

# BY THE YARD

## HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

 Cooperative  
Extension Service

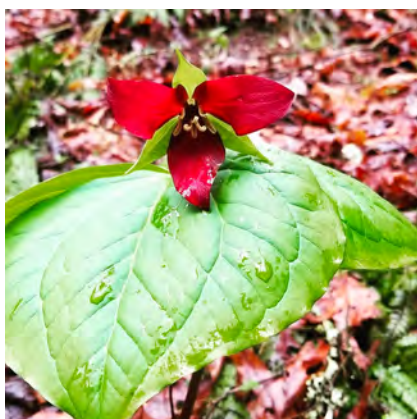
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April

2025

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Ephemerals are blooming!  
Check out all the spring  
wildflower walks in the  
events section.

Hello and happy official Spring!

Spring ephemerals and bulbs are blooming. Lawns are greening. And the spring chore list begins to grow. That's okay because my spirits lift as I spend full days outdoors imagining what will grow and succeed this season. One thing that will grow in many yards this summer is the aggressive bermudagrass. We'll give you some tips to keep it at bay.

Also, strawberry growers beware! There is a new disease that has started to pop up in Kentucky. That's just what we need – another fruit disease. However, there are lots of great researchers giving us the best advise on how to avoid this headache. We have much to learn and are extremely thankful to those experts and the important work they do.

We take a quick dive in another very popular fruiting plant, Elderberry. Lots of claims to the health benefits that are still being explored, but we will focus on how and where to grow the impressive shrub. (Please note that cooking the berries is highly recommended. Do not eat raw.)

Lastly and sometimes the more easily forgotten realm of plant care, what to do for houseplants! When is it safe to bring them outside? Is it time to fertilize? Don't worry, we'll explore these questions and more to make sure your sweet house babies are cared for.

We are also announcing our annual Growing Community garden event! We are greatly looking forward to sharing information, plants and seeds at the Marksbury Family Branch Library on May 3rd. Be sure to look over the flyer at the end of this newsletter for all the details.

Keep growing,

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University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating.  
Lexington, KY 40506



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with prior notification.

## Christmas Tree Association Plant Auction

Spring is here! It is the perfect time to plant. The Kentucky Christmas Tree Association's 19th Annual Plant Auction will be held 10:00 a.m. until 12 noon, Saturday, April 12, 2025, at the Fayette County Extension Office, 1140 Harry Sykes Way, Lexington, Kentucky 40504. Bid and take home some quality Kentucky grown nursery stock. A variety of annuals, perennials, balled and burlapped trees and shrubs will be for sale. A portion of the proceeds will be used to provide one or more scholarships for students majoring in Forestry or related sciences in the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the University of Kentucky. For further information please call 859 223-1140.

### Elderberry



Elderberry cymes,  
Jamie Wolfe,  
Preston County, WV

Elderberry has exploded in popularity over the past couple of years. While much of the proclaimed health benefits are still being researched, it is no doubt that this prolific fruit can make delicious jams and syrups. Please note that most of the plant is mildly toxic and proper preparation of the flowers and berries is highly recommended.

Elderberry (genus *Sambucus*) has primarily two commonly known subspecies—the non-native European variety (*nigra*) and the native (*canadensis*) variety. Both provide edible fruit and have compelling histories of folklore and uses. For the purposes of this article, we will mainly focus on the native type, as they are generally smaller and better fruit producers than their European counterparts.

This deciduous multi-stemmed shrub grows to a maximum height and width of 12 feet. The stems have a soft white pith that is easily hollowed out. The leaves can have a lacey appearance. White clusters of flowers, called cymes, bloom in June through July, depending on cultivar and placement. Each cluster can reach a diameter of 10 inches. The individual five-petaled flowers are quite small, approximately 1/4 inch wide. As flowers fade, berry-like fruit form in clusters, known as drupes. The berries turn deep purple as they ripen. Fruit production is bountiful when elderberry is sited in a sunny location, though it tolerates shadier areas.

Elderberry tolerates wet to dry soil conditions with an ideal pH range of 6.8 to 7.2. It is easy to cultivate from nursery stock or from cuttings. Ensure spacing is 5 to 7 feet between plants, as elderberries have extensive, though relatively shallow, root systems.

One ecological use for elderberry is in stabilizing areas that are prone to erosion. Elderberry can also filter runoff by tolerating wet soils, can sucker to form colonies, and has lots of roots. It can be weedy.

