



## Master Gardener's Tips for Garden Makeovers

by *Sussex County Master Gardeners*

*Jessica R. Clark and Linda Peters*

Spring is the time when Sussex County master gardeners remove debris and weeds accumulated through the winter from the Demonstration Garden on County Seat Highway, Route 9, west of Georgetown, behind the Cooperative Extension Office.

The pandemic changed lives in many ways. Due to COVID, the garden is closed to the public at this time.\* And for safety reasons, master gardeners have been prevented, since last spring and into this year, to assess winter damages, identify



Master gardener file photo

**Georgetown Demo Garden Before** cleanup after being closed during the Covid Pandemic.

### Tips for clean-up

Tips for community and home gardeners to clean up their gardens:

- Identify weeds and make a plan for removing them. Some may have to be removed by herbicides. An environmentally-friendly method is using the sun's power to control bacteria, insects, and weeds in the soil.

### Solarization

Solarization is a process involving covering the ground with a transparent polyethylene tarp cover, to trap solar energy. The sun heats the soil to temperatures that kill bacteria, fungi, insects, nematodes, mites, weeds, and weed seeds. The covering should be in place for at least four weeks before planting, particularly in the hottest part of the summer. Sussex County's sandy soil, drains the steam created by the covering faster, a drip irrigation line can be placed under the plastic cover and water added regularly. For more information visit <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/library/gardening/soil-solarization/> (Texas A&M Extension).

### Soil test

- Before planting, consider doing a soil test.

critical needs, or tidy up any of the 32 specialty gardens designed, planted, and maintained within the one-acre Demonstration Garden.

“However, the pandemic hasn’t prevented master gardeners from fulfilling their mission of educating the public,” states Gaye Mara, one of three of the Demonstration Garden’s co-heads. “This past year, we have presented Zoom workshops and this year, master gardeners will continue the previous year’s Foster Gardener Program. Vegetables will be grown in their home gardens and delivered to local food banks.”



Master gardener file photo

**Georgetown Demo Garden After** major cleanup and restoration by master gardener volunteers from being closed down during the Covid Pandemic.

## Germination

- Germination needs ideal conditions and temperature is a critical factor. Most leafy greens will germinate well in the 55 – 75 F range. Fruiting crops usually prefer the upper end of that range.
- By the time seedlings have a few pairs of leaves, thinning is wise. Plants that benefit from thinning typically fall into the heartier, fruiting category such as tomatoes, squash, peppers. For most herbs and greens, thinning is not as necessary.

For more information about taking and submitting a soil sample in Delaware, go to the following: <https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/soil-testing/>

## Weed control

- Place cardboard and sawdust for weed block in paths and layered newspaper topped with mulch in beds.

## Planting

- A good rule of thumb is to plant seeds after May 15<sup>th</sup> when the danger of frost is over. If plantings are started too late they may not have enough time to mature. Consult planting schedules on the seed packets or visit: <https://www.udel.edu/content/dam/udelimages/canr/pdfs/extension/environmental-stewardship/Vegetable-Garden-Planning-Schedule.pdf>

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• Some seeds may take up to two weeks to sprout. If seeds have not sprouted, the seeds may be too old. Some plants may grow tall and thin. Leggy growth means plants are not getting enough light. Some plants, particularly some vegetables, need direct sun six to eight hours daily. Slow growth and or pale yellow leaves may indicate improper feeding or inadequate nutrition.

## Providing Information

Master Gardeners provide information and help on a wide variety of gardening topics including: lawns, vegetable gardens, perennial gardens, shrubs and insects. The helpline is a free and valuable gardening resource available to Delaware residents year round. In Sussex County, call (302) 856-2585 x 535. In New Castle County, call (302) 831-8862. In Kent County, call : (302) 730-4000.

For the present, Master Gardener workshops via Zoom are available in the three Delaware counties. To register online, visit <https://cast.desu.edu/cooperative-extension/agriculture-naturalresources/delaware-master-gardeners>.

Readers, don't despair. Master gardeners in Delaware's three counties are standing by to help with any gardening questions. For more information about the master gardener program, master gardener minutes, and other gardening topics, visit: <https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/master-gardeners/>

\*Please note this article was written and published during the Covid Pandemic 2020-21

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## More Information

For more information about Master Gardener workshops, garden helplines, presentations, becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer, or other activities, please visit these websites.

UD Website - <https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/master-gardeners/>

DSU Website- <https://cast.desu.edu/cooperative-extension/agriculture-natural-resources/delaware-master-gardeners>

