

## Get Vegetable Gardens Ready For Winter Now

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — As autumn approaches and you harvest your last tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers, you may think your work in the vegetable garden is done. It's not.

Fall cleanup is an important part of proper vegetable garden management, according to specialists at the Home and Garden Information Center of the Cooperative Extension Service University of Maryland at College

Park.

The first step in winterizing your vegetable garden is to remove diseased and insect-infested plants. This will prevent many plant diseases and insect pests from overwintering. Healthy crop residues can be worked into the soil or composted.

Next comes soil enhancement through the addition of lime and organic matter. A \$5 soil test conducted at the University of Maryland at College Park will help you

determine what — and how much — is needed. Test kits are available from the Home and Garden Information Center (1-800-342-2507).

The final step is to plant a cover crop. When planted in the fall and plowed under in the spring, cover crops improve soil structure and fertility while preventing erosion.

The best cover crops are legumes. Bacteria associated with the roots of these plants convert nitrogen from the air into a form

that can be used by plants.

The most suitable legume for home gardens is hairy vetch. One of the most efficient soil builders, this winter annual should be sown in September and plowed under in early spring. Non-leguminous alternatives are annual rye and oats, which should be sown between early September and early October.

For more information about

vegetable gardens or other horticultural topics, Maryland residents can call the Home and Garden Information Center at 1-800-342-2507. Experts are available to answer questions about 8 a.m. and 1 p.m., Monday through Friday. Recorded information on a variety of subjects is accessible via touch-tone phone 24 hours a day.

## Older Homes Look Best With Old-Fashioned Landscaping

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — When you buy an older home, you're also buying an older landscape. Those vintage plants often are worth keeping, says a landscaping specialist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Most yards around older houses contain plants of the period when the houses were built, such as lilacs, yews, roses and forsythias," says Dan Stearns, assistant professor of landscape contracting. "These plantings complement older architecture."

It's often a mistake to remove existing plants and replace them with modern landscaping. "Closely sculpted hedges, a front deck and a large expanse of lawn may clash with Victorian or colonial homes," says Stearns. "We've all seen houses and yards that just don't fit together."

Stearns advises waiting at least a year before altering any landscape. "Study your yard's appearance during each season," says Stearns. "There may be spring-flowering bulbs, summer-blooming shrubs and perennials, trees with colorful fall foliage and evergreens for winter interest. Preserving these plants can save time and money."

Does this mean you shouldn't plant new things? "Not at all," says Stearns. "The key is to blend new plantings with existing ones. This also may mean rejuvenating or removing older plants that are past their prime."

Functional issues also will influence your landscaping decisions. "A lot can change during a property's lifetime," says Stearns. "Many houses were built before there were automobiles. You may need to add a garage or even a driveway."

maintain privacy and shut out noise. Some remodeling also might be necessary, such as adding a side door, putting on a new porch or fixing the walkway."

Before breaking soil on any property, create a landscaping plan. "If you're going to hire a

landscaping professional, it's best to involve him or her while you're setting goals and developing the plan," says Stearns. "An experienced professional can help prevent costly mistakes."

A landscape contractor can help you decide which plants are worth

keeping and can suggest replacements and additions. "There's an excellent variety of plants that weren't available 60 years ago," says Stearns. "And many catalogs are selling heirloom plants again."

Working with an older landscape has its risks. "Digging around established plants can

damage or kill them, and changing light conditions will affect them too," says Stearns. "The best approach is to proceed with lots of care, and remember that landscaping can be done in phases. It doesn't have to happen all at once."

## How 'Clean And Green' Affects Local Taxes

HUNTINGDON (Huntingdon Co.) — To help preserve farmland, Pennsylvania's Clean and Green law lets farmers pay taxes on the agricultural value of their land instead of its higher development value. But it also cuts local tax revenues, says a Penn State researcher.

"Some of Pennsylvania's best farmland is at risk of development," says Dr. Tim Kelsey, assistant professor of agricultural economics. "Act 319, also known as Clean and Green, was enacted in 1974 to help farmers keep real property taxes in line with their income. Even if farmland is not physically affected by neighboring developments, higher property values mean higher taxes."

Kelsey calculated tax revenues lost because of Clean and Green as well as millage rate increases necessary to offset these losses using data on participation in the act in 1991. That year, 45 of the state's 67 counties had participants. More than 42,000 people and more than 3.7 million acres were enrolled in the program.

"The average county government with Clean and Green participants lost 3.5 percent of its real property tax revenue and 1.2 percent of its total revenue because of the program," Kelsey says. "These impacts varied dramatically across counties, municipalities and school districts."

"Fulton County, for example, lost a larger share of its total revenue — 8.9 percent — than any other county, even though it is

under less development pressure than many counties," says Kelsey.

"On average, county millage rates would have risen 0.51 mills, and municipal millage rates would have risen 0.26 mills," Kelsey says. "School district millage rates also would have risen because of Clean and Green. This means the average owner of a house with a market value of \$50,000 located in a county with Clean and Green participants pays an additional \$38.12 in local property taxes each year."

Clean and Green seems to impose a large burden in certain areas, but are these unfair? The jury is still out. "Some people argue that the real property tax is unfair to farmers," Kelsey says. "Farmers at all income levels generally pay around 10 percent of

their household income on real property taxes, while nonfarm households pay a smaller and smaller share as their income rises. Programs like Clean and Green help to correct that."

Raising taxes to make up for these losses shifts the burden from participating farmers onto other taxpayers. "How these costs are distributed may be more unfair than the size of the costs themselves," Kelsey notes. "Some communities suffer large impacts even though they are under little development pressure."

"People living in Clean and Green communities pay the program's costs, even though all taxpayers benefit from the program. Other states with similar programs shift the costs from local taxing

districts onto the state's income tax base. Pennsylvania currently does not do this, so rural residents pay a disproportionate share of the program's costs."

Preserving farmland might be worth the cost, but the benefits are hard to measure accurately, and there is no consensus on how effective programs like Clean and Green are in preserving farmland," Kelsey says.

A new publication from Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences explores this issue in more detail. For a free copy of "Farmland Preservation in Pennsylvania: The Impact of 'Clean and Green' on Local Governments and Taxpayers," Extension Circular 411, contact the Penn State Cooperative Extension office in your county.

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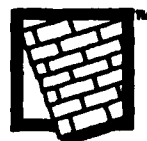
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