BY THE YARD
HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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Inside this issue:

Don't forget to fertilize houseplants monthly in spring and summer with a diluted liquid fertilizer!

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Agent's Note

Summer is in full swing, and with it comes the relentless heat that compresses my gardening chores into narrow windows—just after sunrise and shortly before dusk. It's all too easy to let things slide in this seasonal steam bath. Weeds seem to shoot up overnight, and keeping up with watering becomes a daily challenge.

It's important to remember that drought stress opens the door to a host of insect and disease issues in the vegetable garden. When watering, I'm careful to avoid soaking the foliage—wet leaves can be an open invitation for disease.

I'm also keeping a close eye on my fall-blooming perennials. Just a couple of dry weeks can leave them looking ragged for the rest of the season, so I do my best to stay on top of their care.

Despite the heat and the hustle, summer remains a beautiful time of year. I love the long days, even if I have to retreat indoors during the hottest hours between 11 and 7. The late evenings offer quiet rewards: the air fills with the changing sounds and scents of the season. The chorus now features annual cicadas and katydids, while fireflies light up the fields in magical displays.

The fragrance, too, is shifting—now tinged with the sweet, straw-like scent of blooming sunflowers and other members of the aster family. Even in the face of summer's challenges, we press on in the garden, grateful for the promise each new season brings.

Take care in the heat—and happy gardening!

In appreciation,

Reena Martin, Fayette County Extension Agent for Horticulture
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What to Plant Now?

Latest Safe Planting Date*	**Vegetables** **As we move into autumn, we are now sharing the latest safe planting dates. Plants planted after these dates may be damaged before harvest by frost.**
AUGUST 1	Broccoli transplants, Kale, Kohlrabi, Bibb Lettuce Transplants, Parsley, Snow Peas, Summer Squash
AUGUST 10	Beets, Leaf Lettuce, Turnips
AUGUST 20	Collard greens

*Dates are approximate for the Central Kentucky region

A Guide to Dividing Perennials

One of the gardener's most rewarding tasks is dividing perennials. Not only is it an easy way to acquire more plants, but it helps them stay vigorous and healthy.


Coneflowers (Echinacea) can be divided. Photo credit: Lois Miklas

By definition, plant division is a form of vegetative propagation where each divided piece is capable of producing roots and shoots. This important gardening job is not as daunting as you may think; just follow a few principles that answer the questions: why, when, and how.

Why Divide Perennials
When you see that a robust perennial is beginning to crowd out surrounding plants, you know it requires division. It has sent up new shoots and grown new roots causing competition for light, water, and nutrients. This leads to a weakening of the overall plant with less, or smaller flowers and sometimes yellowing leaves. Another sure sign that you need to divide a plant is when its center begins to die out.

When to Divide Perennials
Don't wait until the plant is going downhill; divide it while it still looks good. Divide the perennial when it is not in bloom, so it can focus its energy on root and leaf growth. Spring and autumn are the recommended times, as those are the seasons when plants tend to establish new roots. Some gardeners advocate dividing spring-bloomers in fall and all other flowering plants in spring. In areas where spring may be late and short, it is preferable to dig and divide in September, allowing four to six weeks for the plant to become established before the ground freezes. This also gives more time for the transplants to develop new root systems before the summer heat. It is not a good idea to divide your plants during the heat of summer. The exception is bearded iris that goes dormant in summer, making August the best time for its division. How often should you divide plants? The general rule of thumb is to complete this task every three years, but I only divide a plant after careful observation of its shape and condition, believing the old adage that 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it.' With a little planning, you can stagger your perennial divisions over several years to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

How to Divide Perennials in the Fall
Follow the step-by-step plan described below. You will need to consider the type of root system of each plant you are dividing.

1. Tools: Useful tools to have on hand include: shovel, spade, garden forks, large sharp knife, pruners, shears, and gloves. For tough root systems, you may want to use an eight-inch-long handsaw.

2. Preparation: A day or two before you plan to divide your perennials, water them thoroughly. Choose a cloudy day, preferably with rain in the forecast—not hot and sunny—for the digging-up task. Before you begin, prepare a well-drained area where you intend to put the divisions. Make sure the hole is more than wide enough to accommodate the roots. Add some organic matter if you wish. Before digging up the plant that is to be divided, first cut down its stems and foliage to six inches from the ground. This will make it easier to remove and you will reduce moisture loss.

