



Spring 2020

Can You Dig It?

Welcome to our Spring Edition of *Can You Dig It?* the Horticulture Committee's Newsletter.

Our normal approach when writing this issue would be to discuss new plant varieties, spiced up with bits and pieces of advice for planting your gardens, a bit on flower design from Samantha, a moment with Lin on Conservation, and more. But these are not normal times....we are worried about our families, avoiding crowds, missing our friends, staying home when we want to be out and about.....and worried about what the “normal” will be.

With this issue, however, we want to point out that gardening can be and is therapeutic – it gives us a chance to be outdoors, to take a deep breath, to play in the dirt, a moment to distract us from all that is going on around us, and to enjoy even more all that Nature has given us. Spring is the time of a new awakening, so let's all awaken our spirit and head out doors.....most of all BREATHE!

One other thought: TCGC President Chloe Pitard has suggested that this year, 2020, be the Year of Conservation and Climate Change – a new theme for TCGC. With this in mind, many of our topics in this issue will cover the same or similar topics. These are not meant to be a comprehensive study of the issues of Conservation and Climate Change but rather a compilation of several individual's perspectives and observations, remembrances and their approach regarding the new world of climate change.

Our hope for all of you is be well and be safe.

Trish Reynolds, Editor

In this Issue...

Good News.....Samantha McCall

Ideas for Creating a Backyard Oasis. (Brent & Becky Bulbs Blog)additions by Trish

Hot and Cold and Cold and HotBobbie Brittingham

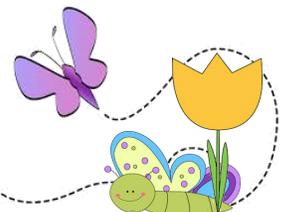
Gardening in a Warmer WorldLouise Williams

Make Room in Your Yard for NatureJanet Mackey

Sustainable Gardening in a Changing ClimatePam Keeton

The Ins and Outs of a Paper BagLin Moeller

Layout and Design.....Rebecca Gaffney





Good News!Samantha McCall

"The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, hearth with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but the soul." Alfred Austin

Good news to report amidst the global pandemic the likes of which we've never seen: with more closures and cancellations happening around us every day gardening has not been cancelled. For those of us who garden and tune into the natural world, we have been gifted a rare multi-faceted opportunity to tend to our gardens with wild abandon. With a combination of unlimited time, a benign spring, longer days, and breathtaking displays of beauty, we have an open invitation to get outside and help heal our hearts and souls.

Whenever I'm feeling anxious or fearful, I know for sure that when I go into my garden with my red Felco pruners in hand I always return inside feeling lighter and calmer. I think it's because I find relief humbly trying to control something I can control (i.e. pruning back the limelight hydrangeas) as opposed to the bigness of the world spinning out of control (i.e. finding a cure for the coronavirus).

Sometimes I like to garden barefoot. Sometimes I like to take my gloves off and let my hands feel the warm earth below. Sometimes I prune and fuss till well after darkness has fallen. And sometimes I will even plant seeds at night on a full moon, imagining the Native Americans and other indigenous groups who honored the earth's cycles and rhythms for planting.

Every time I stumble inside, fingernails full of dirt, my shoes caked in mud and leaves in my hair, I feel better inside. I feel grounded which is one of the best medicines we can give ourselves during this pandemic. A connection to Mother Nature who reminds us we will get through this too.

It doesn't always last long, it's not a panacea and it won't minimize the reality of what's happening around us. But it's an exercise worthy of repetition as it fortifies our inner strength and ability to carry on.

Here are a few ideas to consider while we're all on orders to stay at home. Everyone has their own thoughts on what makes them feel better – these are just a few suggestions. Hopefully there are some that will resonate with you, whether you have a garden or not.

1. Take a few hours on a rainy afternoon and sit down with a warm cup of herbal tea and your garden or flower arranging books to simply enjoy perusing the pages of beautiful plants. It's okay to dream. Give yourself permission to take your mind off heavier subjects for awhile.

2. Go for a walk outside. Better yet, create a schedule and walk every day to create a routine you can count on. It's great to breathe fresh air, hear the birds, smell the flowers and soak up the abundant spring show around us.

3. If you have them – or have permission to pick – gather fresh flowers and spring blooming branches and bring them inside. Feel free to simply plop them in a vase or a pitcher and put them somewhere you can see them often. Change as needed.

