



What we used to lump under one category as lettuce has become a broader field in recent years.

Consumer desire for mix greens with a variety of textures and colors has resulted in an ever-expanding

selection in the supermarket for all kinds of salad greens. Upscale restaurants now serve mesclun—a fancy term for mix greens—which commands high prices. The great news is that many of these lettuce varieties can be grown in the backyard garden.

Lettuce varieties fall into four basic categories, including crisphead, butterhead, leaf, and romaine or cos. Each has its own taste, growing habit, and ideal growing conditions.

The most familiar of the four is crisphead lettuce, which is characterized by a tight, firm head of crisp, light-green leaves. Because crisphead lettuce begins to bolt

(send up a premature flower stalk) in the heat of summer and requires a long growing season, it tends to be the most difficult of the lettuce varieties to

grow in the home garden.

Butterhead lettuce has small, soft heads of loosely folded leaves that appear to be green on the outside and cream-colored on the inside of the head. Butterhead types, which include Bibb, Buttercrunch, and White Boston, have a distinct, delicate flavor. But with their smooth fragile leaves, they are usually more perishable.

Leaf lettuce varieties vary widely in color and form. While some cultivars are crinkled or ruffled, others are lobed. Colors also range from light green to red and bronze to purple. Leaf lettuce has an open growth and does not form a head.

Lettuce types with upright, cylindrical heads of tightly folded leaves fall into the category of Romaine or cos. A sweeter lettuce than most, the plant may reach 10 inches in height. It has an elongated framework, smooth outer leaves, and a blanched inner head. The leaves are more brittle than other heading types. Heading varieties are most successfully grown by transplants.

Because lettuce is a cool-season vegetable, it develops best when grown under cool, moist conditions. *(continued on p. 2)*

## Lettuce Grow Greens



### THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH...

- Remove the flowers from bulbs as they fade, but don't remove foliage until it is yellow/brown and pulls up easily. The foliage must store nutrients in the bulb for next year's flowers.
- Rake existing mulch to break the hard crust. Spread mulch on beds to help conserve water and reduce weeds.
- Plant any new landscape plants in the spring to take advantage of natural rainfall. If you wait, you will be on the hook for more watering this summer.
- Sharpen the lawn mower blade and cut at the proper height. (Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, red fescue - 2 1/2 - 3"; tall fescue - 3").
- Test the soil for pH. Add lime, if the pH is low. Add a layer of organic matter (approximately 1-2 inches thick).
- Rototill the vegetable garden as deeply as possible. Do not till if the soil is wet because you may damage soil structure.
- Dig and divide old perennials to rejuvenate and enhance flowering.
- Prune out suckers and water sprouts while they are easily visible before trees and shrubs leaf out.
- Prune needle evergreens when growth begins.
- If your grass is thick and you mow it to a height of 2.5 to 3 inches, you may not need to use an herbicide. The grass will shade the weed seeds and prevent them from germinating.



## LETTUCE GROW GREENS (continued from p. 1)

tions. Lettuce seedlings thrive in temperatures between 45 F and 65 F, which makes it a fall or spring crop. Leaf lettuce seeds are planted in spring as soon as the ground can be worked. Because its growing season is so long, crisphead lettuce is best started with transplants. Butterhead and romaine can be grown either by direct seeds or transplants.

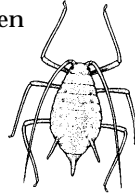
Lettuce likes a wide range of soils; however, loose, sandy loam soils with added organic matter are the best. Make sure the soil is well-drained and moist, but not soggy. Like most other garden vegetables, the lettuce plant prefers a slightly acidic pH—6.0 to 6.5.

Prepare the bed thoroughly; lettuce seeds are tiny and will not germinate if soil is left in lumps. Soil should be fine so that proper seed-to-soil contact is achieved. A supply of water and nutrients is vital for proper development, since lettuce does not have an extensive root system.

