

Personal Message

The summer of 2010 is now officially over. Although it was hot as blazes, this was one of my best summers ever!

I was fortunate enough to spend a lot of time fishing in Ocean City. My favorite sport is surf fishing on Assateague Island. The old jeep that I reserve for surf fishing is prepped to drive on sand dunes. It has all the gear I need for a day of fishing out on the beach.

I caught a fair amount of king fish this summer. I also reeled in bluefish, spot and hardheads.

On rare occasions, Melissa will accompany me to Assateague. She's not much on fishing, but she loves to read books and walk on the beach. She also likes to cook on the tiny camp stove we purchased for these expeditions. We use small pots and pans and miniature utensils, so it doesn't seem like work at all.

I'm equipped with running water, so we have all the comforts of home when we head for the beach. Generally, we'll drive about five miles down the beach toward Virginia before we see a prime fishing spot. We'll set up camp and have a fun day before until it's time to go.

Of course, there are wild ponies to keep us company. We're usually fortunate enough to see several ponies each time we go fishing. Once or twice, the heat forced the ponies to the water's edge. They actually walked under my fishing lines, trying to escape the heat and the horseflies that proliferate the beach.

The heat of this past summer also saw a lot of ruined landscaping and harsh lawns, due to the lack of rain. Melissa lost a lot of her garden vegetables and landscape plants because she couldn't keep up with the watering. Her biggest success was the mammoth sunflowers she grew in our front gardens. Some of the sunflowers climbed to 12 feet tall. The sunflower heads were as large as a serving platter. They were beautiful, interspersed with our lavender crape myrtles.

Unfortunately, all things summer must end. As kids go back to school, I'm also back at work full time.

We've already kicked off our lawn care season, which is one of the most important projects of the fall. Aeration, overseeding and fertilization all need to be completed as the weather grows cooler.

You'll be receiving information over the next few weeks about our natural/organic lawn care. If you've ever considered professional lawn care, I'd like to urge you to try our 80% non-toxic service. Be sure to give us a call for a free estimate.

September Garden Tips

- Plant daffodils this month to provide the WOW factor in your garden next spring. Planting groups of a dozen bulbs of one variety make the most impact after a cold winter. They're easy to plant. Just dig your hole 6-8 inches deep, making sure to space the bulbs according to package directions.
- If you placed house plants outside during the summer, it's time to reintroduce them to your home. It's best to bring them indoors gradually. Changes in temperature and a lack of humidity can be a major shock to their system.
- As the weather cools, you may be tempted to install plant material. Be sure to water new plant material if we don't get enough rain.
- It's been our experience that begonias make great houseplants. Dig up a few of your beautiful summer begonias and try them in an indoor flowerpot.
- Keep up with the weeds in your flower beds until the first frost.

News from the Master Gardeners

It's been some time since we visited our friends at the University of Maryland's Home and Garden Center website. This is one of the best gardening sites out there. You can access their site at hgic.umd.edu. Occasionally, we provide updates from them, regarding their newsletters and publications.

In recent news, they're promoting soil tests for the homeowner to improve their lawn and gardens. Remember, we're big advocates of soil testing.

They provide a publication about soil tests entitled, "Selecting and Using a Soil Test Laboratory." It gives information about how to take a sample, which lab facility you should use and how to interpret results.

Taking a soil sample is a bit more complicated than digging up clumps of dirt and sending them to the lab. This publication includes a chart for the chemical abbreviations found in soil analysis. It also urges the homeowner to call the Center with any questions.

If you prefer, we're available to take soil tests for you at a nominal fee. We take the samples from several areas throughout your property. We'll send them to the lab for you and there are no extra lab fees.

Then, we'll interpret the results and present them in a format you can understand. We will actually meet with you, face to face, to discuss the results of the test. Finally, we'll make suggestions for any corrective measures we believe will help to improve poor soil conditions.

If you're having consistent problems with your lawn or have plant material that always fails in the same spot, consider having a soil test done. It's good for the health of your lawn.

Deer Repellent that Really Works

We recently read a study about various commercial deer repellents. It rated the effectiveness of around two dozen products.

The Illinois Walnut Council tested the effects of repellents on newly planted butternut seedlings. Then, they tested coyote urine, soap on a rope, deer fencing and various commercial products.

Some commercial products tested better than others. The soap on a rope tested well, but the fencing and the coyote urine failed miserably.

The active ingredient in our proprietary product is peppermint oil, which showed no damage to the trees in their test.

We guarantee the effectiveness of our product. It's a barrier spray which actually repels deer away from the plant material. They are forced to find other browsing areas to forage for food.

Although our product is very labor intensive to apply initially, the deer become used to it over time. They don't even approach treated plants. Because of this, we're able to use less product after several month and reduce the cost to you. After three months, we can apply less product and your cost actually decreases.

Our product is guaranteed or we will retreat the problem areas.

Lawn Care

Tis the season for lawn renovation. I love everything about lawn installations.

I enjoy the process of aerating a lawn, adding the proper soil amendments, applying fertilizer and grass seed and watching it grow. You'll be seeing information about our natural/organic lawn care program in your mailbox soon.

We are in the process of sending a series of mailings to you. They discuss our lawn care program which is approximately 80% organic and non-toxic.

We're very proud of our ability to provide you with a lush green lawn at about the same price as a traditional, chemically based program.

If you're tired of this summer's brown grass and weeds, please give us a call for a free estimate. We can repair your lawn without the use of chemicals.