using its tendrils (or handles) to grab a structure for support and get more ground. The tendril is a specialized stem that the plant uses for climbing and support. The tendrils twine around a suitable item found by touch. The tendrils have minds of their own. They use chemicals in the air to help them decide which way to turn. The tendril has a tight curling ability that will choke the life out of a competing plant and invade its space. A tendril can perform a geometric phenomenon which switches direction of the curl (chirality) halfway to its destination. This is called a "tendril perversion," and no one is really sure why it happens.

Tendril perversion.

I have watched one vine climb up and over a fence. Another vine developed a spring-like tendril in order for it to gently lower the heavy part to the ground.

The tendrils are strong but if you have a climbing vine, you may need extra support for your emerging fruit. Many recommend using nylon hose to hammock the fruit. The nylon hose stretch and do not retain water.

Pumpkin ripening on the vine.

After you harvest your pumpkins, what do you do with them besides carving out your jack-o'-lantern? There are hundreds of recipes for pies, breads, muffins, soups, cookies, and seeds.

Thanksgiving dinner would not be the same without a pumpkin pie. You can freeze raw or cooked pumpkin for up to three months. Animals love pumpkin. After Halloween, we usually break up the pumpkin and leave it out for the birds, squirrels, and deer.

This fall, when you see pumpkins for sale, remember how fascinating this native plant is and how it has become a part of our American tradition. Maybe next spring, you will buy a packet of pumpkin seeds and start your own journey.

Nancy Feeney, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Fall Lawn Maintenance

Savvy homeowners know that fall is the right time to really give their lawns some TLC. This is the time to prep the soil, add amendments, and get those seeds to germinate into a lush green landscape. While many others are thinking ahead to pumpkin spice coffee, the lawn-conscious homeowner is drooling over thoughts of compost and overseeding, knowing that the effort he or she puts in now will pay big dividends by spring and through summer the following year. So, what is involved in fall lawn maintenance?

Do I need a soil test? Yes. It is advisable to have your soil tested every three to four years. First, the soil analysis performed by scientists at Virginia Tech (VT) will tell you what your soil pH is, which will determine whether or not you need to add lime and how much. Second, it will also tell you which nutrients your soil might be deficient in, recommending the right fertilizer to optimize soil health for growing your lawn. Sounds complicated? It's not. And through our Healthy Virginia Lawns program, the Loudoun County Master Gardeners can not only help you make sense of the numbers, but for a minimal fee they will measure your turf area, evaluate your turf conditions, take soil samples, and send them to VT; then, based on that analysis, provide you with a plan for the whole year that simplifies everything. Your nutrient management plan includes a schedule that tells you what to do when and how much of each amendment to put down on your lawn. It takes away the stress of guesswork and frustration of doing the wrong things or not doing enough of the right things. In addition to helping you give your lawn everything it needs to thrive, your tailored plan guides you to apply just the right quantities to keep excess nutrients out of our streams and groundwater, reducing pollution and creating a healthier environment for all of us to enjoy.

Do I need to add lime? Only if your soil test says you do. Because many soils in Loudoun County can be acidic, lime can help to bring up pH to a range that is optimal for growing grass. However, if your pH is already in that range, you don't need it. Why spend money on something you don't need? Also, one has to be careful not to apply more than 50 pounds of lime per 1,000 square feet to avoid burning your turf. Your Healthy Virginia Lawns nutrient management plan will tell you how much lime to safely use at each application.

What type of fertilizer should I use? Fall is the time when fertilizer applications are most beneficial to improving your lawn. Your soil test will tell you exactly what to use based on your particular nutrient analysis. Bags of fertilizer are labeled with a three-number ratio, also known as N-P-K or Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium, in that order. This ratio is important for giving your soil exactly what it needs for growing a healthy lawn and to avoid polluting ground water. Believe it or not, much of Loudoun County's ground water travels all the way to the Chesapeake Bay, which is impacted directly by homeowners who apply more nutrients than their turf can absorb. One of the most problematic nutrients polluting the bay today is phosphorus (P), which is why many bags of fertilizer sold in our area contain no phosphorus, e.g., it's easy to find fertilizer with an N-P-K ratio of 32-0-4. A simple soil test will tell you whether your fertilizer should include phosphorus and in what ratio. Not everyone will choose to get a soil test, so if you don't then please do not use a fertilizer that has phosphorus, because a major goal in this region is to reduce phosphorus levels in the Chesapeake Bay and in all the rivers and streams between here and there.

Should I apply compost? In most planned developments, the construction process removes the nutrient-rich layer of topsoil, leaving a homeowner with clay beneath the grass. While not always the case, most lawns in this situation could benefit by adding a compost topdressing and core aeration, which also serves to improve soil that is compacted. Over time, adding compost and aerating will create a healthy top layer to help your lawn excel. How much compost one needs for his or her lawn can be determined with a site evaluation and an accurate lawn measurement provided through the Healthy Virginia Lawns program.

What type of grass seed should I use? The simple answer is that you should use a tall fescue mix for lawn exposed to full sun and a shade mix for areas in part shade to full shade. There are many seed blends on the market, and which one you use is your choice. Your Healthy Virginia Lawns plan provides a link to grass seed blends recommended by Virginia Tech. If you want to ensure the seed you choose includes some of those recommended by VT lawn experts, you can view the 2020-21 Virginia Turf Grass Recommendations at https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html?tag=pubs_ext_vt_edu:lawns.

While VT literature states that it might be difficult to find seed blends that include recommended varieties in big box stores, a recent exploration of such stores revealed that there were some. In a few selections, a bag might include one, two, or even three recommended varieties in its mix, though not many did. One could also search nurseries and supply stores for turf and landscape.

What about weed control? We are fast approaching the time when broadly applied weed killers are not advisable if one is planning to overseed or completely renovate a space with new grass. This is due to the wait time required after applying weed control, which can add two to three weeks or more. One should wait the appropriate amount of time, listed on the product label, before planting new seed. While VCE has publications devoted to weed control, and some of that can be conducted in the fall, it should be emphasized that creating conditions for a thick healthy lawn will also work to reduce weeds. Besides, emphasis on weed control optimally starts in the spring.

If you would like more detailed information on fall lawn maintenance, you can view the Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 430-520 at https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-520/SPES-223.pdf. Within that article are links to other topics mentioned above.