Sow seed in single rows or broadcast for wide area planting. Cover the seeds with 1/4 to 1/2 inch of soil. Water carefully so as not to disturb the seeds. Successive plantings of leaf lettuce provides a continuous harvest throughout the growing season. To achieve proper spacing, thin lettuce seedlings. Leaf lettuce needs at least 4 to 6 inches between plants. For butterhead and romaine varieties, thin to between 6 and 10 inches. Space crisphead transplants 10 to 12 inches apart in a row. Lettuce seed is rather small, germinates quickly (7 days) and produces a crop relatively fast.

Loose-leaf lettuce types typically produce a crop in 40 to 50 days. Most heading varieties require 60 to 80 days to mature. Loose-leaf varieties are more widely grown in home gardens than heading types because they are faster to mature, easier to grow, and more shade-tolerant. Loose-leaf varieties also require less thinning and thrive under warmer conditions.

Regardless of the type, harvest all lettuce when still young and tender. Lettuce that is too old is bitter-tasting and woody. Pick crisphead lettuce when the center is



firm. Harvest leaf lettuce by removing individual outer leaves so that the center leaves can continue to grow. As for butterhead or romaine types, harvest these by removing the outer leaves, and digging up the whole plant.

**Aphid** Green leafy vegetables have few insect or disease problems. Good sanitation and replanting when plants are too thin are two ways to avoid loss to insects and disease. The following insects are most common on lettuce:

- **Aphids** - You may find colonies of aphids on green leafy vegetables. These tiny insects will be grouped on specific plants, not generally throughout the row. Wash off or hand-squash them. Insecticides are seldom required, but, if needed, pyrethrins or rotenone will provide control.
- **Caterpillars** - Several types of caterpillars may be found on lettuce plants. You may find holes in leaves or feeding damage from the edge of the leaf surface. Hand-picking caterpillars is effective. *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) will effectively control small caterpillars. Insecticides are not recommended.
- **Flea beetles or harlequin bugs** may occasionally appear in large numbers. You will see holes in the leaves and find the insects by careful observation. Flea beetles are tiny and make tiny holes. Harlequin bugs are larger, oval-shaped, and brightly colored. Sevin provides control for both.

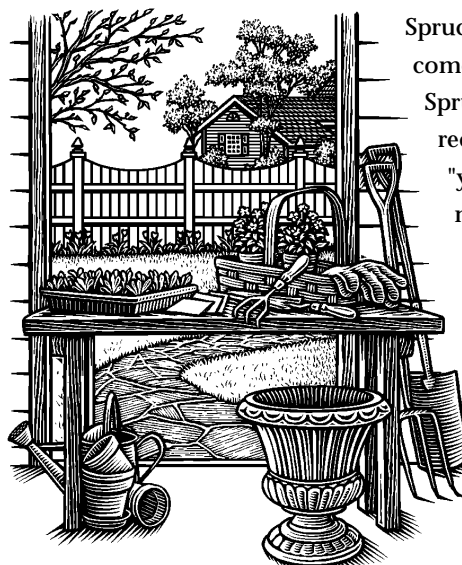
—Derby Walker

## COOL-SEASON MITES ARE MIGHTY HARMFUL

Spruces and other narrow-leaf evergreens can come under attack from cool-season mites.

Spruce spider mites, eriophyiid and southern red mites will cause these evergreens to "yellow out" and appear to be under moisture stress. To determine if the cause is a mite, slip a white sheet of paper under the limbs showing stress and shake the branch. Mites will drop onto the paper; they will look like fast-moving spots. Insecticidal soaps and horticultural oils will control these pests.