4. Or for an extra challenge, take said flowers and branches and create a floral design. Time stands still when I pick fresh flowers from my garden and then have time to arrange them into a pleasing design. This isn't a flower show, it's not to impress. In this exercise, there are no rules.

No judgment. Put duct tape on your inner judge's voice. This is flower arranging for the simple enjoyment of pleasing your soul and making something beautiful and artistic.

Give yourself permission to play with the flowers and try moving them into different positions. Honor their organic nature and don't be fooled into thinking all stems must be perfectly straight or that you are supposed to get it "right" the first time. Feel free to tweak and remake as needed. Please don't tell anyone I said this but if it was safe to put a coronavirus on a stem (about the size of a yellow Billy ball or crespedia) I could see using dozens of them in an arrangement.

5. If you don't already do so, consider adding vegetables and fruits to your garden, harking back to the Victory Garden days. Who knows how food supplies will be in the next few months. This way you can grow your own produce for consumption and/or sharing.

6. As alluded to earlier, my go-to favorite gardening chore is pruning, in part because I added a reciprocating saw to my garden tool box. First to go are dead, dying or diseased branches. Then pruning for shape and regrowth. Few things give me more pleasure and I try to envision letting go of what no longer serves me as I contend with each branch.

7. Wander through your garden with your camera or smartphone and take photographs. Experiment with the macro, distance and portrait features for FUN and learning. Look for the unusual and try to make the ordinary look extraordinary.



8. When you are done shooting, you can continue to play with the images on apps like Waterlogue which will make a watercolor painting of your photos. It's a fun feature with endless opportunities.

9. Most important, be kind to yourself and those you live with during this precarious moment in our history. Stay safe and wash your hands (I'm working on creating an emoji for hand washing. Can you believe they don't have one?) Limit the time spent watching the news or on social media. Learn to meditate and stay mentally fit.

Give yourself the gift of excellent self-care, challenge yourself not to have a to-do list for a few days, reach out to friends who live alone or are elderly and be strong. Pray for our community and all neighbors we share the earth with. 🙏



(The following is taken from the on-line Blog, with changes made by this editor.)

"Ideas for Creating a Backyard Oasis." The Bulb Blog (Brent & Becky Bulbs)additions by Trish

"Our gardens are an escape, in many ways, and these days that escape seems more necessary than ever. Not only is gardening proven to relieve stress, but the décor we choose and the plants we grow have a significant impact on our physical and mental health. Here are a few ideas for creating a wellness sanctuary in your own backyard."

- Install a water feature: A simple water feature such as bird bath with a bubbler – I have one and it is solar powered and easy to assemble. The gentle sounds of the bubbling water is soothing and relaxing and I have found a lovely stress reliever. And it has been fun to see the birds come to the birdbath for a shower instead of their normal bath!
- Grow plants with Therapeutic Properties: The first thing I think of here would be lavender. I have found it often difficult to grow lavender because of our heavy soil and frequently wet climate....but based on the last few summers of hot and dry, maybe you can give this lovely plant another

try. Other herbs that have lovely scents are also worth looking into, as are many perennials....Lilies, Roses, Viburnum, Nicotiana to name but a few.

- Plant more Natives: Sometimes doing our part to heal the world has its own healing effect on us. Native flowers, like Asclepias (Butterfly Weed) or Echinacea (Cone Flower), offer an important food source to local pollinators.
- Choose plants that make you happy: If you want to feel well, first feel happy. In my case looking out my windows at the hundreds and hundreds of daffodils planted each fall, in full bloom now, always makes me happy, even on a glooming, rainy day Add to that the tulips, with their riot of color that I have mixed in with the daffodils....well, I am smiling all the time in the spring! Maybe for you though, you love pastels, or bright colors. So think dahlias for your summer bloom....just find your color, find your plant, and smile! 🌷🌷



Hot and Cold and Cold and Hot.....Bobbie Brittingham

Whether or not you believe it, the weather has been changing. I have gone from a "nonsense attitude, quite skeptical, to somewhat skeptical, to well there could be something to this changing weather thing, you know there is some interesting data from some smart people behind it".....And now that we have ended the "winter that wasn't," moving into early spring, we are hearing from all accounts this has been the warmest winter on record. I concur. I also believe we had some of

the hottest months on record last summer.