What are other alternatives? Let's face it, sometimes environmental conditions work against growing grass in certain spaces. For example, an area with dry, heavy shade and intermittent wet conditions could make it very difficult or impossible to create a lawn. Why fight it? There are alternatives to grass that could make your space more interesting. It all depends on your growing conditions. In the photos on the following page, this shade space is populated with autumn ferns, hay scented ferns, crested iris, and other plants that can survive under the dry shade of a red maple tree and support wildlife.



All photos by Joe Sanchez.

In another example, xeriscaping beyond the sidewalk provides a solution in sunny areas where grass has difficulty growing for other reasons.


However you choose to improve your landscape, enjoy the experience!

Joseph Sanchez, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

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Nancy Feeney, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!
Backyard Gardener #2: Deadheading

Do you like to weed? If you do, I'll bet that you also like to deadhead. Deadheading? Even the name is scary! Despite the ominous name, very simply, deadheading is removing the dead or spent blossoms from a plant. Basically, most plants produce flowers to produce seeds to reproduce themselves. If the flower is removed before the seed has been dropped, the plant will keep trying to reproduce. Think of it this way. The plant's game is to reproduce by forming seeds. This conflicts with your plan, which is to enjoy flowers as long as possible because when the plants go to seed, the floral party is over. You're the gardener though, which gives you the right to tell the plant (by deadheading), "Hey plant! We're going with my plan so you'll have to wait awhile to produce those seeds!" Deadheading refreshes a plant's appearance, controls seed dispersal, and redirects the plant's energy from seed production to root and vegetative growth. But I think the reason most of us deadhead is because we want a yard full of beautiful blossoms all summer long. And here's a fun fact about deadheading—the second blooms that appear after deadheading are typically longer lasting because deadheading encourages the plant to get stronger.

Spent million bells.
All photos by Jayne Collins.

Are pinching back a plant and deadheading the same thing? They are similar terms that are frequently used interchangeably. You pinch back a plant to encourage additional growth and you deadhead spent blossoms to promote more blooms. You can pinch back a plant at any point in its growth, but you deadhead only after a plant has bloomed. I have also found that at some point, especially in mid to late summer, it's best just to cut the plant back entirely, leaving only a few inches showing above ground. Within a week or so, the plant will produce new shoots, and voila! You have the beginnings of a whole new beautiful plant. I've had success doing this with clematis, catnip, basil, nasturtiums, perennial salvia, and watercress.

So why should we deadhead? Why is it so important for our gardens? One of the big benefits of deadheading is that it keeps your garden neat and tidy and attractive. Deadheading is also important because it keeps unwanted seedlings from popping up in your yard. Nearly all flowering plants, especially annuals, will benefit from at least a little deadheading. How do you know when to deadhead? When the blooms start to fade, wilt, turn brown and curl, or otherwise look unattractive, that's the time to trim them off to allow a brand new generation of flowers to come out. Many annuals will die if they are not deadheaded. But if they are deadheaded, they will continue to produce flowers for a long time. My annuals, both hanging baskets and flower pots, last most of the summer because I deadhead them. How often should you deadhead your plants? Each plant and each garden is different so while one person might deadhead every day, another person will deadhead only a couple of times a week. I like to deadhead so I do it every day. Deadheading is a mindless sort of job, like weeding. It's a challenge to find all those little dead blooms. Picking them off gives you instant gratification. You can let your mind wander while you're doing it and listen to the outdoor sounds. I like to walk around my garden and flowerbeds every day to check on my plants. I carry my little bucket and long-nosed snips with me so I can deadhead what needs to be

Spent parsley leaves.

deadheaded, prune or remove yellow and diseased leaves as I go, and keep my garden looking happy and healthy. Is this where the expression "puttering in the garden" comes from?

Large, shrubby plants with large flowers also should be deadheaded. These include large marigolds, summer phlox, astilbe, peonies, purple coneflowers, black-eyed Susans, daisies, salvia (annual and perennial), petunias, and zinnias. Using pruning snips (I like the ones with long blades), cut off each spent flower individually, getting enough of the stalk so that what's left doesn't protrude. Deadheading long-stem flowers on tall stalks (daylilies, larkspur, foxglove, hostas, tulips, daffodils, Oriental poppies, and irises to name a few) is also very easy to do. Using your pruning snips, cut back each flower as close as possible to the spot where the stalk meets the leaves. For smaller plants like coreopsis, hanging baskets, and most trailing annuals, just pull the small spent blooms off by hand and toss them into the flowerbed.

Although Shasta daisies are native to Northern California, they are quite popular in this area and can benefit from deadheading. Shastas usually bloom in the summer and will continue throughout the fall if regularly deadheaded. As with other flowers, deadheading will improve the plant's appearance and also inhibit seed production and stimulate new growth, which encourages more flowers. Not only will deadheading extend the flowering season, but it also helps produce heavier, longer-lasting blooms. So how do you deadhead a daisy? The best time for deadheading is just before the blooms die back completely. As soon as you see the flowers begin to fade, wither, or turn brown, get out your pruning snips--it's time to deadhead! Use you snips to remove the spent blooms. With daisies, pulling off the bloom with your hand does not always produce the best results. Many beginners make the mistake of removing only the petals, leaving behind the most important part of the flower that produces the seeds (and which defeats the purpose of deadheading.) When you find blooms that are beginning to wilt and turn brown (or seed heads that may have already formed), remove them back to the first set of leaves. If all the blooms are spent, cut back the entire plant to the base. This will often stimulate new growth and additional flowering.

Spent blooms.

Some plants that benefit from deadheading and therefore may flower longer include geraniums, coreopsis (tick seed), petunias, marigolds, snapdragons, begonias, roses, campanula, blanket flowers, delphinium, zinnias, perennial salvia, speedwell (Veronica and the kinds that produce flower spikes), yarrow, nasturtiums, bee balm, butterfly weed, columbine, foxglove, garden cosmos, garden phlox, hollyhocks, larkspur, lavender, lupine, monkshood, mountain, Shasta daisies, wild/sweet violets, dianthus, golden marguerites, globe thistles, penstemons, purple coneflower, Jupiter's beard, Stoke's asters, and calibrachoa (million bells).

Deadhead beebalm.