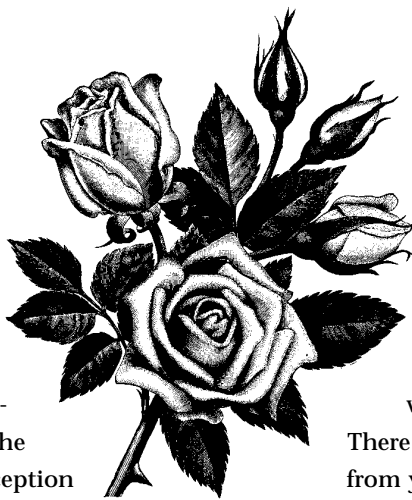
—Derby Walker





## PRUNING THE CLIMBING ROSE

Pruning most rose varieties takes place in the early spring; this includes shrub, floribunda and hybrid tea roses, clipping the old plant back before the new buds appear. Not only does pruning at this time control shape and height of the plant, it also stimulates growth from the base of the plants. It is upon these vigorous new shoots that roses produce the most bloom each year. There is an exception to this rule—climbing roses.



Typically trained on fences, pergolas, arches or posts, climbing and rambling rose varieties require special pruning and training in both spring and summer. In spring, cut back by two-thirds the small, lateral branches of all climbers. For all-summer repeated bloomers, remove one-third of the longest, oldest canes. This practice makes room for more productive, newer canes to sprout from the base of the plant. If rain does not cooperate for your watering needs, provide 1 or 2 inches of water once a week. A dose of fertilizer once a month during the growing season will keep blooms coming.

For rambling and climbing roses that bloom only once in early summer, wait until after flowering to prune. Cut out all dead wood and remove one third of the longest, oldest canes at the base of the plant. To train climbing roses, allow new growth to harden off before tying with soft twin or cut-up nylon stockings to your fence or arbor. Avoid tying up the brand new canes, which are too juicy and soft to tie up without breaking. Don't let the plant waste time and energy on canes that grow in the wrong direction. Just remove them.

## TERMINATING TERMITES, IDENTIFYING ANTS

In spring, starting as early as February, swarming insects are seen in Delaware. The oft-asked question is: Do I have termites? Distinguishing between flying ants and flying termites isn't hard. Termites have four wings which are equal in size; ants, on the other hand, have wings the front pair of which is larger than hind pair. Also, termite wings are

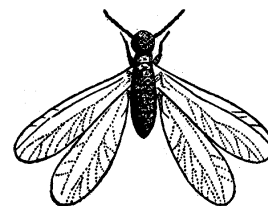
cloudy and tend to break while ant wings are clear and remain fastened. Termites are black with straight bodies. Ants may be yellow, red or black in color, and their bodies pinch in at the waist. The antennae also are different. Termite antennae look like strings of beads; ant antennae are "elbowed."

If you have termites, don't panic. Your house will not fall down overnight. Do some research.

There are plenty of facts online and fact sheets available from your local Cooperative Extension office. Call a few approved professional pest management companies to determine if you do have termites in your building. These firms will inspect, then give an estimate of treatment cost. Check out pest control companies; find out if they do quality work and decide if their treatment program meets your needs.

If you identify your house invaders as big black ants, you may have carpenter ants, which also can cause structural damage. Generally, carpenter ants nest in wet wood, and they are harder to find than termites. Killing the colony followed by eliminating the water problem that attracted them will take care of carpenter ants.

—Derby Walker



**Winged Termite (enlarged)**



**Winged Ant (enlarged)**



COME TO THE SPRING PLANT SALE AND  
ENJOY THE SNOW



**UDBG FRIENDS**  
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE BOTANIC GARDENS

Snow—in the form of flowers—is the theme of this year's UDBG plant sale. Showy *Stryax*, better known as snowbells, cascades with pendulous clusters of delicate bell-shaped white flowers. The small tree is one of the featured plants in this year's University of Delaware Botanic Gardens Perennial Plant Sale, featuring interest-

ing perennials, shrubs and trees not readily found in commercial garden centers.

Scheduled for Saturday, April 24, from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., the 12th annual sale will be held near the Fischer Greenhouse on the grounds of UD's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources on South College Avenue (across from the Chrysler plant) in Newark.