3. Digging Up: Dig about four to six inches away from the plant, at its natural drip line. At an angle, cut down under the clump from several points around the edge. Lever the plant out of the hole. Spray with a hose, or shake, to remove loose soil.

4. Dividing: To divide the clump into smaller sections, you will need to treat each root system differently:

- Spreading Root Systems. These plants include tickseed (Coreopsis), aster, beebalm (Monarda), lamb's ear (Stachys), and purple coneflower (Echinacea.) Their roots are intertwined and may be matted. Pull the smallest of them apart by hand or cut them into sections with shears or a sharp knife. You can forcefully separate large plants by inserting two forks back-to-back in the center of the root ball and slowly draw the handles away from each other. The divisions should each contain three to five vigorous shoots. Discard small, weak, woody divisions and the center of the plant if it is dead or weaker than the outside.
- Clumping Root Systems. Examples are astilbe, daylily (Hemerocallis), hosta, and many ornamental grasses. This type of root system originates from a central clump with multiple growing points. Divide by cutting through the crown with a sharp knife. Use back-to-back forks if necessary. Keep at least one eye (bud) with each division, or several if you want larger plants.
- Rhizomes. Bearded irises are the perfect example. Their roots (technically stems) grow horizontally at or above ground level. To divide rhizomes, cut them with a sharp knife, discarding parts damaged by insects or disease. Each section should contain a few inches of rhizome and a fan of leaves.
- Tuberous Roots. Examples of plants with tuberous roots are dahlia and canna lilies. In most of Pennsylvania, they need to be dug up in the fall and stored in a frost-free area until the spring. Use a knife or pruners to slice the root mass into sections, each containing at least one bud.

A Guide to Dividing Perennials continued

5. What Not to Divide: Do not divide shrub-like perennials such as lavender (Lavendula) and Russian sage (Perovskia). Their single woody bases are not amenable to splitting. Leave untouched butterfly weed (Asclepias) and other plants with a single taproot. Euphorbias, false indigo (Baptisia), baby's breath (Gypsophila), lupine (Lupinus), clematis, and columbine (Aquilegia) are more examples of perennials that resent being divided.

6. Planting the Divisions: Do not allow your divisions to dry out. You may moisten them with water (keep a pail handy) until they are planted. Plant them as soon as possible in the prepared holes in the garden or in containers. You should plant them at the same depth that they were originally. Don't forget rhizomes should have the top showing just above soil level. Water well after firming the soil. Because I divide my perennials in the fall, I use mulch to prevent the heaving caused by alternating freezing and thawing. A loose mulch such as straw is suitable for winter.

7. Aftercare: Don't fertilize your new plants; give them time to grow new roots. Water when needed, being careful not to overwater as this promotes root rot and fungal growth. Provide temporary shade if there is unexpected hot sun.

Dividing perennials is an easy way to rejuvenate them and control their size. You will gain additional plants that you can use to start a new flowerbed, to fill in a space, or to give to a friend. Completing this task always gives the gardener a great feeling of accomplishment.

By: Pamela T. Hubbard, Master Gardener, Monroe County, PA

Overseeding Lawns

Healthy, well maintained lawns are attractive landscape additions. Lawns in poor condition, however, are somewhat unsightly. The poor condition of a lawn may be due to poor management, heat, drought, diseases, insects or other factors. In severe cases, the existing lawn may have to be destroyed and a new one established on the site. Lawns that contain over 50 percent desirable grasses can often be improved by overseeding.

Overseeding is the sowing of grass seed into an existing lawn. In Iowa, the best time to overseed a lawn is late summer (late August to mid-September).

Site Preparation: Good site preparation is necessary for successful overseeding. If possible, identify and correct the problems causing the lawn to decline. Overseeding may only be a temporary solution if these problems are not corrected.

To reduce the competition from the established turfgrass, mow the lawn at a height of 1-1/2 to 2 inches. Successful overseeding also requires good seed-to-soil contact. Simply throwing or broadcasting seed over the lawn typically results in poor seed germination as much of the seed is resting on the thatch layer or soil surface. Rakes, core aerators, vertical mowers, and slit seeders can be used to ensure good seed-to-soil contact.