Living here all my life, I have witnessed a few things on the Eastern Shore that have drastically changed over the last seventy years. Not just with temperatures, but also plants, wildlife, shorelines and our gardens.

So what have I noticed - what has happened because of these apparent warming trends to all seasons?

When I was a child living on a large farm on the Miles River with my family,

mostly my two younger brothers, we were always tramping around the fields, wandering the tramped down road of sorts along the woods. Then we would scour the fields and shorelines looking for anything we could use to build, create or play with that our imagination had come up with. So I became aware of the weather that created much of our materials, such as downed limbs, and the wildlife around us that we saw and heard, and in general all the natural environment we enjoyed.

Now after seventy years, I long for so many things from those much earlier days. Much has changed or has dwindled, or worse, completely disappeared. But then there has been the arrival or introduction of new species of both animal and plants. Most notably to me is the absence of eastern quail or bob white quail. I miss their wonderful calls that we tried so hard to imitate. It was one bird call so distinctive you could always recognize it. The loss of their natural habitat is the most obvious cause of their decline. The wild dense hedgerows that divided fields have been all bulldozed and burned so that farms can move machinery more easily from field to field. The quails used the hedgerows for protection from predators and cover for their nests and young. I no longer see the mother quail combing the lawn with her bumblebee-sized babies scurrying around pecking away for food. I used to see this all the time in the late spring and was delighted to watch the family activity. But the unexpected arrival of wild turkeys is almost as much fun. We never had wild turkeys here and now they are developing large flocks in many woods and adjoining fields. In the spring they can be sighted in flocks grazing on winter wheat and cover crops and many times I have seen late departing Canadian geese with them and also white tail deer grazing too. It's still quite an unexpected sight.

There are not as many song birds coming to the feeders and that too could be caused from loss of nesting sites. Including native plants in your landscaping is a source of both food and shelter for birds. The addition of bluebird boxes and purple martin houses and osprey nesting stands all have been instrumental in helping these birds survive the dwindling food sources and habitat and remain in our surrounding local area.

Our winters were so much colder, and we experienced heavy snow and strong winter storms. I mean really heavy snows. Many times in a year we would have such deep snow that we could dig

and carve forts to have snow ball battles from. We made fort walls three feet or more high just by digging into a drift or cutting blocks of snow to stack and build the walls. Plenty of time was allowed to create a stock pile of ammunition from ample source of snow for the anticipated long and joyous battle. Victorious or not, we had bone-tiring fun.

The large pond down the lane would freeze over several times during the



winter thick enough and for long enough to have ice skating for a week or more. When this happened I would go down after school and skate until almost dark. Then walk back up to the house and get warm and do homework. Many times we would have evening skating parties when friends and neighbors would come over to skate. Cars would line the banks of the pond and turn on their lights. A large cauldron of hot soup was available to all and hot cocoa was steaming, too. Frequently we would have an evening that was full of cold clean air and the dazzling light of a full moon making an enchanting evening. That kind of cold winter hasn't happened for many years. SAD.....

In the winter, the river would often freeze completely over, strong enough to hold ice boat races. People would come from miles away to race. Cars had been known to drive on the ice, too. Ice breakers were called in to open a pathway in the river so watermen could get out to keep working. Sometimes the ice would start breaking up and piling up along the shore. To us it was a great chance to pretend these were icebergs. We would stand on these bergs and pole

around in the water pretending we were Eskimos hunting for seal. We have not experienced this kind of cold weather for a long time. We now have only a few frosty mornings and a few days in the thirties or barely high twenties. My long heavy down coat hasn't been off the hanger for years. What a change.

In the summer, the beach where we played was always full of driftwood, lost items from boats, rocks from the bulk heading, a tire or two. This was before such a ban was imposed on trash being dumped overboard. We constantly found very large oyster shells on the beach and we always had to watch our footing for shells when we went swimming, which we did all the time because the water was clear and decent to swim in. I doubt I would go in the river now unless it was absolutely necessary to save someone's life or maybe my dog.

All this change in weather could be just earth's natural cycle of climate change. Our sophisticated scientific data gathering has concluded that we—humans—are responsible for these changes with our voracious appetite for fossil fuel and the atmospheric infirmity we contribute to every minute.