Some plants that do not need deadheading include ornamental grasses, sedum, impatiens, lantana, most flowering vines, most groundcovers, crocuses, and other "minor" spring blooming bulbs, wishbone flower, astilbe, autumn joy stonecrop, Joe-Pye weed, leopard plant, peony, Siberian bugloss, barrenwort, and goat's beard. It's interesting to note that some perennials just won't bloom again whether you deadhead them or

Lantana no need to deadhead

not. And some perennials don't look messy or untidy after they've bloomed so you won't need to worry about cleaning them up. Other plants have attractive seed heads that provide a winter interest in your garden so you might want to consider not deadheading those plants.

Clematis.

Gardening means different things to different people. How often have you said you're going outside to work in the garden? But is it really work? It isn't work for me, and I'll bet it's not work for you either. Many (most?) of us can happily spend hours in the garden. Others, after a few minutes, decide they've had enough "work" and they move on to something they'd much rather be doing. I love to be outside. Even when I'm inside, I want all the windows open so I can feel connected to nature. Drives my husband crazy; he's a big fan of air conditioning. I walk around my small yard just about every day. I take a bucket and my long-nose snips with me and I deadhead and cut off dead or diseased leaves, maybe do a little pruning as well. I check on all my plants and make mental notes about which ones might need to be sprayed for bugs and which ones I want to move to another location in the garden next year. I just love to be outside! When winter finally comes and there's no more weeding or deadheading, I don't know what to do with myself. I miss that quiet time with my garden, my Zen. That's when it's time to start planning for next year. Stay tuned.

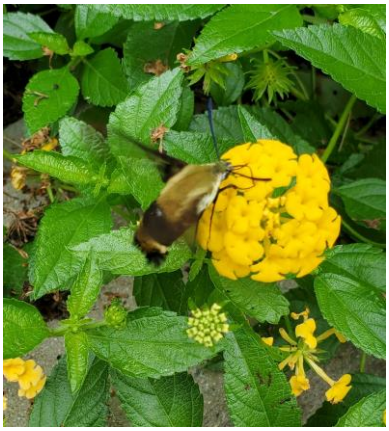
Jayne Collins, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Note

Our summer Trumpet Vine contained an article, *Lantana--A Season-Long Bloomer*, which stated, "Not only are they lovely to look at, bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies swarm to their colorful flowers." This is certainly true of the lantana planting in my neighborhood that attracted this creature.

This is a hummingbird moth. It's an insect that can fly like a hummingbird. Its wings move so fast that it hums like a hummingbird. But it's a moth and develops from a caterpillar like all moths and butterflies. There are several types of hummingbird moth, they can be found from Florida and Texas to Maine and Alaska.

When you are out in your garden, look closely, you might see one of these little beauties.



Photos by Barbara Eppler

Composting Leaves

All photos in this article compliments of Pixabay.com/composting.

Fall is rapidly approaching and with it a dreaded task for most of us--raking leaves. My arms hurt just thinking about it! But I know that those leaves are one of the most important things for my flower beds. Those leaves will turn into what is called "black gold" simply by the act of composting them.

I remember when I first moved back to Virginia. The house I was renting had terrible soil. It was hard with lots of clay. I was excited about renting this little cottage because my landlord had given me permission to do whatever I wanted in the yard! But when I saw that dirt, I felt intimidated. I started my first garden in the front yard--full sun all day long--which just baked the soil.

After I had created that first bed and was ready to mulch, my father mentioned that he could get free mulch from the town he lived in. So off we went, and--much to my delight--I realized it was leaf mulch! We filled his pickup truck with leaf mulch, drove to my little cottage, and spread that leaf mulch into my new garden beds. This was in the fall. The next spring I couldn't believe the difference in the soil. It was easier to dig in, weeds came out easily, and--best of all--I had worms!

I now save my leaves and compost them. I also ask my brother to bring me his leaves. He shreds them and bags them in black trash bags that I leave the leaves in for the winter in full sun--come spring I have bags of leaf mulch. I rarely buy mulch now.

So, let's first deal with some common myths about composting, and then I will give you the why and how to start your own compost.

Top Myths:

- Myth 1: Composting requires elaborate, expensive structures.
    - Your compost can be a simple pile on the ground that gets good sunlight and can be turned.
- Myth 2: Compost piles smell.
    - If your compost pile smells, you need to turn it more often and add some dry material.
- Myth 3: Raw materials must be added in exact proportions.
    - General proportions are needed, but you don't need to measure anything.
- Myth 4: Composting is hard work.
    - The hardest part is the turning two to three times a week.

- Myth 5: Compost piles attract unwanted animals.
    - The only “animals” that my compost attracts are worms.
- Myth 6: Compost piles require special chemical starters or activators.
    - A handful or shovel full of soil, depending on the size of your pile, is the only starter you need.

Why would you make it yourself?

- There are several reasons:
    - To save money on fertilizers and mulch.
    - To benefit your garden.
    - To maintain moisture.
    - To add nutrients.
    - To reduce your carbon footprint.
    - To reduce methane gases released into the atmosphere.

Okay, now how do you get started?

Assemble items you need:

- A place to put your composter or pile:
    - Locate in a convenient place away from nearby tree roots.
    - Locate in an area that gets lots of sun.
    - Keep within range of the hose.
- A shovel or scoop to make layers.
- A fork or scoop to turn layers.
- Dirt.
- Water.

Start building your pile, layering green and brown materials.

You will need:

- Green (nitrogen) materials; these include:
    - Fresh grass clippings.
    - Shrub and tree trimmings.
    - Vegetation and old fruits and vegetables.

  Green layer should be two to four inches thick.

- Brown (carbon) materials; these include:
    - Dried grass clippings, dead leaves, pine needles and wood chips, small tree or shrub branches.

    Brown layer should also be about two to four inches thick. Chop or shred materials if necessary, to speed up the decomposing process.

  Follow this link for an interesting article on what you can and can't throw in the pile.

- Add Soil
    - Add a 1- to 2-inch layer of soil. This activates the pile because it already contains microorganisms.
    - For additional nitrogen, you can add two cups of complete analysis fertilizer like 10-10-10.
- Add Water
    - Maintaining a moisture content of 60-70% in the pile helps the microbes multiply.
    - Add water until the compost feels like a damp sponge.
- Maintain Air Flow
    - Turning or dumping every 2 to 3 weeks adds air.
    - Put broken up limbs between layers.
    - Insert a pipe underneath the pile.

What happens next?

- A few days after mixing, your pile will start heating up and breaking down. A good pile will heat up to 140-160 degrees F.
- If your pile is too wet or packed, it will smell like ammonia, and you will need to throw in some brown material and mix.

Maintain your pile.

