



Master Gardener

VOL. 11 NO. 5, MAY, 2006

NEWS FOR DELAWARE COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS



# Calendar

**Tuesday, May 16,**

MG Monthly Meeting – Picnic and plant swap.  
6:30 p.m. - Smedley

**Saturday, May 20**

Plant and Seed Pick-Up – Intergenerational  
Garden. 10-1

**Saturdays & Sundays in May**

Linvilla Orchards Info Booth  
12 Noon to 3:00 pm

**Saturday, June 3rd**

Merry Place— 10:00—12 Noon  
Composting Workshop

**Tuesday, June 6**

MG Board Meeting – 7 pm Smedley

**Saturday, May 13**

2nd Saturday—Container Gardening,  
Smedley 10:00 am—Noon

**Tuesday, June 20**

MG Monthly Meeting –  
7:00 pm. - Smedley

**Saturday, June 17th**

Meadowbrook Farm “Open House Kickoff”  
We are arranging an informal carpool trip to  
the grower for many of the plants presented  
at the PHS Flower Show. More info? Call  
Gerri Eunson

**Saturday, June 24, 2006**

MGs Tour of Central Park -  
Day Trip \$55.00  
Call Gerri Eunson



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## From the Coordinator: *Linda Barry*

Thanks to the many volunteers who have responded to community requests for Master Gardeners during April and May. Check the volunteer opportunities section in the newsletter to find dates and events for May and June activities that still need volunteers.

Elsie Mueller and Mary Sambor did an excellent job presenting the Arbor Day program in Smedley Park. It was the only really rainy day in April, but the committee switched gears quickly and the scouts had a great time.



Thanks also to Joe Daniels and Cathy St Clair for educational presentations, Carl Pfeiffer for cooking the hot dogs under a tent, and Steve Kosiak and

Steve Hinds for planting 10 trees near the steadily rising creek.

The Teaching Gardens committees have been busy cleaning, mulching and planting the beds. We will have Gardeners' Selects trial plants in the Terrace Garden again this year. The shade garden has new plant signs that will be installed in the near future. Birds are nesting in the bird and butterfly garden, and we have some new natives on the hillside. If you wish to be involved with our Teaching Gardens, please let us know.

Veronica Connor has offered to assist with the Hortline scheduling, and she is a very welcome new co-chair. Liana has assumed the Treasurer's responsibilities and is very relieved to have some help. We always need Hortline volunteers, especially in the spring and early summer. If you have a Tuesday or Thursday morning to help, contact Veronica or Liana.

Thanks also to Alyce for scheduling the special Master Gardener's Day at Miller's Nursery. I saw many of us there, and we were doing some serious shopping.

The second plant and seed pick-up will be May 20 at the Intergenerational Garden. You are welcome to come and make some selections from the many vegetable varieties that the Master Gardeners have grown. We will also have some flower selections for sale.

Don't forget to pot up your extra plants for the May picnic and swap. We will provide hot dogs and hamburgers, and members are asked to bring something to complete our picnic. Check with Hope Jones-Gary to see what is needed if you have not already signed up. Family members are welcome. We will have a very brief business meeting for announcements and updates. I hope to see you there!

### **Friday, June 9, 2006, 10 am-1 pm "Senior Expo" at Neumann College, sponsored by state senator Dominic Pileggi.**

Master Gardeners will have an exhibitor table, and we would like to have a team of volunteers to represent us. The purpose of the expo is to inform senior citizens of the services available to them from state, federal and local providers. If you are interested, please contact Linda Barry.

#### *NEWSLETTER STAFF:*

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# Predacious Ground Beetle

by Marie Hofer, Gardening editor, HGTV.com

It's a nocturnal creature, so you've probably only seen it--or one of its many cousins--scurry for cover when you overturn a log or rock in the garden.

A gardener's friend, the predacious ground beetle feeds on caterpillars, cutworms, slugs, tent caterpillars, fly maggots and other garden and household pests, crushing them with powerful chewing mouthparts. Although it's has been known to feed on earthworms and a few other "good" bugs in the garden, the predacious ground beetle eats far more bad bugs than good.



Sometimes called carabids (they belong to the Carabidae family), predacious ground beetles are usually black or very dark brown, and sometimes metallic green or purple. Their head is usually considerably smaller than their body. They're often found in moist to wet locations. Some types exhibit defensive behavior (like emitting strong odors) when disturbed. They're fast runners.

These beetles are sometimes attracted to lights and find their way inside the house. If you find one indoors, carry it outside and release it. It's a good guy.