Additional ecological benefits include sustaining wildlife. Native bees rely on elderberry for nesting material. Pollinators are attracted to the nectar of the flowers. Mammals and songbirds imbibe on the nutritious fruit. Over 120 bird species eat its fruit and find shelter among its branches, including bluebirds, tanagers, catbirds, phoebes, robins, and cardinals.

It takes an elderberry a few years to become really productive. In the first year or two, it is recommendation to remove flowers so that the plant's energy is directed toward root and foliage establishment. Planting at least two will increase cross-pollination and berry harvest. Elderberries are wind-pollinated and should be planted no more than 60 feet from each other.

Note that elderberries are susceptible to some diseases and insect pests. It has some susceptibility to canker, powdery mildew, leaf spot, borers, spider mites, and aphids. Its branches are susceptible to damage from high winds and heavy snow or ice in winter.

Source: Mandy L. Smith & Susan Marquesen, "Elderberry in the Garden and the Kitchen," *Penn State Extension*, 2025



Elderberry drupe,  
West Virginia University  
Extension

## Spring Houseplant Care

It's spring! And while most of our attention extends outdoors, we cannot forget the dear houseplants that have been with us through the darkest months! In all seriousness, there are a few things you can do to ensure a strong growing season for your indoor houseplants.

**1.Repotting:** It's time to repot when plants become top-heavy, growth slows and/or potting soil quickly dries out. Over time, potting soil will break down and become more compacted and poorly drained. Most gardeners have the best success repotting in late winter or early spring, as houseplants start growing more vigorously with the warmer temperatures and longer days of spring.



*Repotting houseplants,  
Iowa State Extension*

**2.Cleaning:** Are you noticing dusty leaves on your houseplants? Cleaning houseplants improves their appearance, stimulates growth and may help control insects and mites. Large-leaved plants may be cleaned with a mild dishwashing soap solution (add a few drops to lukewarm water) and a soft sponge or cloth. Plants can also be cleaned by placing them in the sink or shower and gently spraying them with lukewarm water. Be sure to adjust the pressure and water temperature before spraying the plants. African violets and other fuzzy-leaved plants can be cleaned with a damp, soft cloth or soft-bristled brush.

**3.Fertilizing:** Spring and summer are the best times to fertilize houseplants. Fertilizers are available in liquid, crystalline, granular, spike and tablet forms. Use fertilizers specifically formulated for houseplants or use a complete all-purpose fertilizer. Mix all-purpose fertilizers at half or a quarter of the strength outlined in the instructions because houseplants grow slower than outdoor plants. When using fertilizers formulated for houseplants, mix at the concentration outlined on the label. The frequency of application depends upon the product and varies from every two weeks to once every three to four months. Carefully read and follow label directions.

**4.Placing Outside:** When moved outside during the warm parts of the growing season, houseplants can flourish in the warm temperatures and high humidity of a Kentucky summer. Indoor plants can safely be moved outdoors when nighttime temperatures are consistently and reliably above 50 degrees (typically in April).

Houseplants will do best if they "summer vacation" in full or part-shade outdoor locations. Never move houseplants from indoors to full sun. It is better to wait until May to ensure trees have leafed out enough to provide adequate shade for house plants. Acclimate houseplants to brighter locations by moving them from an indoor location to a full-shade location outside. Then, introduce more light over 10 to 14 days. Many houseplants can be in full shade the entire summer, and others can be moved to a spot with part shade once acclimated.

Source: Arron J. Steil, "Yard and Garden: Spring Houseplant Care," Iowa State University Extension & Outreach, 2024



*Houseplant in the shady  
outdoors, Iowa State Extension*

## At Arms Against Bermudagrass



*Bermudagrass rhizomes creeping over rock wall, UK Cooperative Extension*

When bermudagrass is introduced into a cool-season lawn, it can be a highly invasive weed. As a warm-season grass with a fast growth rate, bermudagrass is often able to outcompete cool season grasses during the heat of the summer. Bermudagrass, which spreads aggressively by aboveground and belowground stems, can choke out desirable grasses and spread each season. Another problem with bermudagrass is that as temperatures begin to drop in the fall, it becomes dormant, turning a broom-straw brown color, which stands in stark contrast to the green color of cool-season turfgrass.

