

News Release from Master Gardeners of Montgomery County, MD

Master Gardeners—a non-profit organization of volunteers trained through the University of Maryland—provides free, environmentally friendly, gardening advice

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Pick Up 'Green' Planting Tips at Master Gardener's 'Bay-Friendly Garden Oasis' at Montgomery County Fair

When you need a break from hot dogs and rides at Montgomery County's Fair, come see the "Bay-Friendly Garden"--an oasis created by the Master Gardeners of the Montgomery County Cooperative Extension. This year's County Fair will be held August 8-16 at the Montgomery County Agricultural Fairgrounds in Gaithersburg.

"Both novice and experienced home gardeners will take home dozens of ideas to make their yards green in color and green in spirit," said Frank Lostumbo, Master Gardener Co-Team leader of the demonstration garden. **"We've got some easy, environmentally responsible ways you can think globally and act locally."**

Volunteer teams have transformed a parking lot at the Montgomery County Agricultural Center, Inc. into a 2,700-square foot Bay-Friendly Garden. Virtually all the vegetation and planting techniques at the demonstration garden follow three principles of environmentally sound gardening:

1. **Use Native Plants:** They are generally more disease- and insect-resistant, require less fertilizer and pesticides and support more wildlife species. Five, wedge-shaped raised beds are filled with native and commonly planted ornamental grasses, flowers, small trees, shrubs and vegetables that are indigenous to the Mid-Atlantic Region.
2. **Control water use and explore new reuse techniques:** Mulching your garden beds and using drip hoses reduce run-off of water, soil, fertilizer and pesticides into storm drains. That water goes unfiltered into neighborhood streams and the Potomac River, the source of our drinking water. A rain barrel display shows how to collect rain from roofs that can be used later to water the garden.
3. **Minimize the use of fertilizers and pesticides:** This effort keeps pollutants out of our watersheds and protects beneficial predator insects that naturally control garden pests.

"Making small changes in our garden and lawn care practices can truly make a difference in preserving the health of our local streams, the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay," said Lostumbo. The Master Gardener group, which anticipates that Maryland will certify the plot as a "Bay-Wise Garden," will provide information on how homeowners can also achieve Bay-Wise certification.

Other features of the demonstration garden include: **Build a rain garden:** Learn how to convert a small portion of your property into a rain garden to filter out pollutants, recharge groundwater and clean and reduce storm water discharges into the Chesapeake Bay. A simple rain garden can be made by modifying a low-lying area with absorbent soil and planting a variety of vegetation adapted to heavy but infrequent rainfall. **See drought tolerant shrubs and plants that attract butterflies:** Pick up information sheets and bring your own garden questions to knowledgeable Master Gardeners. **Bring the kids:** Check out the salad table, hunt for gourds, and count the tomatoes.

"Creating such a design is a great personal activity and achievement for the home gardener," said Lostumbo. "We hope fairgoers stop by and get inspired."

The Bay-Friendly Garden is accessible from the Chestnut Street entrance to the Montgomery County Agricultural Fairgrounds. Within the fairgrounds, it is at the intersection of Poplar and Hickory Avenues.

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The Master Gardeners of Montgomery County are 250 volunteers trained by the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension. Their free programs educate residents about environmentally safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens and landscapes. These programs include a telephone consultation hotline, plant clinics, therapeutic horticulture, demonstration gardens, a speakers bureau and design services for government and non-profit organizations. An intensive 75-hour training program in February is available for gardeners who want to become Master Gardeners. For more information about the Master Gardener training program, contact the Master Gardener Hotline at **301-590-9650**.

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