Overseeding Small Areas: Small areas can be prepared by gently raking the thin spots. When raking, it’s necessary to break the soil surface without pulling out the existing turfgrass. After raking, sow the seed by hand. Then, work the seed into the soil by gently raking the areas a second time.

Overseeding Large Areas: Large areas can be prepared by using a core aerator. Core aerators are machines with hollow metal tubes or tines. They remove plugs of soil when run over the lawn. To prepare the site, go over the lawn three or four times with the core aerator. When finished, there should be 20 to 40 holes per square foot. Apply the seed with a drop seeder. Afterward, drag the area with a piece of chain link fence or drag mat to break up the soil cores and mix the seed into the soil.
It’s also possible to prepare the site with a vertical mower. When run over the lawn, the knife-like blades of the vertical mower slice through the thatch and penetrate into the upper 1/4 to 1/2 inch of soil. One or two passes should be sufficient. Afterwards, remove any dislodged debris from the lawn. Sow grass seed over the lawn with a drop seeder. Work the seed into the soil by again going over the site with the vertical mower.

Large areas also can be overseeded with a slit seeder. A slit seeder makes small grooves in the soil and deposits the seed directly into the slits.

Core aerators, vertical mowers and slit seeders can be rented at many garden centers and rental agencies. If you would rather not do the work yourself, many professional lawn care companies can overseed your lawn.

Post Seeding Care: Keep the seedbed moist with frequent, light applications of water. It’s usually necessary to water at least once or twice a day. Continue to mow the lawn at a height of 1-1/2 to 2 inches. Mow the lawn frequently to reduce the competition from the established turfgrass. When the new seedlings reach a height of 1-1/2 to 2 inches, gradually increase the mowing height over the next several weeks. The final mowing height should be 2-1/2 to 3 inches. Approximately six weeks after germination, fertilize the lawn by applying 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
When properly overseeded, a thin, scruffy-looking lawn can be turned into a thick, lush lawn in just a few weeks.
Source: UK Ag. Communications Exclusive, “Identifying and taming poison ivy,” Shawn Wright, UK Extension Specialist, 2023

Dealing with Chiggers in the Landscape

Fast Facts

- Chiggers are immature mites that feed on the skin of animals and induce an aggravating rash with an intense itchy feeling.
- They are most commonly encountered in overgrown areas but can live in yards and near parks and camps where they will spoil a nice weekend outside.
- Skin based repellents for ticks and mosquitoes can also repel chiggers. DEET is the best option for your skin, permethrin is an insecticide you can apply to clothing.
- Over the counter medications, like hydrocortisone, may help, though the itchy symptoms will likely persist for about 10-14 days.

Figure 1: As immature mites, chiggers only have six legs. They are almost invisible to the naked eye; this image is highly magnified to show their body plan off. Photo by Jim Kalisch, UNL Entomology

Pest Description, Feeding Style, and Symptoms

Chiggers are barely visible to the naked eye. You likely won't see them in the landscape or when they are on your body to feed. If you were to look at one under a microscope or powerful magnifying glass, you would notice that they have six legs, and they are usually reddish in color.

Chiggers are parasites that feed on digested skin cells. They are the immature larval stage of a predatory mite. When chiggers are on their host, they will insert a tube-like mouthpart into the skin. Then, they will pump in their "saliva" which will dissolve the nearby skin cells. After this, they will slurp up the resulting skin slurry. This can happen over the course of 2-4 days. It is important to note that chiggers are external parasites. The mite doesn't burrow into the skin.

The effects of chigger feeding are much more noticeable than the chigger itself. Bites are usually located in areas with thinner skin, or an area being constricted by clothing. Common bite sites are the ankles, behind knees, the groin area, the waistband area, in armpits, and around bra lines. The effects of being bitten may not appear for 12-24 hours after exposure to the chiggers. The area bitten can be inflamed and hardened, with a reddish hue. The center may have a red dot and be sunken, they could be red and slightly raised, they may also develop a large pustule that can pop like a blister. Different individuals may react differently to bites from parasites.