Due to the aggressive growth and ability to adapt, bermudagrass control will fail without manipulating the environment to favor the desirable cool-season grasses. The use of herbicides alone is not recommended for management of this weed. The most important step in creating an environment where cool-season grasses are competitive is to raise the mower height to 4 inches or greater. Since bermudagrass thrives in full sun, a tall, dense lawn can capture sunlight and shade out the bermudagrass. Research shows that mowing heights of 4 inches can decrease the spread of bermudagrass in cool-season lawns.

Additionally, fertilizing with nitrogen in the late summer to early fall favors cool season grasses as the bermudagrass enters dormancy and is not actively growing. Avoid applying fertilizers while the bermudagrass is green and actively growing to reduce competition with the desired cool-season grasses.



*Bermudagrass turns straw colored when dormant, UK Cooperative Extension*

There are a limited number of chemical control options available for the removal of bermudagrass from cool-season lawns. Complete control of bermudagrass even with the most effective herbicides may take several applications over multiple growing seasons. When applying herbicides, it is important to read the label closely on all products before use to ensure turfgrass safety. Refer to AGR-278 Bermudagrass Control for Kentucky Lawns for more information on chemical control options.

*Source: J. Vaughn, B. Wilson, A. Rideout & K. Clayton, "Bermudagrass Control for Kentucky Lawns," University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension, 2024*

## Recipe of the Month



### Asian Asparagus Salad

- |  |  |                                 |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| <b>1 pound</b> fresh asparagus             | <b>2 teaspoons</b> sugar or artificial sweetener | <b>2 teaspoons</b> sesame seeds |
| <b>1½ tablespoons</b> low sodium soy sauce | <b>1 tablespoon</b> olive oil                    |                                 |
- 1. Snap** off and discard the root ends of the asparagus.
  - 2. Wash** remaining stalks thoroughly.
  - 3. Slice** stalks into 1½ inch lengths on the diagonal.
  - 4. Blanch** asparagus for 1-3 minutes in boiling water, until bright green in color.
  - 5. Cool** immediately under cold water and drain.
  - 6. Combine** soy sauce, sugar, olive oil, and sesame seeds in a small glass bowl. **Mix** dressing until sugar is dissolved.
  - 7. In** a gallon zip-seal bag, add asparagus and dressing. **Turn** bag to coat asparagus with dressing and chill in the refrigerator for 15 minutes. **Turn** bag again and chill for an additional 15 minutes before serving.
- Yield:** 4, ½ cup servings.  
**Nutrition Analysis:** 70 calories, 4.5 g fat, .5 g sat. fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 250 mg sodium, 7 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 3 g protein.

Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.



## New Strawberry Disease is a Mouthful

“Neopestalotiopsis.” Try saying that three times fast. We’re going to call it “Neopest” for short. It was first detected in Kentucky last year and research is ongoing. There is still much that is not understood about this disease’s origin, spread, and management.

Here’s what we do know. Neopest disease can affect all parts of the plant, reducing yields and resulting in plant death. The earliest indications of the disease are leaf spots appearing on older leaves, particularly as new strawberry plants are establishing. Leaf symptoms can easily be confused with other strawberry diseases, such as leaf blotch, Phomopsis leaf blight, common leaf spot, Cercospora leaf spot, or leaf scorch.

Then you might notice spots on the fruits. Fruit spots are initially small, light tan, sunken, and irregular in shape. Lesions can quickly expand to encompass entire fruit. Lastly, you can see early evidence of crown rot that includes reddened older leaves, while new leaves are often smaller than normal. Affected plants may appear stunted, unhealthy, and/or fail to become established. Ultimately plants wilt, collapse, and die.

So while one of these symptoms might appear as a different issue or disease, usually the combination of all of these symptoms are telling of the disease. The Neopest pathogen overwinters in soil, on crop residue (infected crowns, leaves, and fruit), and on asymptomatic weeds. It is believed to persist in soil from one year to another, possibly up to 3 years; however, its longevity in fields is still under investigation.

While infections can occur at temperatures as low as 50°F, temperatures in the 68°F to 86°F range are optimal. However, wetness plays the most important role in pathogen infections. Extended wetness (48 hours or more) and consecutive rain events can lead to rapid disease development and spread. Perfect for a spring crop!

There has been some preliminary trial studies out of Purdue University that indicate several short-day cultivars, including AC Valley Sunset, Darselect, Earliglow, Flavorfest, Galletta, Honeoye, Jewel, and Sonata, remain asymptomatic to the diseases. You can find more details on this trial in the publication “Strawberry Cultivar Susceptibility to Neopestalotiopsis Leaf Spot in Indiana.”