- Check the temperature inside the pile weekly.
- Turn the pile inside out by digging down into the center of the pile and bringing the inside material to the outside until well mixed. Break up any large clumps of material.
- Add water as needed.
- Repeat this process every time the temperature drops.
- When the temperature of the pile won't rise above 110 degrees, the compost is finished.

I hope this encourages you to give leaf composting a try. It's easy to start and maintain, it's an excellent way to recycle your leaves and add nutrients to your soil, plus you save money! Happy gardening!

Becky Phillips, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

To Journal or Not to Journal……That Is the Question!

Well, another gardening season nears its end, and, as I stroll through my garden, I think to myself……

Those angel wing begonias would look nice if they formed more of a mass--not just a few.

I really must remember to cut those tricyrtis back in June so they won't sprawl over everything like they are doing now.

Picture courtesy Illinois Extension.

Same for these autumn joy sedum, especially the few in less sunny spots; they're behaving like they own the entire surrounding area. (Still, their beautiful heads, just beginning to turn in color, are so lovely, I'll forgive them this year.)

And, yes, there's more…….

Plantings around the new walkway leading from the side yard to the rear garden is coming along well, but there are glaring missteps, like the Lo & Behold Blue Chip Jr. butterfly bush that I sited in less sun and more moisture than it would like; must relocate it before it croaks!

The large concrete planters I placed where my neighbor's downspout adds unwanted moisture still look lively and lovely, but the gomphrena globosa knows no limits and probably wasn't the best choice for a container; the sidekicks (zinnia, salvia, dusty miller) have tried to check it, but I'm realizing it's somewhat of a bully! Better choices for next year would be what?

Not to overlook the positive…..

The pine chip mulch provided a good soil cover along the walkway and trees, but you can't beat the leaf mulch that had aged and was spread throughout my garden beds. I do wonder, however, if the snails didn't like that environment a little too well….mmm, must watch more closely next season.

The several clematis vines seem to have finally become comfortable and grounded…..took a couple of years though for them to decide to behave as they should, a good lesson in patience. The sweet autumn will be bursting in ivory color soon--a spark my patio will enjoy!

The expander bamboo fence now attached to my fencing really did a great job supporting the moon and cardinal vines. Of course, I have to run out at night to see the blooms, but it's worth it. Instead, maybe I could rise with the sun a few mornings to check out the moon vine, but that's probably not going to happen!

The two new chelone lyonii (turtlehead pink) I added to the existing one are now flowering and brighten the shade with their stunning pink blossoms…..must add more as its fall color is just delightful.

All this to say, I have finally convinced myself that a garden journal would be a great help as my memory from the year and years prior is not quite as sharp as it used to be! My dear husband's photos from each year do help, but the details I've mentioned are lacking. I've done quite a bit of

reading on what a journal should or shouldn't include, and I have concluded that a good start must be uncomplicated, so I've settled on just a few categories:

- What I planted that did well.
- What I planted that didn't do so well and/or need a change.
- When I did certain tasks; i.e., deadheading, trimming, and pruning, etc.
- What, when, and how I fertilized various plants.
- Notes on watering.
- Copious notes on containers (I have a lot! ….and I added to my collection just recently from a post on Craigslist, a real steal!): what I filled them with; where they were placed; how they will be maintained over the winter, etc.
- Seed starting.
- Fall winterizing tasks.

I did say just a few, didn't I? So those listed seem to be sufficient. I'll add to them as I realize what I'm missing next spring! So, I've concluded that I will journal--beginning now--so, to that task I go!

If you've been thinking about starting a garden journal, why not join me……we can compare notes! Or, those of you who already have garden journals might share your tips with us novices. Oh my, just thought of another category: what I want to add; now how could I have forgotten that?!!

Pamela McGraw, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Hydrangea anomala ssp. Petiolaris--Climbing Hydrangea

Hy-DRAN-jee-ah ah-NOM-uh-luh pet-ee-o-LAR-is

Climbing hydrangea (sometimes called Japanese climbing hydrangea, Japanese hydrangea vine, and creeping hydrangea) is a woody, deciduous vine that requires very little maintenance and care but rewards the gardener with lacy white blooms in early to midsummer and glossy green leaves throughout the growing season. Like other hydrangeas, climbing hydrangea is easy to grow if given a site it likes and a very strong structure on which to climb.

The tiny fertile flowers give the flower cluster a lacy look, emphasized by the large, sterile blooms. Photo by Meneeke bloem / CC BY-SA. https://commons.wikimedia.or

Hydrangea anomala ssp. *petiolaris* (formerly *H. petiolaris*) is native to Japan, China, South Korea, eastern Siberia, Taiwan, and the island of Sakhalin off the coast of Russia. It was brought to Europe from Japan by Phillipp von Siebold in 1862 and introduced at Kew Gardens in London in 1878. From there, it was brought to Arnold Arboretum in Boston in the late 1800s, and, from Boston, it came into our gardens.

If you need or want a vine to climb over a fence or up a wall, tree trunk, or other structure, or to disguise a stump or rock pile, climbing hydrangea would be a good candidate for the job.

Size: *H. anomala* ssp. *petiolaris* can vary in height from 30 to 80 feet tall at maturity although it generally is more likely to mature in the 30- to 60-foot range. It may initially need a little help in attaching to its support structure, but it will soon get the idea and need no further help.

The plant grows *out* as well as *up*, with the side branches giving it a three-dimensional appearance. These lateral branches generally are about five to six feet long but in an especially vigorous plant can extend to ten feet from the trunk. If they encroach into territory where they aren't wanted (for example in front of a window), they are easily shortened or pruned off.

As you would expect, a woody vine of this massive size requires a very sturdy support structure--a stone or brick wall or fence, a large tree trunk, a well-built pergola, a gazebo, or an arbor, for example. A simple, lightweight trellis won't do--it will collapse under the weight of the vine. While it will grow up the wooden sides of, for example, a house, it's not advisable to let it grow up a wood surface for one main reason--sooner or later that wood surface will require painting, and you'll be faced with removing the vine to do the job.

Notice the thick trunk of this climbing hydrangea. Photo by Acabashi https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hydrangea_petiolaris,_climbing_hydrangea_at_Myddelton_House_garden,_Enfield,_London,_England.jpg .

If grown over the ground as a ground cover, on an embankment, or to disguise a rock pile or stump, climbing hydrangea vines take the form of a somewhat mounded shrub, about three to four feet tall, and can cover as much as 200 square feet of territory--which would cover a good sized rock pile!