Since there is always great demand for UDBG sale plants, veteran buyers know to pre-order their choices to avoid disappointment on sale day. Another advantage to pre-ordering is that plants can be picked up the day before the sale close to the sale location for easy loading. For people who want to preorder, a list of sale plants is available on the Web at <http://ag.udel.edu/udbg>. Just print out the order form and mail it with a check.

Pre-ordered plants, which are processed in the order received and available on a first-come, first-served basis, can be picked up Friday, April 23, between 2 and 8 p.m.

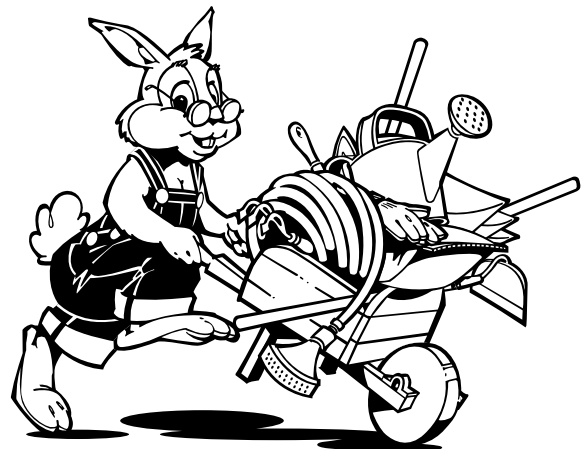
Proceeds from the plant sale fund UD student horticultural internships as well as horticultural education and research programs at the UDBG. The sale is held in conjunction with Ag Day, a celebration of agriculture that includes exhibits and educational activities. Both events are free and open to the public.



### First Tasks in Spring

- If you haven't done so already, check your outdoor furniture for signs of corrosion. Remove any surface rust with a steel wool pad, clean thoroughly, then paint with rust-inhibiting paint.
- Does your tiller get sluggish in early spring? If the engine refuses to turn over, move the tiller to a sunny location and cover it with a black plastic garbage bag for an hour. It's amazing what a few minutes of solar heating can do to warm up the fluids and get the machine humming. Not so different from people. A little sun is good for us too.
- Ice cream scoops are great for digging holes for transplants; the dirt slides off easily and the hole is just about the right size for most bedding plants.
- The popular garden accessory in recent years has been the 5-gallon plastic pail. You can make this garden carry-all perform two purposes at once. Attach a tool pouch to the outside of the pail, in which to carry pruners, trowel, and seeds. Inside is reserved for weeds or harvesting vegetables.
- Make labels for your spring garden. Plastic milk jugs or bleach bottles cut in strips 1 inch by 6 or 7 inches work well. Use permanent ink markers to write the names on them.

*Hints gathered from Cooperative Extension web sites around the country. Share your own great ideas and gardening solutions with Garden Check readers. Send your hint to [gardencheck@udel.edu](mailto:gardencheck@udel.edu)*





## ASPIRE TO SOME ASPARAGUS ACREAGE?

One of the great pleasures of spring is going out to the garden and harvesting your own fresh asparagus. If you follow these few basic steps, you can establish an asparagus bed in your backyard.

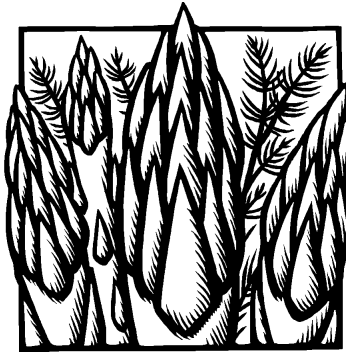
First, do a thorough job of preparing the planting bed, since you can expect asparagus to be productive for about 20 years. If you are just starting this spring, use this year for proper bed preparation. Take the time to eradicate weeds by repeated tilling and by growing a cover crop before planting. Then build up the soil by applying plenty of organic matter.

