

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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March

2024

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Welcome Reena Martin

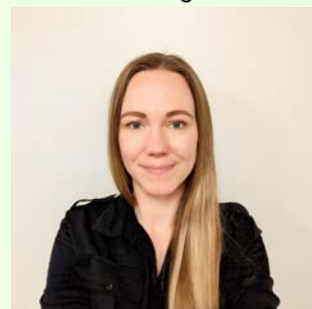
Hi! I am very excited for my new role as Horticulture Assistant at the Fayette County Extension Office. I graduated from Berea College in 2014 with a B.S. in Agriculture & Natural Resources with a focus on Sustainability & Environmental Studies. While at Berea, I participated in a variety of work-study placements including manager of the Non-Traditional Student Program, teaching assistant to plant and soil science courses and summer field assistant in the campus gardens. I also spent an internship focusing on remediation opportunities for surface mining sites in Eastern Kentucky, which included beekeeping, black walnut plantings and soil studies.

After graduation, I moved to Lexington with a strong desire to serve underserved populations. This was at the crest of the farm-to-table movement. I joined a very young non-profit at the time, FoodChain, as an Americorps VISTA. FoodChain models innovative forms of urban agriculture, such as indoor aquaponics, and demonstrates what a sustainable food system can look like. Over the next 5 years, I became their Education Director and developed much of their youth programming -- like the Classroom Aquaponics Program, Cook. Eat. Grow. cooking classes and the Power of Produce Club to engage youth at the Lexington Farmer's Market. I also led the Fayette County Farm to School Coalition to incorporate more local food into Lexington's school systems.

Knowing that youth education wasn't my forever dream, I moved on to work at another innovative non-profit, GreenHouse17. GreenHouse17 serves survivors of intimate partner abuse in 17 counties in central Kentucky. Their emergency shelter is located on 40 acres in rural Fayette County. On this land, advocates work with survivors to produce a cut flower CSA as well as fruit and vegetables to serve in daily meals. Here I worked as the Community Engagement Manager. In this role, I celebrated the hard work of survivors across the community, regularly selling out of the summer flower CSA and annual U-Pick events on the farm.

Now it is with much excitement to continue to work with volunteers and the community to further the horticultural knowledge in Fayette County through this position with UK Extension. I look forward to all the new opportunities this role will bring!

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Simple Pruning Tips for Your Fruit Trees During the Dormant Season

All fruit trees must be pruned and trained to enhance fruit production, as the way the tree is shaped will impact fruit yield, fruit size and ripening. In Kentucky, the ideal time to prune fruit trees is in late winter or early spring.

Both newly planted and mature fruit trees must be pruned to maintain size and shape. Here are some easy tips:

- For young trees, pruning to a strong central leader with four to five lateral branches is most common.
- Heading cuts can be done on mature trees to control the tree's height; thinning cuts can open up the canopy and maximize sunlight and airflow. For older, overgrown trees that need heavier pruning, removing up to 1/3 of the larger branches over several years will help rejuvenate the tree.
- Pruning cuts should be made at the base of the branches, leaving a ¼" to ½" branch collar intact for proper healing. Dead and diseased shoots and limbs should be removed, as well as any shriveled or 'mummy' fruit remaining on the tree.
- Sharp pruners or loppers should be used to ensure clean cuts. Sanitize the tool blades between each cut with rubbing alcohol or a 10% bleach solution so as not to spread any disease that may be present.

For more information on pruning apple trees, visit the UK Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/UKAgriculture>.

Pruning Central Leader Apple Trees (<https://bit.ly/48VR31Q>) discusses trees that are pruned to the classic pyramid or oval shape.

Pruning Tall Spindle Apple Trees (<https://bit.ly/4bh85JA>) focuses on the high-density supported training system with trees planted on dwarf rootstocks, producing a crop as little as a year after planting.

The Kentucky Christmas Tree Association's 18th Annual Plant Auction will be held 10:00 a.m. until 12 noon, Saturday, April 20, 2024, at the Fayette County Extension Office, 1140 Harry Sykes Way, Lexington, Kentucky 40504. Bid and take home some Kentucky grown nursery stock. It is a perfect time to plant. 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.

Moles

Moles! As snow melts and yards begin to be inspected, you may begin to notice the all too familiar and unwelcome mole tunnels that will cause consternation with the first mowing in a few weeks. We tend to not pay much attention until those pesky critters show up in our yard.

From a research-based perspective, Purdue Extension generally recommends one of two methods of mole control as being most effective. Most other methods would be considered either inconsistent or ineffective. No matter what method is chosen, 100% control may be an unreasonable expectation.

Trapping remains the most reliable method of mole control. However, it does take practice, patience, persistence, and perhaps a bit of luck. I often describe it as both an art and a science.