Life Cycle in Kentucky

Chiggers overwinter as adults, hiding in the soil until spring. When temperatures begin to rise, the soil temperature will be around 60 °F, they will emerge and mate. The eggs will then be laid in the soil as well, usually in habitats that are overgrown. After the eggs hatch, the chiggers that attack humans and pets will then crawl to the ends of blades of grass or tips of other plants and wait for a host. After feeding, this parasitic stage will fall off of the host and molt to the next stage. In Kentucky, there can be multiple generations of chiggers with bites possibly occurring over the entire growing season but peaks in spring and late summer.

How to Protect Yourself

To avoid chigger habitats, you can try to avoid entering unmown or overgrown areas and stick to managed trails. Wearing long pants, that are tucked into socks or shoes, and long sleeves can reduce the ability of chiggers to reach your skin. When you come in from outdoor activities, even short ones like weeding, you can also dislodge chiggers by wiping your legs down with a dry towel or taking a quick shower and scrubbing your lower appendages.

Using insect repellents on your skin can also protect you from chiggers. Skin based repellents include DEET, picaridin, IR-3535, and oil of lemon eucalyptus. These also help to repel ticks and mosquitoes. Depending on the percentage of the active ingredient in the product and the amount of time you plan to spend outside, you may need to make multiple applications to ensure protection.

Beyond skin-based repellents, if you will be spending extended periods of time in chigger habitat (i.e., working outside, camping, hunting, etc.) you can treat your clothing with permethrin. This is a true insecticide, so it shouldn't be applied to the skin but once it is dry on clothing, it will kill chiggers (as well as ticks and other pests) when they climb onto you clothing.

If you do get chigger bites, they can be treated with over-the-counter medication (such as hydrocortisone, calamine lotion, etc.) or you may want to consult with a medical professional about prescriptions to help with relief.

Figure 2: Chiggers are external parasites only; they do not burrow into your skin and live there.
The orange arrow in this image is pointing to a chigger feeding on a person's leg.
Photo by Jim Kalisch, UNL Entomology

Dealing with Chiggers in the Landscape continued

Treating Chigger Habitats

Long-term solutions to chiggers include brush removal, mowing, and landscape management to cut down on suitable habitats. Increasing light penetration and reducing humidity in given areas (by opening them up through plant removal) can reduce chigger attraction to an area. It also reduces habitat for other potential chigger hosts, meaning there could be fewer chiggers in that area.

Insecticides won't provide long-term control over chiggers but can help to reduce populations quickly so you can get back outside and work or enjoy your landscape. Hot spot treatments with products containing bifenthrin, permethrin, cyhalothrin, or carbaryl would provide 1-2 weeks of control (depending on the product used and the weather). Follow label directions but treat the afflicted vegetation up to a height of about three feet. Treating in April or May would provide effective timing, in serious infestations there may need to be a follow up application in June.

CAUTION! Pesticide recommendations in this publication are registered for use in Kentucky, USA ONLY! The use of some products may not be legal in your state or country. Please check with your local county agent or regulatory official before using any pesticide mentioned in this publication.
Of course, **ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW LABEL DIRECTIONS FOR SAFE USE OF ANY PESTICIDE!**

By Jonathan L. Larson, Extension Entomologist, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture

Figure 3: The ankles, knees, groins, waists, and armpits are all chigger bite hotspots. People can be bitten by a few to many chiggers and react in different ways. Some develop dots like we see here, others may end up with pustule-like bites. Photo by Jim Kalisch, UNL Entomology

Water Wisely This Summer

Kentucky summers can feel like living inside a greenhouse — high heat, thick air and the occasional thunderstorm that somehow misses your yard entirely. When the thermometer sticks in the 90s with little rain, plants need help. The trick is watering smart, not nonstop.

Watering your yard in the early morning lets water sink in while the sun's still low, so less of it evaporates into thin air. Lawns built on tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass want roughly an inch to an inch and a half of moisture each week. Pay attention to color and timing: when blades turn a tired gray-green, your footprints linger a bit too long or it hasn't rained in a week or so, it's time to run the sprinklers. Remember that watering thoroughly as opposed to frequently will promote deep root systems that help grass withstand dry periods.