Asparagus does not need full sun, so you may be able to find a spot that wouldn't be suitable for other vegetable production. While asparagus can take great variation in soil conditions, an ideal site will have well-draining sandy loam soil and a pH of 6.5. Avoid waterlogged sites because this soil condition promotes crown rot. Also, do not plant asparagus in the middle of a vegetable garden that you till every year. Once planted, asparagus cannot be disturbed; you can ruin the plant's roots by tilling. Instead, choose a garden corner or location outside your regular garden.

Start asparagus from one-year crowns. Plant in the early spring as soon as the soil can be worked. Dig a trench 12 inches wide and 15 inches deep. Fill the bottom of the trench with about 4 inches of organic matter, some phosphorous in the form of bonemeal or superphosphate (5 pounds per 100 square feet) and enough topsoil so that the final depth of the crowns will be 6 inches below ground level.

Form a mound down the center of the trench and drape the crowns over the mounds, setting them about 18 inches apart. Cover with about 2 inches of rich soil and water thoroughly. As the crowns send up shoots, return the soil to the trench, an inch or two at a time, until the trench is leveled. Fertilize in the spring and fall with a balanced fertilizer and keep the bed free from weeds.

You can begin harvesting lightly for one to two weeks in the spring of the second year, for three to four weeks in the third year, and for about six weeks thereafter. When



harvesting, snap only the spears that are thicker than a pencil. Allow smaller shoots and all shoots after the harvest period to grow into ferns. The ferns nourish the plant and build up food reserves for next season's crop. When the ferns die back in the fall, cut them down and mulch over the crowns to protect them against winter damage.

—Susan Barton

*Adapted from an article written by Frank Pemberton and published in Grow Line, March 2003, a Cornell Cooperative Extension publication.*

### KENT MG PLANT SALE SET FOR APR. 24

The Kent County Master Gardeners will hold their annual scholarship plant sale from 8 a.m. until noon on Saturday, April 24, in front of the greenhouse at Delaware State University in Dover. For information, call 302-730-4000 or 302-857-6426.

#### Contributing Writers

Susan Barton, UD Extension Horticulture Specialist  
 Bob Mulrooney, UD Extension Plant Pathologist  
 Derby Walker, Ag Agent, Sussex County  
 Jo Mercer, UD Extension Educator, Horticulture  
 Maggie Moor-Orth, Extension Ag Agent,  
 Delaware State University  
 Jay Windsor, UD Extension Agent, retired



Cooperative Extension Education in Agriculture and Home Economics, University of Delaware, Delaware State University and the United States Department Of Agriculture cooperating. Janice Seitz, Director. Distributed in furtherance of Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. It is the policy of the Delaware Cooperative Extension System that no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, color, disability, age, or national origin.



## Greek to you? Actually it's Latin

### How to Speak the Language of Plants

What's in a name? Apparently everything if you are referring to the botanical naming of plants in Latin—the very thought sends chills up the spine! Yet this system for naming, ranking and classifying organisms, developed three centuries ago by scientist Carl Linnaeus, is still in use today. A world-accepted classification system, it eliminates confusion that can arise when the common plant name changes with regions and cultures.

Horticulture experts and avid gardeners, however, need not be the only people privy to this "mysterious" knowledge. You can, too, if you look beyond the intimidating Latin language and realize that it is, quite simply, a logical classification system.

#### Making sense of botanical names

All plants are identified according to a binomial system—bi meaning two, nom meaning name. Every plant has two names—genus and species. Just as you have a first name and a last name, so do plants. Your last name identifies you generically as being part of a particular group: say, Smith, Murphy, or *Mentha*. Your first name identifies you specifically: Tom, Laura, or *Piperata*. When writing your name to be classified on a form, you put your generic name first, followed by your specific name; i.e., Smith, Tom; Murphy, Laura; *Mentha piperata* (the species name is not capitalized in scientific names). So the plant peppermint, or *Mentha piperata*, is identified as being a mint by the generic, or genus, name *mentha*; it then is given individuality by the specific name *piperata*.