Mole traps are available at several local retailers. Harpoon traps, scissor traps, and choker traps are available. The harpoon trap has the trigger placed on the soil surface over a slightly depressed mole run. When triggered, spikes impale the mole vertically down. Scissor traps are placed in the mole run. A trigger in the middle of the trap enables the capture of the mole via scissor-like jaws whether he advances or retreats. Also called a choker loop trap, the choker trap captures and chokes the offending mole when the trigger is activated. Choose a well-used mole run to set one or more traps. In general, multiple traps will increase your chances of success. Of course, one advantage of trapping is that you know when you've been successful!

Until a few years ago, most mole baits had provided inconsistent results. However, a product introduced in recent years has shown effectiveness. It mimics a favorite food of moles: earthworms. When the poison gel-type "worm" is placed inside a mole run, the mole consumes the poison worm and later dies. The product contains the active ingredient bromethalin. Be sure to read and follow all label directions, and heed precautions, especially regarding curious pets. Several brand names now offer this product. The best results are usually obtained during the cold weather months when insect activity is at its lowest.

A common misconception about mole control suggests that if you control grubs, you'll take care of the moles. Grubs make up only a portion of the mole's diet, which also includes earthworms and other soil animals. Moles may not move far from a treated lawn and may periodically re-invade the area in search of food or a mate.

Moles do have some redeeming qualities. They eat many soil insects, some of which are pests, including grubs, termites, and slugs. And they aerate the soil, allowing deeper air and water penetration into the soil profile. Of course, these aren't the first things you think of when you have mole runs in your yard.

Source: John E. Woodmansee, Purdue Extension

Winter Preparation Gives Gardeners a Jump on Spring

As winter draws to a close, it is time for vegetable and flower gardeners to start preparing for the spring planting season, said Rick Durham, associate extension professor for consumer horticulture at the University of Kentucky.

The vegetable growing season is fast approaching for some areas of the state. Gardeners can plant peas as early as late February in western Kentucky, and they can plant cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, spinach greens and onions as early as mid March, he said. Central Kentucky gardeners can start planting peas in early March and eastern-area gardeners can begin planting in mid March.

One of the things vegetable gardeners can do during the late winter is to have their soil tested. If the soil test indicates a nutrient is lacking, gardeners can add it to the soil. This is especially true if a pH change is needed. Nitrogen, which is the most commonly needed nutrient, is an exception to late winter nutrient application. It should be added just before or during planting, he said.

Late winter and early spring is also the time to incorporate organic matter into gardens, which enhances the soil's productivity, Durham said. Organic matter can be obtained from either commercially available sources that include composted manure and other composted products, such as leaf mold, or compost produced by gardeners since the last growing season. Gardeners should apply compost up to two to three inches deep in their garden and then work it into the soil until it reaches 10 to 12 inches in depth.

Gardeners should also remove debris from their beds to prevent potential pest problems in the spring.

"Debris can serve as an overwintering place for pests, both insects and diseases," Durham said. "Insects and their eggs can be hidden in the debris, and the diseases can produce spores once they begin growing again, which can infest gardens."

Those with flower gardens may already be seeing signs of spring as bulbs, such as tulips and daffodils, start to send up shoots. Many other garden perennials will begin showing signs of growth soon.

"As the plants begin to grow, if you mulched a lot in the fall, pull the mulch back around the crown of the perennial," Durham said. "If you didn't mulch in the fall, you should mulch this spring."

Unlike perennials, most annuals shouldn't be planted until after Derby Day, or the first of May, to prevent damage from a late spring freeze.

By Katie Pratt

Hellebores

Hellebores are wonderful garden plants, yet they remain fairly uncommon in perennial gardens. When you consider their evergreen nature, ease of culture and beautiful late winter blooms it is hard to imagine why they have taken so long to catch on. The tide is turning for these shade loving plants. In fact the perennial plant association chose Hellebore as the perennial plant of the year in 2005.

Over the last decade or so Hellebore breeders have created and introduced many new cultivars in a range of colors and combinations, many with contrasting spots of color in the flower centers. Improvements in plant form have also produced upward facing blooms, better foliage, and several double flowered types. The bloom color ranges from green to white to rose to burgundy, with some varieties approaching black. There are even some yellow varieties making their way into catalogs and shops.

The most popular hellebores are the oriental hybrids, which are known as Lenten roses because they traditionally bloom around the beginning of lent. Hellebores are easily grown, thrive in partial shade, and can even handle dry shade situations. The plants prefer soils high in organic matter but will tolerate less than ideal conditions. They resent wet feet. Most grow about two feet tall and have glossy evergreen foliage. The real selling point is their miraculous late winter bloom, which typically begins in February here in Kentucky. You may want to trim some of the winter battered foliage to showcase the emerging flowers.

Much like peonies, hellebores can take a few years to reach their full potential. But a gardener's patience is well rewarded and a mature clump of hellebores in full bloom is a spectacle you won't soon forget.

Although these beauties were once hard to find in nurseries, you can now find them offered for sale and with a little investigating, you can find many unique colors and varieties. If you aren't familiar with hellebores, try a few in your garden. If you are fortunate enough to have grown them for years look into the newer varieties available today, I think you will be pleasantly surprised at the offerings.



