

Baltimore Be-more Productive

A Diagnostic Tool for Your Neighborhood

What can your neighborhood produce? This Diagnostic Tool will ask you to look at your neighborhood in three ways:

1. Can you harness the sun?
2. Is there land for small plot gardens and a beehive?
3. What benefit can weeds provide?

Look Up!

Baltimore has a huge untapped energy resource: acres upon acres of rooftops full of sunlight. Think of using this forgotten space to produce energy in your community or for your company or school.

Getting Started with Solar Power:

1. Check and measure how much solar potential exists around your home. The site must have southern exposure and no more than six hours of shade a day. (Reference www.manytracks.com/alt-energy.htm)
 - a. Solar Pathfinder can chart your site's amount of direct sunlight for every month of the year. www.solarpathfinder.com
 - b. *The Passive Solar Energy Book* by Edward Mazria, Rodale Press (1979)
2. Photovoltaic (PV) panels can be purchased starting at under \$500 for 80 watts up to over \$20,000 for 4,000 watts. Other items you may need, depending on whether you want to do it yourself or contract with a company, include:
 - a. Battery
 - b. PV rack to mount the solar panel
 - c. Control panel
 - d. Special wiring
3. Check out solar programs through the Maryland Energy Administration www.energy.state.md.us/facts/renewable/solar.asp. They have grants and loans as well as tons of information for you to find out how you can put your rooftops to work.

Use Small Plots to Produce Lots of Food

A front stoop, the bit of land alongside your church, and a backyard fence all can be used to produce food. The investment in labor, a few tools, and ongoing weeding and watering will soon bring you a wonderful harvest.

The cheapest way to grow food is from seeds directly put in your soil. Next cheapest is to start your own seeds inside. To jump-start your backyard farm, buy seedlings at local stores and farmers' markets.

Think about a fruit tree to produce fruit—fresh figs or apples, anyone? The productive trees will also shade hot spots in your community.

Three tomato plants, ten lettuce plants, a cucumber and a pepper plant, plus some herbs, can greatly enhance your meals and even give you a few things to freeze for the winter. More space can provide zucchini, your own Halloween pumpkins, and loads of other favorites.

Resources are abundant. Here are a few places to start to learn more about small gardens:

Master Gardeners

www.mastergardener.umd.edu

National Gardening Association

<http://www.garden.org/foodguide/browse>

Guide to Growing Food in D.C., a post on the DC Urban Gardeners blog, has great information we can use in the Baltimore region

<http://www.dc-urban-gardener-news.com/guide-to-growing-food-in-dc.html>

Also think about sharing tools and buying seeds together with a neighbor or through your neighborhood association.

Bees

We need bees even in the city.

Bee-keeping Basics

1. Beekeeping can be approached as a hobby or as a business. Regardless, the true value of bee-keeping is helping sustain flora and agriculture through pollination.

2. Bees require a home within one mile of a large floral concentration. They need to have access to water, and hives should be placed in the sun.
3. Beekeeping requires an initial financial investment in equipment to build your hives and control the bees, plus protective gear to prevent bee stings.
4. Bees can be purchased in packages of 3,500 bees. These packages should be purchased in January and February for delivery in early spring.

Rules of thumb for urban/suburban beekeeping, from Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences Cooperative Extension's *Beekeeping Basics* (pubs.cas.psu.edu/FreePubs/pdfs/agrs93.pdf)

1. Keep gentle bee colonies and employ good swarm management techniques. Swarm activity in your neighborhood can attract a lot of panicked attention.
2. Keep no more than four hives on a property of ½ acre or less.
3. All hives within 20 feet of a property line should have a solid fence or vegetative barriers 5 feet or more in height between the hives and the property line.
4. All hives within 30 feet of a public sidewalk or roadway should have a solid fence or dense vegetative barrier or be elevated so as to direct the flight path of the bees well above traffic and pedestrians.
5. An adequate supply of water should be provided by the property owner or beekeeper from March 1 to October 31.

Bee Resources and Clubs in Maryland

Maryland Bee

www.mdbee.com/

Maryland State Beekeepers' Association

www.msbeea.org

Central Maryland Beekeeper's Association (www.cmbeea.org).

President: David Gill-Boucher (410-357-9476; dgillboucher@yahoo.com)

There are club meetings and courses at the Oregon Ridge Nature Center; go to

www.cmbeea.org/main/Classes.html for more information

Weeds

Spend some time wandering through your neighborhood seeking out weeds and volunteers (plants that grow on their own, rather than being deliberately planted). See if you can locate the weeds

below and investigate using them! Many weeds have nutritional and medicinal qualities and are wonderful additions to any decorative or edible garden.

Paulownia – Foxglove Tree

Edible: Leaves (must be cooked), flowers can be used with miso

Medicinal: Some medicinal properties including astringent.

Lambsquarters

Edible: A close relative to spinach, high in Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and fiber.

Common Evening Primrose

Edible: First year roots can be boiled like parsnips.

Day-Lily

Edible: Shoots, flower buds, flowers, and tubers can be eaten and are delicious.

Chicory

Edible: Can be used as a spring green, or coffee substitute.

Yarrow

Edible: Fern-like leaves can be used to make tea.

Medicinal: Fern-like leaves can also be employed as an herbal medicine for cuts & colds.

Dandelion

Edible: Leaves are best when they are young, and can be harvested for salad greens or sautéing.

For more information, check out *Edible Wild Plants* by Lee Allen Peterson (Houghton Mifflin, 1977)