Leaves with flowers just ready to bloom. Photo by AfroBrazilian at File: *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*. The Botanical Garden of the University of Latvia.

Flowers: Climbing hydrangea blooms in early to midsummer in our area. The flat, lacecap blooms are white to creamy white, fragrant, and range from six to ten inches across. In typical lacecap form, the numerous small, fertile flowers are in the center of the cluster and are surrounded by a ring of very showy sterile flowers each of which can be one-half to one-and-three-fourths inches in diameter. The overall effect is quite lacy. The flowers can be cut for flower arrangements, can be snipped off after they have faded, or can be left to dry on the plant, where the dried clusters will add to the plant's winter interest.

Leaves: Not only are the flowers lovely, the two- to six- inch-long leaves of climbing hydrangea are equally attractive. During the growing season, they are a glossy dark green and in the fall they sometimes (but not always) turn yellow before falling.

Stems and Bark: Climbing hydrangea clings to its support structure both by twining and by root-like "holdfasts" on the branches. These holdfasts attach to the rough surface of the structure. If allowed to grow up a wood wall, when the plant is removed, the holdfasts will leave an unsightly tracery of rootlets firmly attached to the wall, and these should be removed before the wall is painted--another reason not to grow on a wood wall.

Notice the root-like holdfasts on the stem. Photo by Kim Tilli at https://flic.kr/p/LXrAVw.

The bark of climbing hydrangea is particularly nice. As it ages, the older stems become rich cinnamon-brown and exfoliate to reveal a lighter brown inner bark for a nice two-tone effect.

Selections: There are a few selections of *H. anomala* ssp. *petiolaris.* Two particularly popular ones are Miranda and Firefly, both with variegated leaves.

Propagation: Climbing hydrangea is easily propagated by cuttings, seeds (for the species and subspecies but not the hybrids), layering, or simply buying a plant or two. The plants are readily available at nurseries.

Siting and planting: Climbing hydrangea is hardy in USDA zones 4-8. It is fairly adaptable, growing in conditions ranging from full sun to full shade. However, it is happiest and will give the best growth and bloom if given dappled sunlight or part sun and part shade, for example, morning sun and afternoon shade, such as on the east side of a building. This is particularly important in our zone 7, where it needs more shade than it does further north to prosper. Our summers are simply too hot and humid for good growth in full sun. In full shade, it won't bloom as well, although it will live and grow. In part shade, it will be happy here!

Climbing hydrangea plants prefer a rich, moist (but not wet) soil that is well drained and slightly acidic, although they will tolerate slightly alkaline soil. They absolutely will not thrive in dry, arid conditions.

Plants are somewhat slow to establish and may take as long as two to five years (or sometimes a little longer) from the time they are transplanted to the time they first bloom. Once settled into their new home, however, they are quite vigorous and will grow rapidly, and your patience will be rewarded with lacy blossoms.

Ongoing care: (Water, fertilizer, pruning, pests, and diseases) Climbing hydrangea is a low-maintenance vine. Its needs are few and easy to satisfy.

Older bark exfoliates, becoming two-toned. Photo by Jim Robbins at https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/hydrangea-anomala/.

Watering: Until established, climbing hydrangea vines do appreciate a drink during a drought. Once established, however, watering isn't necessary.

Fertilizing: It isn't necessary to fertilize climbing hydrangea if it is grown in rich, fertile soil. The plants grow quite vigorously without any assistance. If you do choose to fertilize, a layer of compost around the base in the spring is a good choice. Or, you could use a good general purpose, time-release fertilizer such as 8-8-8 or 10-10-10, scattering it around the base in March, lightly working it into the soil, and then watering it in well. Don't use a high nitrogen fertilizer; it will result in an abundance of very healthy leaves but fewer flowers.

Pruning: Climbing hydrangea rarely needs pruning. It is, however, necessary in the following circumstances:

- The plant begins to outgrow its bounds and needs restraining to control its height and/or width.
- A branch dies and needs to be removed.
- The plant needs reshaping.

Other than that, it simply isn't necessary to prune climbing hydrangea. If, however, you find you *must* prune, do so just after flowering; this hydrangea blooms on old wood, and if you wait too long, you'll cut off next year's flowers. Of course, dead branches should be removed whenever they occur.

Pests and diseases: Climbing hydrangea vines are remarkably pest and disease resistant plants. At the most, you might have an occasional problem with Japanese beetles, but this generally isn't serious.

Lina Burton, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Fall Planting Time for Spring Flowering Bulbs

When you think of tulips and daffodils, you probably picture a lovely spring garden, but now is the time to make that spring vision happen. Fall is planting time for many spring flowering plants and bulbs. But before you rush out to buy an armful of bulbs, it is helpful to understand what they are and how to plant and care for them.

The term "bulb" is often used to describe any type of plant organ that stores food or energy underground or at ground level until conditions are favorable for new growth. Thus, the term may refer to--botanically speaking--true bulbs, corms, rhizomes, and similar structures. While the growing methods for these various bulblike structures are generally similar, there are important differences.

True bulbs, such as *Tulipa* (tulips) and *Narcissus* (daffodils and jonquils), consist of a short, modified stem with layers of fleshy leaf bases or scales on top of a basal plate that surround the plant's growing point. Many of these also have dry protective outer scales. Corms, such as those for crocus and gladiolus, are swollen underground plant stems made of more solid tissue than the layers of a true bulb. Corms generally are covered by dry papery covering formed from the previous years' leaves that help protect the growing tissue. Unlike true bulbs, they may have more than one growing point. Rhizomes are similar to corms in that they are a type of stem, but in this case, one that grows horizontally underground or at ground level. They send out roots and new upward shoots at intervals along the stem. Lily of the valley, cannas, and some irises are examples. Dahlias, which are tubers, another type of food-storing structure, are generally planted in the spring so are not addressed here.

Left to right: daffodil bulb, allium grown from bulb, iris rhizome, bearded iris. All photos by D. Bayless

Regardless of the specific type of bulblike structure, most go through a similar growth cycle. These plants have all developed and adapted to allow them to survive unfavorable growing conditions. For spring flowering bulbs, growth begins in late winter and early spring as weather begins to warm following a cold spell. In fact, many of the bulbs and bulblike structures require a chilling period to flower. Following this cooling period, new stems begin to form at the growth point, deriving their energy from food the plant has stored in the bulb. Eventually flowers form. After the flowers fade and die, the plant continues to absorb sunlight, water, and nutrients and

produces food, which it stores in its underground storage structure. After several weeks, the leaves will die back and this underground storage structure (the bulb or bulblike organ) will be ready to wait for favorable growing conditions again. Many of these plants do produce seeds, perhaps as nature's backup plan, but plants produced from the seeds take substantially longer to grow and may not replicate the parent plant as well as those produced by the bulb and new bulbs that develop from the parent bulb over time.