The Spring Garden

The spring garden contains cool-season crops that are planted and harvested from late winter to late spring. The seed of some of these crops can be planted directly in the garden soil, while others will need to be started in a greenhouse or other suitable growing area and then transplanted to the garden.

Spring garden plants grow best with relatively cool air temperatures (50° to 65°F) and are raised either for their leaves, stems or flower buds. Peas are grown for their immature fruits. These crops produce their vegetative growth during spring's short, cool days. If they are planted too late in the spring, summer heat reduces their quality by forcing some to flower and form seeds (bolt), and others to develop off flavors, bitterness, poor texture and low yields.

Avoid these problems by planting spring vegetables as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring since light frost will not injure them. Plant either seeds or transplants, allowing the vegetables to reach edible maturity before hot summer days arrive.

Plant as soon as the soil is workable and dry enough so it does not form wet clods. Do not work the soil when it is wet. Doing so can ruin the texture for several years. Wait for the best conditions no matter how much the planting bug is nibbling at your fingers.

Do not use organic mulches in early spring. Rather, let as much sunlight as possible reach the soil to warm it. After May 1, you can use mulches to conserve soil moisture and help prevent weeds.

Plant spring garden crops together so that you can plant fall vegetables in the same area later. When "double cropping," do not plant closely related vegetables in the same rows because of possible disease and insect carryover from the spring crop.

Source: Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky, ID-128.

The Spring Garden			
Vegetable	Seeds	Transplants	Days to Maturity
Beets	x		55-60
Bibb lettuce	x	x	60-80
Broccoli		x	40-90
Brussels sprouts		x	80-90
Cabbage		x	60-100
Carrots	x		60-80
Cauliflower		x	50-100
Celery		x	100-130
Chinese cabbage	x	x	43-75
Collards	x		75-90
Endive	x	x	60-90
Kale	x	x	50-60
Kohlrabi	x		50-70
Leaf lettuce	x	x	40-50
Mustard greens	x		35-60
Onions	x	x	40-120
Peas	x		60-80
Potatoes			90-140
Radishes	x		20-30
Spinach	x		40-70
Swiss chard	x	x	55-60
Turnips	x		40-60
Turnip greens	x		30-50



March Quick Tips

- Sow grass seed. First half of the month is ideal but you can seed all month with reasonable results. Turf type tall fescue is your best choice. Dwarf varieties equal less mowing.
- Feed bulbs a balanced fertilizer now to promote nice blooms next year. Do not cut leaves down after flowering. They provide food for the plant. Let them die naturally.
- Vegetable gardens are awakening. Only work soil when crumbly. Squeeze a handful of soil into a ball. Drop it from waist height. If it crumbles easily soil is dry enough to work. If not wait for drier times as wet soils form hard clods.
- Remove old stems from rhubarb and asparagus. Fertilize with nitrogen, compost or rotted manure.
- Time to plant cool crops in the garden. These include: asparagus, beets, cabbage plants, carrots, chard, collards, kale, lettuce seed and plants, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach, and turnips.
- Repot houseplants. Increase pot size gradually. Plants may be fed a weak fertilizer solution (one quarter strength).
- Plant pansies and other cold tolerant flowers.
- Use sunny days to begin bed clean up. Be careful not to tread on emerging plants.
- Cut back perennials and ornamental grasses. Most grasses can be divided at this time. Grasses are very woody and may require an ax.
- Prune and fertilize brambles and blueberries.
- Clean out birdhouses or if you don't have any, now is the perfect time to hang a few.
- Seeds of hardy annuals such as larkspur, bachelor's buttons, Shirley and California poppies should be direct sown in the garden now.
- Spray peach trees with a fungicide for the control of peach leaf curl diseases. See HO-57 for more info on peaches.
- Register for Gardener's Toolbox Classes: <https://fayette.ca.uky.edu/classregistration>

Recipe of the Month



Noodles Florentine

8 ounces whole wheat egg noodles	¼ teaspoon pepper	1½ cups diced, low sodium cooked ham
3 tablespoons butter	2 cups fat-free milk	10 ounces fresh spinach, cooked and drained
4 tablespoons whole wheat flour	2 cups low-fat cheddar cheese	¼ cup bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. **Cook** noodles according to package directions; **drain**. In a small saucepan, **melt** butter over medium heat. **Add** flour and pepper; **blend** to a smooth paste. Gradually **add** milk, stirring constantly and **cook** until thickened. **Add** cheese, **stirring** constantly, until melted. **Place** half of the noodles in a greased 2 quart, shallow baking dish. Over the noodles, **sprinkle** a layer of ham and spinach.

Drizzle half of the cheese sauce over the mixture. **Repeat** with second layer of noodles, ham, spinach and remaining cheese sauce. **Sprinkle** with bread crumbs. **Bake** for 25 minutes.

Yield: 8, 1½ cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 310 calories, 11 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 45 mg cholesterol, 680 mg sodium, 29 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 4 g sugar, 23 g protein.



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<http://plateitup.ca.uky.edu>

Plate it up!



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