



## MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

# News Release

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### County and Master Gardeners to Showcase Environmentally-Friendly Garden at County Fair

Montgomery County's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has teamed with The Master Gardeners of the Montgomery County Cooperative Extension and the Montgomery County Agricultural Center, Inc. (MCAC) to create a "Bay-Friendly Garden" for the 2007 Montgomery County Agricultural Fair. The garden will feature native plants, water reuse techniques and environmentally-friendly pest management methods. This year's County Fair will be held August 10 to 18 at the Montgomery County Agricultural Fairgrounds in Gaithersburg.

"Making small changes in our garden or lawn care practices can truly make a difference in preserving the health of our local streams, the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay," said Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection Acting Director Fariba Kassiri. "Using native plants whenever possible, capturing and reusing rainwater and minimizing the use of fertilizers and pesticides help keep pollutants out of our watersheds."

The 2,700-square foot Bay-Friendly Garden will showcase a variety of native and commonly planted ornamental grasses, flowers, small trees, shrubs and vegetables that are indigenous to the Mid-Atlantic Region. These plants are better adapted to local moisture, soil, and seasonal temperature conditions than non-natives, so they generally require less water and are more resistant to local insects, minimizing the need for pesticides. Less need for fertilizers or pesticides reduces the amount of these chemicals that are washed into stormwater systems, which flow into streams and eventually into the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, the use of native plants supports a larger and more diverse number of wildlife species than non-natives, providing for a better ecosystem balance.

The Garden contains a demonstration rain barrel that shows homeowners how they can disconnect their rooftop runoff and save and use rainwater.

"The relatively easy practice of Bay-Friendly gardening protects the environmentally sensitive Chesapeake Bay," said Frank Lostumbo, Master Gardener team leader.

Lostumbo explained that the average homeowner can make their garden more environmentally-friendly by focusing on the following strategies:

- **Water Control.** Return water to the soil using permeable pavers for walkways, rain barrels to save water for the garden and mulch-covered drip hoses to cut evaporative water loss.

- Mulching. Mulch garden beds to reduce run-off of water, soil, fertilizer and pesticides into storm drains.
- Pest Control: Use “Integrated Pest Management” methods that minimize pesticide use, including choosing native plant materials and frequently inspecting plants.
- Native plants: Use a variety of hardy natives, which are generally more disease- and insect-resistant, require less fertilizer and support more wildlife species.

“Over the next year, we will add a complete rain garden at the Fair site,” said Lostumbo. “Rain gardens filter out pollutants, recharge groundwater and clean and reduce stormwater 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.”

The Master Gardener’s Environmentally-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.

The Master Gardener team of 15 volunteers, DEP and MCAC transformed a drab plot into a watershed-friendly garden oasis over a ten-week period. MCAC workers dug out asphalt and gravel and provided tons of topsoil. The Master Gardeners moved the topsoil and added compost and mulch to create five raised planting beds bordered by dry-stacked fieldstone walls. They moved more than 70 plants, three trees and several large shrubs from the Master Gardener’s former fairground site. Then they added new vegetable and ornamental plants and drip hoses to create the new garden.

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 and a speakers bureau.

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.