## **2006 SECOND SATURDAYS at SMEDLEY—10:00 TO NOON**

**May 13**—Container Gardening—  
Bring your own container, \$7 + cost of plants

**June 10**—Lawn care—\$7

**July 8**—Water Gardening—\$7  
**August 12**—Stepping Stones—Bring own  
materials for tiles—\$15

**September 9**—Mums & Asters—\$7

**October 14**—Pumpkin carving—\$10

**November 11**—Ikebana—\$7

**December 9**—Wreath Making—includes  
materials—\$15





# MAY TO DO GARDENING TIPS

BY Joe Daniels

## Houseplants

1. Divide indoor plants after new growth begins.
2. Root cuttings of many plants now.
3. Move plants outdoors when the night temperatures stay over 50 degrees F. Place them in a shady area and gradually move them to their preferred light level as they adapt to the brighter outdoor light.

## Bulbs

1. Allow the leaves of your spring bulbs (daffodils, tulips, etc.) to brown after flowering. The leaves need to remain to nourish the bulb for the next year's flowers.
2. Remember, DON'T tie up your bulb foliage or even braid it, the foliage needs to be able to send back nourishment to the bulb and it won't work as well if the foliage is tied up.
3. Plant tender bulbs of dahlias, tuberous begonias, and gladioli.

## Compost

1. Start a new compost pile or bin if you do not have one. Check for our upcoming compost workshops.
2. Maintain "food" (garden trimmings), moisture, and keep pile turned.

## Vegetable gardens

1. Its best to wait until May 15 or even Memorial Day to plant summer crops of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, limas, squash, and other warm season vegetables.
2. Apply 2 inches of mulch to plants after soaking the ground, but avoid over-watering and do not cover small plants.
3. Slugs may be a problem for seedlings and transplants, check plants in the evening around 10:00 PM with a flashlight to confirm this (don't worry about the neighbors...they already know how gardeners act). Setting out small pans of yeast and water, or beer will act as slug bait.

## Herbs

1. Plant annual, biennial and perennial herbs outdoors for use in foods, or mixed them with annuals and perennials in a container by the door.

## Lawns

1. Mow your lawn regularly, generally once a week, but adapt this to the type of grass and how fast it is growing.
2. New lawns can still be sown and older ones reseeded before summer heat takes its toll.
3. If you did not apply fertilizer earlier this spring along with an herbicide and turf growth is slowing down, you can fertilize to maintain its color and health
4. Grackles and starlings feeding in lawns may indicate an infestation of sod webworm.

## Perennials, biennials and annuals

1. Seedlings started indoors, or purchased can be moved to the garden in mid to late May.
2. Divide crowded perennials if they are still small and have not se flower buds.
3. Sow seed in the ground of sunflowers, cosmos, and other direct seeded annuals for summer flower.
4. Begin to stake weak-stemmed perennials like delphiniums when they are 6-8" tall.
5. Avoid planting any of the loosestrifes, as they can become a serious weed and destroy the habitat of native plants and animals.

## Trees and shrubs

1. Keep newly planted conifers well watered.
2. Deciduous trees can still be planted before summer heat makes it inadvisable.
3. Prune spring flowering trees and shrubs after they flower.
4. Add more nitrogen fertilizer to areas where fresh wood chips or bark mulch is added.
5. Avoid damage to trees and shrubs from lawn mowers and string trimmers.
6. Watch for caterpillars eating the needles off pine trees, they are often the larvae of sawflies.

## Roses

1. Prune out deadwood.
2. Water regularly, especially roses planted this spring.
3. Apply 2-3 inches of mulch to help retain water.
4. Fertilize as indicated by a soil test.

Here is some sage advice given to me many years ago....and how could I forget it.

*May the light always find you on a dreary day.  
When you need to be home, may you find your way.  
May you always have courage to take a chance,  
And never find frogs in your underpants.*

This is a warm and witty wish and a funny reminder to be grateful for the little things. Enjoy your spring gardening, and watch out for those frogs.  
Some dates to remember

**Saturday, May 13** Container gardening at Smedley at 10AM...could use the help

**Monday May 15** Container workshop in Lansdowne 7PM, at 20th Century Club

**Thursday May 18** Container workshop in Marcus Hook 6-8PM waterfront park

## Plant to Human: "Hands Off, Buster !"

*If you think plants can't tell you're touching them, you may want to think again. In fact, a gentle tap or squeeze may trigger a kind of "911" call to all of the plant's cells, placing it on red alert.*

"Squeezing the leaves probably gives the plant the feeling that it's already in the jaws of an insect," says Frank J. Turano, a [molecular biologist](#).