I'm a Libra. You know the ones who have to weigh both sides and like balance in their lives, so I believe that what has been happening is a combination of both. Man certainly has done damage to the earth, the atmosphere, the sea and all the creatures who have been here longer than we have, but I believe we are becoming more aware of our part and making efforts to correct our mistakes. I only wish I could be around to witness what it will be like several hundred years or thousand years, or millions years from now to see if I could ice skate again or pole around on icebergs and hear quail calling to each other, or find large oyster shells on a beach. I doubt it will ever be like that again.

Inevitably things will change and that is one constant thing 📖



Gardening in a Warmer World.....Louise Williams

For millions and millions of Americans gardening is a PASSION!! However, there is no denying it – climate change is here and changing the gardening experience for us all. Although public controversy around this subject continues to be debated, the scientific opinion on climate change seems to be solid...and we can only point to ourselves. Both natural and human activity are a definitive cause for this change - but human activities are the dominant cause - resulting in the emission of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and thereby contributing to climate change.

We have experienced warmer winters, warmer springs, no snow this winter, and potentially longer-lasting droughts.

My personal experience having moved to Talbot County not quite two years ago has been near disaster! After *decades* of gardening successfully in three very different states I now feel like a novice with very little experience! We watered like mad, weeded like crazy and talked to our new plantings in hopes of encouraging new growth. Prior to putting anything in the ground, we had a local company work on both our lawn and our garden soil. The result was many failed plantings and poor results with the lawn.

This year is going to be different!!! Climate solutions are in gardeners’ hands as both stewards and guardians of our environment. We must adjust to climate change and the more educated/informed we are on this very complex situation will make a difference.

Here is a list of potential and easy answers:

- Remove invasive plants, choosing an array of native alternatives helping to maintain and attract important pollinators.

- Reduce water consumption by mulching, installing rain barrels and using drip irrigation.
- Compost kitchen and garden waste – an extra source of nutrients for your garden.
- Plant lots of trees.

Have your backyard certified as a Community Wildlife Habitat with the National Wildlife Federation.

Maintain a high level of plant diversity – that is, mix in experimental warmer zone plants. Annuals and herbaceous perennials are good candidates for experimentation. Early blossoms and unseasonal frosts are signals - so it seems the only thing to do is embrace the chaos and adapt for the new times ahead.

Plants are blooming earlier and frost date patterns are irregular. This may dictate that our “usual” planting dates may change and thus our growth range as well. This weather unpredictability makes it difficult to determine what and when to plant. So when planning your garden think about choosing plant varieties that do well in both arid and wetter conditions.

Helpful Hints:

Mulching – a seemingly obvious and “old time” advice - but a proper layer of mulch will become a gardener’s best friend as never before! It conserves moisture and helps to keep plant roots cooler during high heat periods.

Trenching – provides a place for water to go in heavy flash rains.

Knowing and understanding your garden site will become increasingly important for gardeners as weather patterns vary.

Pay attention and adjust accordingly!! 🌱



Make Room in Your Yard for Nature. A review of Doug Tallamy’s new bookJanet Mackey

When Doug Tallamy spoke to our club in February 2017, he told us how important native plants are to the successful breeding of the birds we so enjoy seeing in our yards and to pollinators that feed on nectar and pollen from our native flowers. He encouraged all of us to plant native plants in our yards, because they provide these important functions in our ecosystem in addition to being beautiful and relatively easy to care for.

Dr. Tallamy just published his second book, *Nature’s Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*. His basic message is the same, but he has turned up the heat in terms of the magnitude of the problem our ecosystem faces and the urgent need for many, many people to take

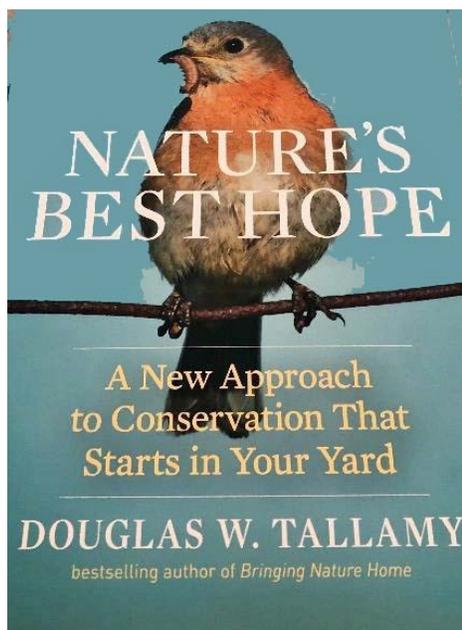
action. I recommend that you read this important book, which I am confident will convince you to take at least a small step to improve the resiliency of the world around us.