What happens when several related people with the same generic name also share the same specific name? For example, take the name Elizabeth; each Elizabeth looks different and may be from different generations. How do you

differentiate them? Nicknames. People use nicknames such as Liz, Beth or Libby to identify each Elizabeth. Plants have nicknames, too, and these names designate plant varieties. **Oh, the varieties!**

The variety is a subgroup name in which the plant differs only slightly from the species. This further delineates a specific plant. Variety is made known in Latin notation following the genus and species and the abbreviation var., as in *Mentha piperata* var. *variegata* – or the peppermint with the white-variegated leaves.

A cultivar—a contraction of cultivated and variety – is a kind of plant variety that can be created only by human cultivation. Cultivars do not grow from a seed or reproduce in nature. Hybrid plants are cultivars. The cultivar

name is set off in one of three ways: 1) by putting the abbreviation cv. before it, as in *Ilex cornuta* cv. *Burfordii*; 2) by using bold-face type; or 3) by enclosing it in single quotes, as in *Camellia japonica* 'Debutante'. The third one is the most common method.

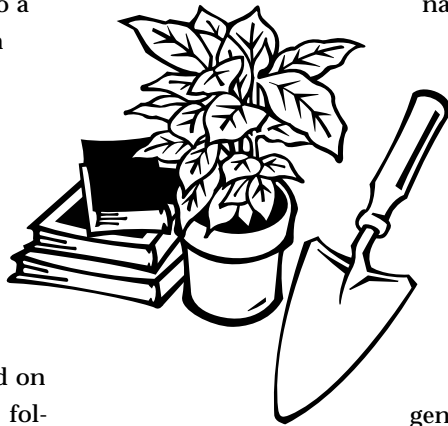
#### What's in a name?

Each Latin botanical name is actually a fascinating puzzle that reveals a great deal about the plant and how it is identified. The genus name is always a noun—*mentha*, which is a mint. The species name is an adjective that describes the genus name—*piperata*, which is like pepper, meaning strong, pungent, spicy. Hence, *Mentha piperata* is peppery mint.

The species name of a plant can tell you:

- what color its flowers are (albus = white, coccineus = scarlet),
- what it smells like (foetida = fetid or stinky, perfuma-

(continued on p. 8)





## GREEK TO YOU? ACTUALLY ITS LATIN:

(continued from p. 7)

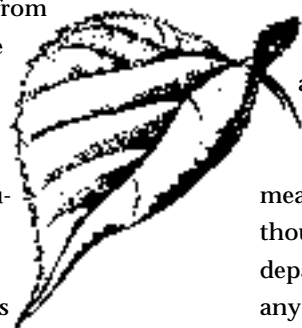
tissima = like perfume),

- where it originates (chinensis = China, pennsylvanica = Pennsylvania)
- natural habitat (aquatica = water, arvensis = field),
- its form and habit (reptans = creeping, gracilis = graceful or slender).

Other species names are a little more complex but still logical, as in *grandiflora*; the prefix *grandi*—means large, *flora* means flower. Some more common prefixes include *leuco* (white), *macro* (long or large), *semper* (always), and *brevi* (short).

### Pop quiz

Since many English words are derived from Latin, even when only part of a plant name is recognizable, it may be possible to guess the rest. The plant's name is *Maranta leuconeura*. Can you figure out anything about this plant? We know that this particular maranta has something white (*leuco*-). Study the part you don't know. *Neura* sounds like neuralgia or neurosis, which has to do with nerves; nerves also mean lines or veins. The leaves of the nerve plant, *Maranta leuconeura*, have whitish veins. It's easy.



—Wendy Stamm

(Adapted from an article—*Making Sense of Botanical Names*—from Virginia Tech Extension's "Virginia Gardener Newsletter," Volume 10, Number 1).

