

HAVE YOUR CAKE AND...ER ENJOY THE GARDEN

Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardener

Now that it's nearly June, deciduous trees and shrubs have dropped their spring show and donned their summer leaves, helping to create an oasis of green around our homes. Along with those trees, flowers, shrubs, and other plants, come the birds, bees, butterflies, and other pollinators, providing our own "Animal Planet" show.

Numerous health experts agree that gardening is not only a place of peace and mental calm, but is physically healthy for us, helping us remain mobile and flexible for much later in our lives than we might otherwise be. WebMD.com points out that gardening promotes your body's endurance, flexibility, and strength. On WebMD.com, author Jeff Restuccio says to alternate the gardening activities—light and heavy chores—over a 30- to 60-minute span, then rest a while. Yardshare.com also notes that gardening improves "our endurance and strength...reduces stress and promotes relaxation...provides a sense of a job well done..."

Sounds encouraging, but I have to admit that my mobility and flexibility are still not what I'd like. These days it's hard to kneel down and even harder to get up from my little bench; gardening chores take a lot longer now than when I was in my thirties; and allergies and heat intolerances are having their way with me. So how do I find time to relax in the garden with a glass of wine or cup of tea when I have never-ending weeding, trimming, pruning, and other chores to do?

One answer my husband and I have found is to adapt our gardens to our abilities. So our 20 or so gardens surrounding the house and yard perimeters are gradually becoming smaller, more narrow, or have been eliminated altogether.

You may also be contemplating changes to your own yard, whether it's because the needs of the garden have changed, or because your needs and your endurance have changed. Consider cutting back, cutting out, and refreshing this summer—and give yourself more time to enjoy your garden.

One of the things I love about a garden is that it is ever-changing—plants die or grow too big for their spot, once-small trees loom over sun-loving plants. You begin to think of changes—what should replace the dead plant? Where should we move that too-big perennial or shrub? Should we change out the sun-loving plants for shade-loving ones under that big tree, or should we cut down the tree?

Are you putting a new garden in once barren land, or replacing plants? Look for low-maintenance (minimal pruning or trimming) natives. Keep in mind the eventual mature size of any trees or shrubs you want to plant.

Please don't make mulch "volcanoes" around the trunks of trees—the mulch piled high around trunks and then flattening out beyond the trunks prevents rain water from soaking into the roots and is an open invitation to damaging insects and diseases to invade your trees. Instead, keep the mulch a

couple inches away from the tree trunk; spread it evenly out to the dripline of the branches, then mound a ring of mulch along the edge, which helps to keep water in the root area, where it needs to be.

Have you been learning about the importance of pollinators in the life cycle of plants and insects? Attract pollinators with perennials and annuals. Use shrubs and plants that bloom at different times of the season and that don't require a lot of dead-heading.

Looking for something different, something to have an impact? Plant vegetables and herbs, such as cabbages, rosemary, and lavender, in places you usually reserve for annuals. Or go for tropicals, such as banana plants or canna lilies—just remember, you will need to dig up tropicals in the fall.

If you're cutting back on garden beds, could you place raised beds or containers for vegetables or flowers on a patio, deck, or porch for easier access? Would weaving irrigation hoses through the garden or installing a water-conservation system help ease your work in the garden?

For additional information, check out our Frederick County Master Gardener website at <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call us at 301 600-1596. Then settle back in your garden with that cuppa and just enjoy the peace.

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.

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