Source: Nicole Gauthier & Cheryl Kaiser, “Neopestalotiopsis Disease of Strawberry,” *Plant Pathology Fact Sheet*, University of Kentucky



Neopestalotiopsis on Strawberry Fruit, UK Plant Pathology



Neopestalotiopsis on Strawberry Plant (left), UK Plant Pathology

### What to Plant Now?

Earliest Safe Planting Date*	Planting Method	Vegetables
APRIL 8	Transplant into garden	Broccoli, cauliflower, collards, lettuce, Swiss chard, onions from seed
APRIL 8	Start seeds outdoors	Mustard greens, spinach, radishes, lettuce, Swiss chard
APRIL 12	Start seeds indoors	Muskmelons, watermelons, squash
APRIL 12	Start seeds outdoors	Sweet corn, beets, carrots, mustard, spinach, radishes, lettuce

\*Dates are approximate for the Central Kentucky region

## Upcoming Events

Look out for these events happening at the Extension Office and across Lexington. **Some of these require registration. Be sure to look them up ahead of time!**

- April 1-19 – Various Wildflower Hikes @ Floracliff Nature Sanctuary
- April 2 – Children’s Garden Open @ The Arboretum
- April 5 & 6 – Lexington Farmer’s Market Summer Hours & Southland Location Open
- April 5 – Spring Tree Planting @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- April 5 – Wildflower Walk @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- April 12 – KY Christmas Tree Association Plant Auction @ The Extension Office
- April 12 – Seedleaf Agroforestry Program @ Headwater Farm
- April 12 – Wildflower Walk @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- April 16 – Tiny Tot Naturalist “All About Plants” @ McConnell Springs Park
- April 18 – Seedleaf Spring Plant Sale @ Headwater Farm
- April 19 – Planting Trees with Trees Lexington
- April 19 – Reforest the Bluegrass @ Jacobson Park
- April 19 – Junior Naturalist “All About Plants” @ McConnell Springs Park
- April 15 – Nature Journaling @ Floracliff Nature Sanctuary
- April 22 – Earth Day Volunteer Hour @ McConnell Springs Park
- April 22 – Earth Day Wildflower Walk @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- April 24 – Urban Forestry Initiative’s Canopy Con @ The Extension Office
- April 26 – Planting Trees with Trees Lexington
- April 26 – Reforest the Bluegrass @ Home!
- April 26 – Junior Explorers: Wildflowers @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- April 28 – Bluegrass GreenSource Sustainability Summit

## April Quick Tips

- If you haven’t trimmed back ornamental grasses and perennials, do so now.
- Remove flower stalks from bulbs. Apply fertilizer and make sure to leave the foliage to die back naturally. The leaves provide food for next year’s flowers.
- Continue planting trees and shrubs.
- You can begin trimming evergreens now through late summer. Pruning after the spring flush of growth will result in less re-growth.
- Add organic matter to flower beds and garden plots. Incorporate into the soil where possible.
- Edge beds for a crisp, clean look. This will also keep creeping weeds from encroaching rapidly.
- Apply new mulch to beds as needed. Total mulch depth should not exceed 2-3” and a 2” layer is usually sufficient. Keep mulch away from tree trunks and bases of shrubs.
- If you have a spray program for fruit trees, begin spraying after flower petals drop. As always, follow label directions very carefully. Better yet, plant fruit trees with natural disease resistance.
- Sharpen mower blades. Clean cuts make for a healthier, more attractive lawn.
- If you start seedlings indoors, gradually toughen them up with brief trips outdoors on nice days. Start with short times in a shady spot at first. They sunburn easily.
- In the vegetable garden you can plant potatoes now. You still have time for peas, lettuce, and onions if you didn’t plant in March. In late April you can begin planting beans
- Register for Gardener’s Toolbox Classes: <https://ukyfayette.pacecommunity.net>



# GROW YOUR OWN FOOD!

## MARKSBURY FAMILY BRANCH LIBRARY

2197 Versailles Rd  
Lexington, KY 40504  
Saturday, May 3rd  
10:00 am – 1:00 pm



Attend 15-minute mini lessons to receive a bundle of FREE vegetable plants and seeds!

- Container Gardening
- Soil Prep & Planting
- Planting
- Watering & Nutrients



Kid's activities provided by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Beta Gamma Omega Chapter. All materials available while supplies last.



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