Trees and shrubs run on a different clock. New saplings crave approximately 10 gallons of water weekly for each inch of trunk thickness. It may even help to build a small berm or raised area that surrounds newly planted trees to concentrate applied water around the root zone where it is needed most. Established woody plants settle for an inch of rain every week or so, and many native species can usually go two weeks without suffering harm. Stick a finger in the dirt — if those top two inches feel damp, hold off on watering. Roots that are too wet cause problems as well.

Veggies can be picky. Tomatoes, peppers, beans — once they decide to bloom and the fruit or pods bulk up — will wilt at the first hint of drought. Aim for an inch of water a week, but break it into two sessions if your soil drains fast. Drip lines or soaker hoses help keep leaves dry and disease at bay; if you're hand-watering, hit the soil, not the foliage, and do it early in the day. Also remove weeds and grass nearby that will compete with your food crops for moisture.

Soil texture matters. Bluegrass clay retains moisture like a sponge, so fewer, longer waterings are most effective. Sandy pockets in central or western parts of the state drain like a sieve, demanding shorter, more frequent pours. Either way, spread a three-inch mulch blanket — shredded bark, straw, even last fall's leaves. Mulch cuts surface evaporation, evens out soil temperature and prolongs soil moisture which saves you from constant hose duty. Keep mulch two to three inches from the base of plants to allow air movement and drying — prolonged moisture in these areas may promote disease.

It could also be very helpful to keep a rain gauge staked in the yard. When a summer storm dumps an inch, skip the next watering cycle and let nature foot the bill. And before cranking irrigation up during a dry stretch, glance at city notices. Some counties post watering advisories once reservoir levels start to look shallow.

Source: Rick Durham, Horticulture Extension Professor

Lightning Death Statistics

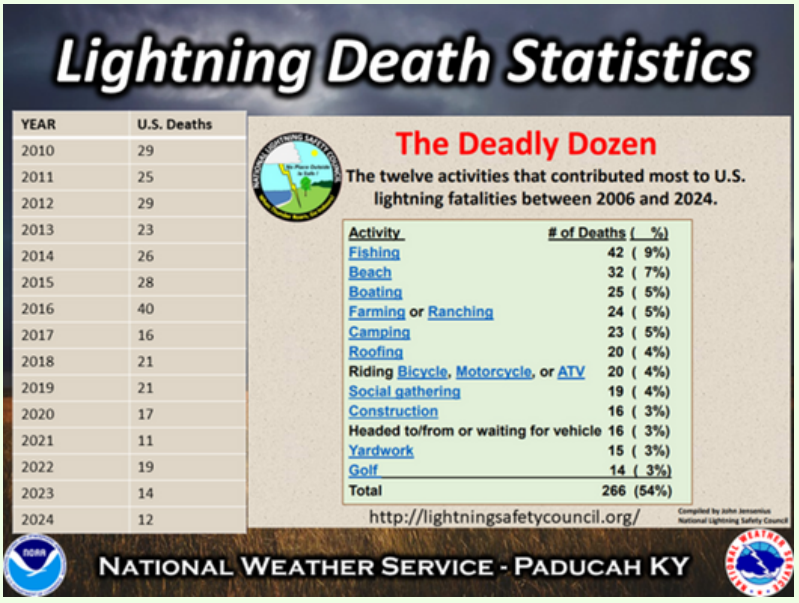
While the risk for severe thunderstorms that produce tornadoes, large hail, and damaging winds is greatest during the spring across most of the country, the dangers of lightning can occur during all times of the year. Every year, hundreds of people are seriously injured from lightning strikes. The good news is that lightning deaths have trended downward in recent years thanks to greater preparedness and education. However, numerous people are still killed every year. Looking at the statistics for lightning fatalities, the majority of lightning deaths occurred while people were doing outdoor activities.

The deadliest activity when it comes to lightning strikes is fishing, followed by beach going, boating, camping, farming/ranching, riding bikes/motorcycles/ATVs, roofing, gathering outside, working construction, walking to a vehicle, yardwork, and playing soccer or golf. If you are caught outside during a thunderstorm, remember that there is no safe place outside from lightning. If a thunderstorm is occurring or nearby, seek shelter inside a sturdy enclosed structure. A hard-topped vehicle can also provide good shelter.

