



# Take it from Maryland Farmers Garden Planner and Checklist

Take it from Maryland farmers, winter is a good time to plan for springtime planting. Beautiful, healthy gardens don't just happen—they are planned, and winter is the best time to sit down and think about what types of projects or enhancements you want to tackle this year. The following checklist can provide you with some food for thought during the long, cold winter months.



These gardening tips are brought to you by the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the Home and Garden Information Center, a service of the University of Maryland Extension. For answers to all your gardening and pest control questions, visit the Center's website at [extension.umd.edu/hgic](http://extension.umd.edu/hgic).



## Nuts and Bolts: *Fall Equipment and Maintenance Chores*

- Sharpen lawnmower blades, grass clippers, pruning shears, and loppers.
- Service garden equipment such as mowers, edgers, and tillers.
- Clean out the garden shed.
- Repair or replace worn tools.
- Clean and sand rust off of garden tools. Sharpen edge tools and rub linseed oil into wooden handles.
- Drain and store all garden hoses.
- Turn off water to outdoor spigots and drain check valves.
- Prune dead and diseased branches from deciduous trees and shrubs. Snow and ice can cause these branches to come down unexpectedly.
- Incorporate organic matter into the soil in September or October. This may also help disrupt the life-cycle of over-wintering insect pests.
- Mulch tender perennials with straw or shredded leaves to protect their crowns.

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 GROW IT EAT IT  
Maryland's Food Gardening Network  
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## Practice Backyard Conservation



- Read up on Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law. Visit [mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer](http://mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer).
- Test your soil. Visit [extension.umd.edu/hgic](http://extension.umd.edu/hgic) for a list of soil testing labs and to learn how to take a sample.
- Research rain barrels to help save on water bills and protect plants during periods of drought.
- Scope out a spot in the yard to start a compost pile.
- Plan a rain garden for a low spot in your yard that will allow stormwater to infiltrate slowly into the ground rather than running off into the nearest storm drain.
- Do not broadcast fresh manure or fertilizer of any kind on frozen ground.
- Lime may be applied during the winter months according to soil test recommendations.
- Cut spent chrysanthemum plants to the ground. Prune out and compost the dead stalks and leaves of peonies, hollyhocks and other perennials.
- Check the guy wires on newly planted trees to make certain that they are not gouging the bark.
- Keep compost bins covered to prevent over saturation and leaching of nutrients from the compost.



## When it Warms Up



- Turn outdoor compost piles when the weather begins to warm. Remove woody stems and twigs that take a long time to compost. Shred leaves that have been stockpiled over the winter before adding them to compost bins.
- Fruit trees should be pruned in late winter, right before bud break. Do not prune on mild winter days, as this may stimulate growth and cause a premature loss of dormancy.
- Remove dead and diseased wood and weak stems from other trees and shrubs that have been damaged over the winter.
- Cut down last year's growth of ornamental grasses to within a few inches of the ground. This will help to make room for new growth.
- Use the "bounce test" to determine if your soil is dry enough to work. Squeeze a clump of soil into a ball and bounce it up and down in your hand. If it easily breaks apart, you're ready to go.
- Sow lettuce, spinach, radishes and other fast-growing salad greens in fertile soil. Keep young plants well-watered and fertilize with a balanced liquid fertilizer.
- Overseed lawns in early spring. For advice visit [extension.umd.edu/hgic](http://extension.umd.edu/hgic).
- Apply a crabgrass pre-emergent herbicide if you had a serious crabgrass problem last year and are not planning to re-seed this spring.
- Work rotted manure or compost into vegetable and flower beds. Never add fresh manure to vegetable beds in the spring.



## Plan Your Garden: Early Winter Chores

- Order seed catalogs or browse online catalogs.
- Research native plants that require little or no care and provide habitat and food for wildlife.
- Review last year's garden diary to see what worked and what did not. Now is the time to look back and jot down observations so that you can build on your successes for next year.
- Place orders for seeds and bulbs.
- Research different types of compost bins or learn how to make your own.
- Check out the dates for upcoming Master Gardener classes at your local Extension office. Visit [extension.umd.edu/mg](http://extension.umd.edu/mg).



## Odds and Ends



- Be a good neighbor and protect the Bay—pick up after your pet. When walking your dog, bring along a plastic bag and scooper. Pet waste should be removed daily from yards and exercise areas.
- Do not walk on frozen lawns. Excessive walking on frozen lawns can damage grass crowns and slow growth next spring.
- Follow Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law. Never use chemical fertilizers containing nitrogen or urea to melt ice around the home.
- Store pesticides in a location where they will not freeze.