Since most of these spring flowering bulbs do not like hot weather, the best time to plant them is mid-September through mid-November when soil temperatures fall below 60 degrees F but there is still time to allow the roots to grow before the ground freezes. Bulbs are best planted where they will receive a minimum of five to six hours of direct sunlight a day. Many can be planted under deciduous trees since they will flower before the shade develops, but they still need some sunlight to continue making and storing food throughout the summer months.

The planting site must have good drainage since most bulbs do not like wet feet. But they do not want it too dry either so adding compost will help ensure proper moisture retention. Most bulbs like a pH range between 6 and 7. A soil test will determine if you need to raise or lower the pH in your selected spot and if there is ample phosphorous to encourage root growth and bud development.

Planting depth will depend on the bulb type and size. Most bulbs should be planted so that the bottom of the bulb is at a depth two to three times the height of the bulb. Rhizomes of bearded iris, however, are planted just at or below the surface. In a new bed, or where a large area can be dug to the proper depth, positioning the bulbs and then covering all bulbs with soil to achieve the optimal planting depth is preferable to individual planting. Once bulbs are planted and lightly watered, a light layer of mulch will help maintain the proper moisture, deter weeds, and lessen the chance of bulbs being pushed up during alternate freezing and thawing in the winter. Just remember to check planting times, depths, and other requirement for the specific bulbs (or other bulblike structures) that you are planting.

Other planting considerations include the presence of animals or insects in your area that might eat or damage your bulbs and the aesthetics you desire after the bulbs have stopped blooming. Voles, squirrels, rabbits, and deer love certain bulbs--tulips and crocuses are favorites. To deter animal damage, you can try planting the bulbs in wire cages or covering the area with a layer of coarse gravel. For insect damage, you can seek guidance from an Extension Master Gardener volunteer at the Help Desk. Once flowers fade, the leaves should be allowed to die back naturally so they can continue to make and store food in the bulb for the next year. This can make your garden appear a bit untidy. Ways to remedy this include intermingling bulbs with ground cover, annuals, or perennials that will hide the fading leaves.

One advantage of bulbs is their return for a number of years as long as conditions are optimal. There will come a time, however, when the flowers seem smaller or nonexistent or the bed becomes too crowded. Then it is time to dig up your bulbs. This should be done once the bulbs have made and stored food for the coming year, so early fall is a good time for this. Take as much care as possible when digging to try to avoid damaging the bulbs. For tulips and similar bulbs, carefully dig deeply to lift the bulbs. Small side bulbs can be carefully separated from the parent bulb. If you have the space, you can plant and allow these tiny bulbs to mature, but if

your space is limited, replant only large, healthy bulbs. Those that are soft, shriveled, cut, diseased, or too tiny should be tossed out. For rhizomes like iris, gently lift the rhizomes and break or cut into smaller pieces along natural breaking points. Replant pieces that are at least three to four inches and have a grow point, but discard any diseased or damaged ones.

If you already have bulbs in your garden, dividing and replanting might be all that is needed to revive your garden to bring back a beautiful show in the spring. However, if you want to start fresh or add new or interesting varieties, now is the time to look for those new bulbs. Local garden centers carry many common varieties. If you can personally inspect the bulbs, look for large (compared to others of the same type), plump, firm bulbs that show no signs of damage or disease.

There are also many catalogs and online sources for bulbs. Be sure to select reliable sources since you will not be able to inspect the bulbs before purchasing.

LCMGA Bulb Sale

Loudoun County Master Gardeners Association has recently partnered with Brent and Becky's Bulbs, a Virginia-based company, as a source to make quality bulbs available to local gardeners and raise money for our organization. When "Loudoun County Master Gardeners" is identified during a purchase, we will receive 25% of that purchase price. This can be done online or with phone or mail orders. For online orders, go to http://bloominbucks.com/home/confirm/15503. You will be asked to select either the fall-planted bulbs or spring-planted ones. This is an ongoing fundraiser, so whether you order bulbs at this time or later, the fundraiser is in effect. Remember to check back later for spring-planted bulbs. At checkout, make sure the page shows "Fundraising for Loudoun County Master Gardeners." It is that easy to beautify your garden and help raise funds for the Loudoun County Master Gardener Association programs! Thank you for your support. And, enjoy your spring flowering bulbs!

Diane Bayless*, *Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Honeyvine Milkweed: Beauty or Beast?

It is seldom that I discover a new native plant right in my neighborhood, let alone one that monarch caterpillars eat. Let me explain. There's a largely unattended "hellstrip" right along one of the entrances to my neighborhood. Common milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca*, has a good foothold there and I've been trying to establish some durable natives such as brown-eyed susans, which are more presentable, but I just don't get over there very often to keep a close eye on the area. A couple weeks ago my gardening friend and I noted what looked like bindweed growing all over the bed. When we started pulling it out, we quickly saw that there were monarch caterpillars all over the place--on the common milkweed and on the bindweed--eating both plants! We immediately stopped, but I was totally puzzled. A quick Internet search on "monarch caterpillars eating bindweed?" revealed that what we had was honeyvine milkweed, *Ampelamus albidus.* It is a true native milkweed, a monarch host plant, and a beast!

The bindweed leaves are described as being arrowhead-shaped, with pointed or blunt lobes at the base. The honeyvine milkweed leaves are described as being elongated and heart shaped. I hope there's no test!

Bindweed leaves. Photo: Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org .

Honeyvine milkweed leaves. Photo by Carol Ivory

We observed the area with common milkweed and honeyvine milkweed for about two weeks and this is what we saw.

Caterpillars of all sizes eating common milkweed and honeyvine milkweed. Photos by Carol Ivory

We also observed this.

Caterpillar preparing to pupate
Photo by Barbara Eppler.

Butterfly visible inside chrysalis
Photo by Barbara Eppler.

Monarch butterfly
Photo by Barbara Eppler.

