

# Maryland Department of Agriculture Information for Home Owners

<https://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/fertilizer.aspx>

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Only a handful of the many insects in an average yard or garden are considered pests. Most plants can tolerate some insect damage without significant loss to yield or appearance. Whenever possible, choose insect and disease resistant varieties of garden plants and turf grasses. Remember, the goal is to make your lawn or garden a healthy place for preferred plants and insects. If you decide that you have a pest problem that requires attention, use the least toxic method of control—don't simply reach for the spray bottle at first sight of an insect, weed, or disease.



Over the years, we have learned that excess fertilizers from farm fields, public parks, golf courses, and hundreds of thousands of suburban lawns are washing off the land and finding their way into streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay. Once in our waterways, fertilizers designed to make our crops healthy and our lawns lush and green, fuel the growth of harmful algae. As algae grow, they block sunlight from reaching Bay grasses, rob the water of oxygen, and threaten underwater life.



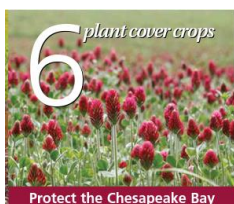
Every year, tons of topsoil leave the land and end up in streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay. As we have cleared the land, paved roads, and built homes, our waterways have lost much of the natural protection that grasses, wetlands, and forests provide against rainwater runoff. When the rains come, runoff carries not only topsoil, but fertilizers, pesticides, oils, and other pollutants into the Bay system. Once in our waterways, these contaminants cloud the water, stress aquatic life, and disrupt stream habitats.



There are lots of ways to recycle. Farmers recycle the leaves and stalks of harvested crops to create a natural mulch that protects their fields from erosion and nutrient runoff during the winter months. When managed properly, livestock manure can be recycled as a valuable soil conditioner and crop fertilizer. Homeowners, too, can cut down on the amount of yard waste that gets hauled to our landfills by recycling leaves, grass clippings, and non-meat kitchen scraps for use in the garden. Composting is easy, improves soil composition, and makes a great fertilizer.



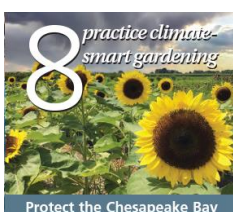
Farmers know the importance of conserving water, not only during periods of extreme dry weather, but throughout the growing season and beyond. Just as most of us are taught from childhood not to waste food, water conservation is similarly ingrained in the farmer's psyche.



Maryland farmers understand the benefits of planting cover crops. Each fall they plant thousands of acres of cereal grains, legumes, and other types of cover crops on their fields to provide a "living protective cover" against erosion and nutrient runoff. They know that soil left uncovered over the winter easily erodes into nearby waterways and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay, carrying with it nutrients and other contaminants. Planting cover crops in the fall is one of the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial ways to control soil erosion, recycle unused plant nutrients, and protect water quality in the Bay and its tributaries.



Most flowering plants depend on pollinators to reproduce. Birds, bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, flower flies, and other pollinators visit flowers in search of nectar, a sugary liquid, and pollen, a powdery, protein-rich food source. As they gather food, these animals transfer pollen from male flower parts to the female parts, and from flower to flower. This fertilization allows plants to produce seeds, fruits, and nuts.



Scientists define climate change as a long-term shift in global temperatures and regional weather patterns. Although Earth's climate has warmed and cooled naturally over time, the evidence shows that human activities are speeding things up. The fossil fuels that we burn to produce electricity, power industry, drive our cars, and run our households release carbon dioxide and other gasses into the Earth's atmosphere. These "greenhouse" gasses trap the sun's heat and contribute to the warming of the Earth's atmosphere. Agriculture contributes to climate change, but farmers also serve as part of the climate change solution. So can you.0.

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