A group of students from Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, Md., helped Turano show that even a gentle pat can send a plant's stress levels off the chart.

To a plant, these gentle taps may seem like the soft steps of an approaching insect, sneaking in for a bite to eat. Turano credits the students with helping set the stage for learning *how* plants make their 911 calls.

Talking, and even singing, to plants to see how they respond is a common science fair project, he notes. But results have been mixed.

Turano's studies suggest maybe it's because students just aren't using the right form of communication. Maybe, the trick is to stop talking and just reach out and touch the plant.

*Then, let it do the talking back.*

That's what happened when Turano asked the Greenbelt high schoolers to touch the plants at 1-, 2-, 5- and 15-minute intervals. The object of this touchy-feely experiment was a type of wild mustard plant called *Arabidopsis thaliana* (Uh-rab-ih-DOP-sis thal-ee-ANN-uh).

Turano found that the students' touching set off high levels of two substances called amino acids. They signal that the plant is really stressed out.

It may happen something like this: touching triggers the amino acids' release. They in turn set off a chain reaction that unlocks a gate-like area on cell walls, called receptors.

Through this receptor gate flows a stream of electrically charged molecules called *ions*. They become part of the 911 call that rapidly alerts other cells--from the plant's top down to its roots. It's probably a long distance call, but one that Ma Nature doesn't charge for (after all, the plant is stressed enough as it is).

Turano says it's possible the plant's long distance calling may send messages a bit like that of our own nervous system.

More research is needed to prove this is what actually happens in plants. For now, it's a [hypothesis](#), he says. Instead of electrical, for example, the plant's SOS signals may turn out to be chemical.

### So why worry about plant SOS signals anyway?

At ARS' Climate Stress Laboratory in Beltsville, Turano's job was to find out how plants handle--or don't handle--*stress*. This can result from severe heat or cold, dryness or flooding or damage from chewing insects, says Turano (he's now a professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.).

Eventually, the findings may help plant breeders find ways to breed crop plants that don't get so stressed out.

For the farmer, that could mean more crop to sell as food, fiber or livestock feed and less to throw away.

The stress research could also mean better-adapted trees, beautiful shrubs, flowers and houseplants.

Hopefully, they won't mind being touched--or maybe it's the singing that really bugs them.

--By [Don Comis](#), Information Staff, Agricultural Research Service

## Lending Library

We have a wonderful self service lending library available during office business hours (weekdays 8:30am to 4:00pm). If you haven't seen it, maybe you should stop in.

Four weeks has been established as the time limit to keep a book. The office management committee has two requests:

If you have a book(s) that you checked out and you have had it for more than 4 weeks please bring it back.

If you have any books that are no longer needed in your personal garden library consider donating them to our lending library.

Office Management Committee

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## NEED HELP

The Urban Gardening Committee will need some volunteers to help with the heavy tree planting on Tuesday, May 23 at the site in Chester.

We are planning on some digging for the prep work and planting of 3 large trees.

You can reach me by cell phone or email if you need any more info. Thanks for your help.

Wilma J. Ervin

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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### June 3—Hazardous Waste Site Sharon Hill

We will distribute information to residents. Our organization received a check for \$120 for our participation.

**June 3**—Composting Workshop at Merry Place. Contact Janae Alberts if you are available to help.

**May 13, 14, 21, 28 & 29 at Linvilla.** We need 2 volunteers for each day—Noon to 3.

## For Sale:

NIB—(New in box) 12" Bulb Pans for sale. Start thinking now about planting bulbs this fall and forcing for wonderful displays of color and cheeriness in the winter. They are near impossible to find. I had to purchase an entire case— \$1.50 each

Call or send email to: Barbara Smith

*PS—My experiment with the flowers for the Spring Tea turned out to be a mishap with the bulbs blooming 10 days before my event. Thanks to everyone who offered advice—a good stiff drink was all I needed. As usual, Mother Nature had the last laugh!*

### MG OFFICERS & COMMITTEES

President: Alyce Zellers  
Vice President: Kathy Hornberger  
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Elsie Mueller  
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Hortline: Liana Bauerle  
Home Gardener's School:  
Diana Breen  
Ken Paulsell  
MG Recruitment: Marty Roelandt  
Mentoring : Lisa Augustine  
Octoberfest: Anne Smith  
Ann Hofmann  
Office Mgmt: Barbara Meahl  
Social Events: Hope Jones-Gary  
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Stephen Hinds  
Butterfly: Kathy Hornberger  
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Marion Nelson  
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