In case you don’t read the book, I’ll share a couple of Dr. Tallamy’s key requests. Make a portion of your property more supportive of the web of life by shrinking your lawn. Then, in its place, plant one of the native plants that fuels our local food web, such as a native oak, willow, or birch tree that supports hundreds of species of caterpillars or native asters or goldenrod that support many species of native bees and other pollinators.

The logic is pretty simple. The web of life that supports all living things on earth, including us humans, starts with the

sun's energy being captured by plants through photosynthesis. This energy moves through the system by herbivores eating plant leaves and then many successive types of predators eating herbivores and other critters that ate herbivores. Many of the plants that serve as food require pollination by insects to set seed and reproduce. If we don't grow a diversity of native plants for these insects to eat, these important herbivores and pollinators will disappear from our landscapes.

An important aspect of the food web is that many of the herbivorous insects and pollinators have specialized relationships with certain native plants that developed over a geological time span of millions of years. Plants have chemical defenses to keep insects from devouring them, but specific insects have developed the ability to get around those defenses in specific native plants. These insects may eat only a particular family or genus at some point in their life – like the caterpillar phase of the monarch butterfly eating only milkweed leaves. Maryland has about 400 species of native bees that are important pollinators that have specialized on pollen from just a few native species to feed their young. Native insects need native plants. Plants that were introduced from other countries, like



crepe myrtles that came from Asia just a couple of hundred years ago – which is a mere blink of an eye in geological time – provide little food for any of our insects. Dr. Tallamy calls on property owners across the country to take responsibility for supporting the local food web that supports all of us. He calculates that if all the private property owners reduced their lawn by half and planted a portion of their yards instead to support food webs, we would have an area larger than the areas protected in our National Parks. As one homeowner convinces other homeowners of the importance of growing native plants, we could establish corridors that would interconnect areas of protected land such as National Parks and re-establish healthy habitat for the diversity of life we all need. Recent reports of the loss of 3

billion birds from our skies and 40% reduction in the number of insects do not paint a picture of a sustainable ecosystem. It's good to know that there are actions we each can take as individuals in our own yards that collectively will enhance the health of the food webs on which we humans are dependent. *Nature's Best Hope* delivers its message in a very readable conversational style. Dr. Tallamy has an optimistic spirit and conveys confidence that we as gardeners can enhance the health of our ecosystem. 



Sustainable Gardening in a Changing Climate.....Pam Keeton

Hotter, drier summers; warmer winters; more bugs; and fewer pollinators are wreaking havoc in gardens around the world. There are a variety of techniques we can use in our gardens to minimize negative effects on the local environment while maximizing resources and getting better results.

Maintaining turf takes an incredible amount of effort and resources, and often involves the use of chemicals and polluting equipment. Replacing lawns with garden beds and trees or letting areas “naturalize” reduces negative effects on the environment while creating food and habit for insects and wildlife. We have done this in several areas of our property. We have added trees along wooded areas to extend the tree line further into the yard, and in other areas have created islands out of woodchips in which we've planted native trees, shrubs and bulbs. One benefit of wood chips is that they are free! We allow them to cool for a couple of months before spreading them. The chips decompose over time adding to

the soil structure, and help retain moisture during hot, dry months.

As much as possible, use native plants because they provide food sources and habitat for native insects, birds and animals. Remove invasive plants, like the Bradford Pear trees that are overtaking our forests, and replace them with native trees, such as Dogwood, Tulip Poplar, Oak, Serviceberry, and Eastern White Pine.

Compost yard clippings and use it to improve soil structure and minimize waste disposal. There are a wide variety of composting methods and equipment for almost any situation, and a host of resources on how to get started. Leaves can also be shredded and used as mulch, rather than sending them to the dump. As they decompose, they will improve the soil and provide habitat for insects that birds feed upon, while reducing weeds.

As summers become hotter and drier, irrigation is becoming extremely important. Drip irrigation is a way to efficiently and

effectively use water. Kits are available for the DIYer and are easy to use. Connect the irrigation system to a timer to ensure you water at the appropriate time of day – early morning is best - and for an appropriate amount of time. Using a drip system rather than overhead sprinklers, can also help reduce harmful pests and diseases.