Normally we would welcome into our garden any food for monarch caterpillars. But the honeyvine milkweed is aggressive and invasive. Once this vine has flowered and produced seeds, you will have it forever. The roots of this perennial can grow as deep as six feet into the soil and usually break when you try to pull them up. Then the underground root stock puts up more sprouts. A single vine can be 10 to 30 feet long and produce 50 seed pods. The seed pods have the familiar milkweed shape and the seeds are carried in the wind. This vine does not have the milky sap of other milkweeds but does have a cloudy sap. It can be a problem in tree plantings since it can twine around the plants. It prefers moist, fertile soil, and full sun, but can grow in a variety of conditions. It is often found in fencerows and disturbed sites.

Honeyvine milkweed flower. Photo courtesy of VCE Publications / 450 / 450-139.

Honeyvine milkweed is found throughout the eastern United States, and extension offices consider it a serious pest in field crops and a nuisance in smaller scale no-till gardens.

Control this plant by cutting off the seed pods and then watching for the new plants to come up in the spring. But the seed pods are often not visible until the plants have dropped their leaves. Use care when pulling down vines with pods so that the contained seeds are not accidentally released to the wind before making it to your hands. Pull the new plants immediately as soon as they emerge. Repeat this weekly to keep the plant from growing and to cut off food supply to the roots. Systemic herbicides can be used on actively growing plants. See VCE Publication /450-139 for herbicide recommendations.

Carol Ivory, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Celebrate Fall With Delicious Squash Dishes

Squash are herbaceous vining plants in the gourd family, Cucurbitaceous. While consumers consider squash a vegetable, botanists know squash are really a fruit. Yes, really—just like tomatoes, bell peppers, peas, okra, olives, corn, and beans. A fruit is the fleshy product of a plant that contains seeds. Vegetables are the other parts, such as leaves, stems, roots, and flowers.

While there are hundreds of squash species, consumers will divide them into two broad categories: summer and winter. This designation is not based on growing season but on harvest and storage span. Summer squash is picked somewhat immature with tender, edible skin and eaten soon after. For winter squash, the term "winter" doesn't mean it was grown then but that it was harvested later and can often be stored through much of the winter season.

Shorter and cooler days have me thinking of warm soup! Here are two flavorful and satisfying recipes I served at the Virginia Cooperative Extension office during Master Gardener training that were popular with the group.

Italian Sausage Summer Squash Soup

I like the mix of half sweet and half spicy sausage, but you may use all of one kind if you prefer. It may be easier to find the raw sausage in links that you can cut open and cook. If the sausage is extremely lean, you may need to add a tablespoon more olive oil to help it cook with the vegetables. Vegetarians can use meat substitute crumbles, but the flavor may be too bland, so add extra Italian seasoning.

Makes 12 cups

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ pound sweet Italian bulk sausage
- ½ pound spicy Italian bulk sausage
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 4 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (28-ounce) can Italian seasoned or fire-roasted diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 2 teaspoons dried Italian seasoning
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 4 cups coarsely chopped zucchini or yellow squash or a mix of both

Garnishes: grated Parmesan cheese or Parmesan crackers, slivered fresh basil

Heat olive oil in a large soup pot over medium heat. Add sausage and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned. Drain, if desired, and return to pot.

Add onion, celery, bell pepper, and garlic to sausage and cook 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until tender. Stir in tomatoes, tomato sauce, Italian seasoning, salt, and sugar. Cover and simmer 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add squash and cook 10 minutes or until tender. Garnish, if desired.

Black Bean and Winter Squash Chili

This vegetarian stew is hearty and filling. If you are cooking for meat lovers, brown a pound of lean ground beef, ground turkey, or cubed beef with the onions and proceed with the recipe. For ease, try frozen cubed butternut squash—you don't even have to thaw it!

Makes 10 cups

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 poblano peppers, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 cups vegetable broth
- 2 (15-ounce) cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 (28-ounce) can diced fire-roasted or chili seasoned tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 3 ½ - 4 cups cubed or chopped butternut squash or other winter squash

Toppings: sour cream, shredded Cheddar cheese, fresh cilantro

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and cook, stirring frequently, 5 minutes or until tender. Add garlic; cook 2 minutes. Add poblanos and red bell peppers. Cook 5 minutes, stirring constantly.

Stir in broth, beans, tomatoes, tomato sauce, chili powder, cumin, paprika, salt, and pepper. Stir in squash. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and cook 25 minutes or until squash is tender. Serve with desired toppings.

Text and recipes excerpted from *Squash: 50 Tried & True Recipes* (Adventure Publications, 2019).

Julia Rutland, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Squash photos from Pixabay.com.

Feeding the Birds

The birds that migrate often follow a common pattern of migration that involves flying north in the spring and returning in the autumn to warmer regions of the south. They often migrate along a flyway usually north and south. Birds migrate for many reasons that include finding richer food sources, seeking safer habitats, and avoiding predators.

Migration usually starts because of the need for food supplies to help their offspring survive. Migrating birds can fly more easily in dense, high-pressure conditions. They tend to stop flying and take refuge if a storm is coming. Birds tend to be noticeably quiet before a big storm. Birds also sing if weather is improving.

Though birds often migrate in flocks, many migrate alone. The most amazing example is a juvenile hummingbird that has never migrated before yet knows to fly, where to fly, how far to fly, and when to stop. And it does this all alone. The farthest migrating bird is the Arctic tern, which migrates 24,000 miles each year. That is about the distance around the Earth.

Birds are not the only animals that migrate. Whales, fish, crabs, bats, butterflies, dragonflies, bison, reindeer, wildebeests, and zebras move from place to place. The majority of migrating animals, however, are birds.

Birds that do not migrate and stay on in cold regions are often referred to as birds of winter.

A common winter birding misconception is that there are few birds to enjoy during the coldest months since not all birds migrate in North America. Birds that do not migrate include birds of prey, which include black vultures, and woodpeckers--hairy, downy, red-bellied, and pileated. Owls stay put during colder times of the year. These non migrating owls are the great-horned owls, barred owls, and screech owls. There are several other breeds of birds that can be spotted during winter months including the dark-eyed junco, the bohemian waxwing, the northern cardinal, and the American robin.

The birds that do not migrate have reasons for not migrating. They do not need to expend massive amounts of energy to travel. They also do not need to give up their territory if there are enough food resources for them. The birds that stay in winter have a better chance of maintaining their territory year-round and avoid the hazards of migration, but they must endure the cold. Birds remaining in colder areas must cope with much shorter days during which to find food and shelter. They are often well-equipped to survive the coldest of temperatures. They store fat during the short days of winter to keep themselves warm. Birds may start winter food storage in late summer and retrieve the stored food months later. Some birds form social groups that can last into the following spring.