Keep these things in mind when it comes to lightning safety:

1. Your chances of being struck by lightning depend on how you react when storms are in the area.
2. Remember: “When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors!” If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning!
3. The threat of lightning increases as a storm approaches, peaks when it is overhead, and gradually diminishes as it moves away.
4. Many people wait too long to get to a safe place and then go back outside too soon before the threat is over. Wait about 30 minutes after you hear the last rumble of thunder to return outside.

By Derrick Snyder - National Weather Service Paducah, KY



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!**

- August 2 - Tree Mulching with Trees Lexington @ William Wells Brown Elementary
- August 2 - River Sweep (Rescheduled Date) @ Kelley's Landing Park
- August 2 - Volunteer Morning @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- August 5 - Elk Lick Creek Exploration @ Floracliff Nature Sanctuary
- August 5 - Mosses & Liverworts @ McConnell Springs Park
- August 7 - Wild One's Invasive Plant Talk @ St. Michael's Church
- August 9 - Volunteer Morning @ Kelley's Landing Park
- August 12 - Trees Lexington's Soil & Water for Trees Talk @ Good Foods Co-op
- August 12 - Lichens, Plants & Air Quality Seminar at Floracliff Nature Sanctuary
- August 14-24 - Kentucky State Fair
- August 16 - Mosses & Liverworts @ McConnell Springs Park
- August 16 - Bat Hike @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- August 18 - Summer Wildflower Walk @ Hisle Farm Park
- August 19 - Gardening with Tropicals @ The Arboretum
- August 19 - Trees Lexington's Right Tree, Right Place Talk @ Good Goods Co-op
- August 23 - Tree Mulching with Trees Lexington @ God's Pantry Food Bank
- August 23 - Volunteer Morning @ McConnell Springs Park
- August 29 - Kentucky Conservation Committee's Wild & Scenic Film Festival

August Quick Tips

- Many short season vegetables can be planted now for a fall crop. Look at kale, carrots, radishes, lettuce etc. Keep in mind the shortening days will cause plants to mature more slowly. Allow at least two weeks longer than the predicted days to harvest.
- Finish trimming shrubs and hedges this month to allow time for re-growth to mature before winter.
- Do not spray pesticides in the heat. Wait until late evening or early morning when temperatures are cooler. Always read labels thoroughly for additional precautions.
- Divide crowded perennials now through mid-September. Late flowering perennials, like chrysanthemums and Japanese anemone, are best divided in spring.
- Harvest vegetables as they mature. Allowing fruits and vegetables to ripen seed on the plant will reduce further yields.
- Monitor plants in the squash and pumpkin family for squash bug and squash vine borer. Treat as necessary before a significant problem develops.
- Bagworms are still a problem on evergreens. Monitor plants closely as small bagworms are much easier to control than the more mature larvae.

Recipe of the Month

Scalloped Okra and Corn

4 cups sliced fresh or frozen okra
4 tablespoons olive oil
1½ cups cooked corn kernels, drained
2 tablespoons whole wheat flour
1 cup skim milk
8 ounces shredded 2% cheddar cheese
1 cup Italian style dry bread crumbs

1. Stir-fry okra in 2 tablespoons olive oil for 10 minutes. **Place** in baking dish alternating layers with drained corn.
2. Prepare white sauce by heating remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil in saucepan over low heat and blending in whole wheat flour. **Cook** oil and flour mixture 1 to 2 minutes.
3. Add skim milk all at once, cooking quickly and stirring constantly until mixture thickens.
4. Stir in cheese until blended.
5. Pour mixture over vegetables. **Sprinkle** bread crumbs over casserole. Bake at 350° F for approximately 45 minutes, until casserole is heated through and the crumbs have browned.

Yield: 8, 1 cup servings

Nutrition Analysis: *220 calories; 9 g total fat; 2 g saturated fat; 0 g trans fat; 5 mg cholesterol; 340 mg sodium; 24 g total carbohydrate; 4 g dietary fiber; 7 g sugars; 9 g protein; 20% recommended allowance for vitamin C; 20% recommended allowance for calcium; 8% recommended allowance for iron.*

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

Kentucky Proud

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Newsletter Enclosed *Fayette County "By the Yard"*

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