Reuse things like newspaper for weed control and moisture retention. I do this in my vegetable garden and have found it to be very effective. When I clean out the beds at the end of the season, I cover the soil with several layers of newspapers to keep weed seeds out. In the spring I leave any paper that is still viable in place and add new paper where necessary. I cut holes where I am going to plant and compost the old newspaper. For the last two years I



have enjoyed a remarkably weed-free vegetable garden while reusing old newspapers.

Speaking of vegetables, consider growing some of your own to reduce the carbon footprint required to mass produce and truck vegetables to stores and, ultimately, your refrigerator. Purchase seasonal fruits and vegetables from a local farmers market – keeping your food sources local reduces pollution. The Eastern Shore has an abundance of small, family farms that are using environmentally-friendly techniques.

As temperatures rise, extreme heat can be hard on vegetables and experts are beginning to recommend providing shade when plants begin to suffer. Shade cloth is available online and at garden centers.

Researchers are also rethinking planting dates and the types of plants best suited for changing climates. The reality is that some years are going to be better than others for certain plants so, don't give up! 🍷🍷



The Ins and Outs of a Paper Bag.....Lin Moeller

PAPER BAGS . . . We all most likely have a few stashed away in case needed for something. . . I am from a long line of paper bag stashers and users. Though presently I don't have as many stashed, nor use them so often. Still, this may change.

Today, with many states passing laws to ban the use of plastic bags because of environmental and conservation impact concerns, stores will be reverting back to providing paper bags to hold buyers' purchases. We may all be building a larger stash of them and wondering what to do with them other than just tossing. Even though they are biodegradable.

Growing up on the family farm as part of the fourth generation to live there (and it is still in the family) more things were recycled and reused than taken to the dump – there was no easy toss, curb-side, trash pick-up. My great-grandfather purchased the farm in the early 1900's. Then it went to my grandfather. My mother was born there. The generations lived there through the lean years of the wars and depression, so you can imagine the items saved and waiting to be repurposed, reused. It was those years that taught people the need to be frugal, to reuse. Things were never just tossed. Even today my mother of 95 years is inclined to keep, 'just in case.' There was always a paper bag filled with paper bags of all sizes in the pantry waiting for their next use. . .

Sides of the bags would be folded down for strength and used as temporary baskets to hold things – fruits, nuts, potatoes, shallots, garlic, etc. Fruits needing a couple more

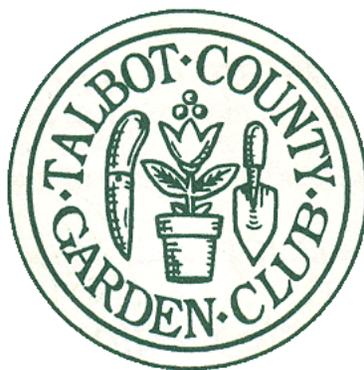
days to ripen were enclosed in a bag. Bags would be split open and used flat to dry the seeds and herbs before being placed in recycled storage jars and cans. Or, used flat by the stove to place fried foods to absorb the excess cooking oils. In the shop, bags were used as blotters on the bench to absorb oils, paints and other liquids and as shelf liners. As kids, the use of a paper bag was only limited by imagination . . . masks and costumes, hand puppets, craft projects, holding treasures, etc. During the school years, paper bags would be used to cover and protect our school books which, in a short time would be covered with doodles and jottings! At the end of the school year, paper bags were used to hold all the papers, workbooks, pencils, crayons, pens and treasures that had collected in the desks or lockers during the year; no one had backpacks.

When teaching I always had a stash of various sizes of paper bags to store craft items and for the art and learning projects themselves – map skills, Indian tepees, booklet covers, posters, etc.

Today, if you have a stash of paper bags and need some ideas of what to do with them, google 'papers bag uses' and check out the lists of suggestion or try DIY or Pinterest. There is a plethora of ideas and suggestions for uses and crafts for gardeners – seed starters, composting, mulching, etc., and for projects with children and grandchildren. Finally, if nothing else, a brown paper bag can be used to store a collection of newspapers which also have lots of uses. Newspapers will have to be a story for another day. . . 🍷

Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

Albert Einstein



TALBOT COUNTY GARDEN CLUB

P.O. Box 1524, Easton, MD 21601

————— **Member of** —————

Garden Club of America

National Garden Clubs, Inc., Central Atlantic Region

The Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, District I