Several species group together in a loose, mixed feeding flock. Flocking together in winter improves the chances of locating food and huddling together during the critical night-time period helps conserve body heat. Birds are warm blooded; their bodies maintain a constant temperature, often around 106 degrees. They have evolved strategies to make and maintain heat, including huddling together, tucking in their heads and feet, and sticking up their feathers. Cardinals puff up into the shape of a little round beach ball to minimize heat loss. Shivering, a form of shaking helps to retain heat. Warm-blooded birds fluff up their feathers to create their own little air pockets, which warm up and keep them warm. They must eat a great deal of fat-rich food to

generate necessary heat. Birds have a protective scale-like covering on their feet and special veins and arteries that keep their feet warm.

Their down feathers provide plenty of extra warmth that is necessary when the temperature drops. Birds can stay dry because of the oil-producing glands they have. They preen to coat their feathers in this oil to waterproof and insulate their down feathers.

It is a common myth that robins fly south during the winter. If there is sufficient food in their breeding grounds, they will remain where they spent the summer. They will live on insects found in tree bark instead of the frozen ground.

Some birds migrate to get away from cold temperatures, but the ones that stay in the colder climates have limited food and shelter options. This leaves them relying on us to help them survive.

Your bird feeder may see a flurry of bird activity first thing in the morning as they replenish energy lost overnight and last thing in the afternoon to prepare for the long night ahead. Select only high-energy foods since they burn fat for energy to stay warm. Appropriate food for the birds of winter include black oil sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, suet blocks with mixed seed and fruit, fruit trees, meal worms, peanuts, and white proso millet. Unsalted peanuts are a great winter food because nuts do not freeze and they are high in calories, oil, and fat. Suet is excellent in the fall and winter months when the birds need more calories to maintain their body heat. Peanut butter is a very nourishing food, especially in winter, when the production of fat is important to birds' survival. Seed heads at the end of autumn attract birds in the cooler months.

Photo courtesy Pixabay.com

Although striped sunflower seeds are a good source of nutrition for birds, black oil sunflower seeds are the better choice. Black oil seeds have nearly double the calorie content. Suet is made from animal fat and provides loads of nutrition to scavenging birds. It can be purchased in blocks or balls, or it can be spread on pinecones and hung on trees.

Backyard birders can attract winter birds by offering not only food but a heated bird bath for liquid water. The use of a heated birdbath will provide necessary water for them. Birds will drink from a heated birdbath, but if the temperature is well below freezing, they will not bathe in it and get their feathers wet. The heated birdbath would be best if it offered warm water to drink but was too deep or inaccessible for them to bathe.

Birds can be helped during the winter months by keeping their bird seed accessible and dry. Tube and hopper feeders are preferred for keeping the seed dry.

Birds that rely on your home feeder will not die if you leave town during winter. Research has shown that most birds eat only 25 percent of their daily food requirement from feeders. Since many people have bird feeders, birds will fly to a neighbor's feeder until you return home. However, by keeping feeders filled consistently, the birds are given a safe and reliable source of food. This is especially important when the weather turns extremely cold or snowy.

Well-sealed shelters that block both wind and cold can be critical during the winter cold. Feeders should be placed in areas that are less windy like along an edge of a wooded area or anywhere with a wind barrier. Keep the platform feeders swept off or clear a place on the ground where you can scatter seed for ground-feeding species such as sparrows, juncos, and doves. Another good idea is to keep extra feeders for use in bad weather. It gives the birds another place to eat at one time. Other extras to consider are having a peanut feeder, a suet feeder, a satellite feeder for small birds, and a hopper feeder.

Invest in a good quality birdhouse, a roost box, or another form of bird shelter to help protect visiting birds from the coldest winds. Be sure to keep all birdhouses clean to prevent mold and other forms of bacteria from forming.

Heather Keith Swanson, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Cicada Brood X Arriving in Spring 2021

Brood X (Brood 10), the Great Eastern Brood, is one of 15 broods of periodical cicadas that appear regularly throughout the eastern United States. It has the greatest range and concentration of any of the 17-year cicadas. These insects are due to emerge in Northern Virginia next May. This means our gardens and sidewalks will be littered with the carcasses of large insects for about 6 weeks. These insects do little harm. Their short lives above ground consist of singing loudly, mating, laying eggs and dying. They eat nothing. But in the process of laying eggs, the females may damage some trees. The female cicada lays eggs in slits she cuts in small branches. When the nymphs hatch, they drop from the branch and burrow into the ground where they will live, feeding off root sap for the next 17 years. Tree branches from the point of injury to their tips will probably dieback. Large trees can take this in stride. Small and newly planted trees and shrubs may suffer substantial damage. Introduced species dn ornamentals are most likely to experience damage.

Photo by Nancy Harding, UMD Extension

Covering your smaller trees and shrubs with plastic netting may be an option but there are some drawbacks. The netting must be small enough to keep the cicadas out, the netting must be tied at the bottom to keep the cicadas out, and birds, snakes, and other creatures can get ensnared in the netting with disastrous results. Another option is to use light weight row cover, cheesecloth or even tulle. Some of these materials will reduce the amount of light getting to the leaves, and limit air circulation, encouraging fungus. A more attractive option is to do nothing.

Never attempt to use a pesticide. There isn't enough pesticide to kill the millions of cicadas but think of all the bees and other beneficial insects that would be killed in addition to possibly poisoning dogs and cats dn other critters who will eat the sprayed insects. People, pets, rodents, marsupials, reptiles, birds, fish, insects, arachnids — virtually any creature will eat cicadas.

The Brood X periodic cicadas won't arrive until next May, so you have plenty time to decide what you are going to do.

In the meantime, here's some additional reading on this amazing phenomenon:

http://bugoftheweek.com/blog/2020/6/1/cicada-surprise-in-the-dmv-brood-ix-and-straggling-brood-x-periodical-cicadas-magicicada-spp

https://www.cicadamania.com/cicadas/periodical-cicada-brood-x-10-will-emerge-in-15-states-in-2021/

https://loudounwildlife.org/2004/04/brood-x-cicadas-back/

https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/5/130515-cicadas-recipes-food-cooking-bugs-nation-animals/#close