## DECAMPING THE TENT CATERPILLAR

In our area, wild cherry, flowering cherry, apples and other fruit trees are favorites of the Eastern tent caterpillar. Nature times the egg hatch of this caterpillar to occur just as the leaves emerge from the tree's buds. Close examination will reveal shiny brown egg masses encircling small branches and twigs.

As soon as Eastern tent caterpillars hatch, they construct a nest in a crotch of the tree. This nest provides them

protection from their natural enemies such as birds. In the evening caterpillars move out to feed on the leaves. As the caterpillars grow, the nest size increases. Now is the time to check your flowering fruit trees for signs of nests in crotches or on limbs and branches.

Most years, predators, parasites and disease agents keep this pest in check, so they do little economic harm. More of a nuisance pest, tent caterpillars make unsightly nests in trees and cause temporary defoliation. If there are just a few egg masses, they can be pruned out and disposed of.

If you can reach the nest, pick a cool day in late afternoon to tear it open, thus exposing the pests to predators.

This action may be enough to eliminate the problem.

BT products and insecticidal soap will be effective against small caterpillars. The pyrethroid products, including Orthene and Sevin or Carbaryl, can also be used effectively if they get to the caterpillar, which means you must break open the nest. Keep in mind, though, that once Eastern tent caterpillars quit feeding and depart the tree in search of place to pupate, no amount of any pesticide is effective, simply because the caterpillars are no longer eating.

In severe outbreak years, Eastern tent caterpillars become more of a problem, because when they finish feeding on one tree, they search for a place to pupate. They leave the wooded areas, often straying into yards, a situation that causes homeowner frustration. It's hard to miss these crawly critters when hundreds pupate on your house or lawn furniture. When the yard is rampant with 2-inch caterpillars that cannot be killed, the only thing to do is ignore them. After April, they will disappear—until next March anyway.

—Derby Walker

PRSRRT STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit 199  
Newark, DE

Cooperative Extension System  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware 19716-2103

*Garden Check* is published 10 times annually.

**Annual Subscription rate:** \$17.50, payable to University of Delaware.

**Direct subscription requests, questions, and comments to:** Garden Check

Agricultural Communications  
113 Townsend Hall  
University of Delaware  
Newark, DE 19716-2103  
Phone: 302-831-1355  
Fax: 302-831-6758  
E-mail: gardencheck@udel.edu

Trade names given herein are supplied with the understanding that discrimination is not intended and no endorsement is implied by Delaware Cooperative Extension. To protect your safety and to obtain the best results when using any pesticide, always read the label and follow directions carefully.

Call the Garden Line for help with home lawn, garden, and pest questions:  
New Castle Co. (302) 831-8862  
Kent Co. (302) 730-4000  
Sussex Co. (302) 856-7303  
Find Garden Check back issues on the Internet:  
<http://bluehen.ags.udel.edu/deces/hg/>



Susan Barton, Extension Specialist  
Ornamental Horticulture

## ANNUAL LAWNMOWER TUNE-UP SET FOR APRIL 16-18

With spring just around the corner, it's time to get your lawnmower in shape for the long grass-cutting season ahead. The Annual Spring Push Lawnmower Tune-up sponsored by Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity and the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) at the University of Delaware is set for April 16-18.

Push lawnmowers dropped off Friday between 4 and 9 p.m. can be picked up on Saturday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. or Sunday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mowers dropped off on Saturday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. can be picked up the next day. There is no drop-off on Sunday. Any lawnmower left after the designated pickup time will be assessed an extra \$10 fee.

Just take your push lawnmowers (no riding ones please) to behind Townsend Hall on South College Avenue in Newark (across from Chrysler) for a tune-up that includes an oil change, spark plug replaced, blade sharpened and balanced, air filter checked and cleaned, and deck power washed. No repairs will be made. The cost is \$30.

For information, call 831-2502.

