

# BY THE YARD

## HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

 Cooperative  
Extension Service

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May  
2025

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### Big Congratulations to Reena Martin!

We are thrilled to share that Reena Martin has officially accepted the position of Fayette County's newest Horticulture Agent beginning May 1, 2025! 🌸🌿

Reena is already a familiar face to many—she's been an invaluable part of our team as the Horticulture Program Technician over the past year. Her passion, knowledge, and dedication have made a lasting impact, and we couldn't be more excited to see her step into this new leadership role.

Reena brings incredible talent and energy to the position, and we're looking forward to all the ways she'll expand our outreach and strengthen our community connections.

Here's what Reena had to say about this exciting next chapter:

*"I am so grateful and honored for this opportunity to expand the horticultural efforts and programs of Extension in the county. I hope to continue bringing even more relevant and meaningful horticultural information to all the diverse communities in the area. At risk of sounding painfully cliché, this is my dream job. It's work I love doing. Thank you to everyone who has encouraged me this past year. I hope to see you at our Growing Community event on May 3rd (at the new Marksburg Library)!"*



Please join us in celebrating Reena and this exciting new beginning! 🌞

Jamie Dockery, Fayette County Extension Agent for Horticulture  
[jamie.dockery@uky.edu](mailto:jamie.dockery@uky.edu)

### Agents Note

What a wet start to the season! Both Jamie and I hope you have fared well through the torrential 10 inches of rain in just 5 days that we received last month. Submerged basements and leaky roofs aside, we came out of it fairly well. Our hearts go out to our friends in Frankfort and all those along the many rivers and creeks of Kentucky while we hope that this is the last of the extreme weather for the year. (Very wishful thinking, I know.) At the very least, let's manifest a dry enough May to get our beloved tomatoes in the ground.

While you are out and about supporting great causes through various plant sales and exchanges, we will provide you with some easy tips to ensure you buy healthy plants. If you are a fruit tree grower, or plan to be, we've gone into a deep dive about fire blight – an early season disease that can be detrimental to apple and pear trees. It's also a good time to lay mulch down on those and other trees and shrubs. We'll share the "right way" to mulch that will help keep your plants healthy all season long. Lastly, despite the craze that flooded news stories last year, this year is actually a year where cicadas will make some noise in the Bluegrass region.

So, with all of that and a growing garden to-do list, we would like to encourage you to view your garden, landscape or lawn as a sanctuary space. Often, we are bombarded with stressful news, work and events that can make it difficult to find peace. Let the outdoors take that stress from you. Let the to-do list be suggestions to encourage gentle work alongside plants. It's a practice. A practice that we sincerely hope will bring you peace and joy. In other words, don't take it too seriously and have fun!

In appreciation,  
Reena Martin, Fayette County Extension Agent for Horticulture  
[reena.martin@uky.edu](mailto:reena.martin@uky.edu)

### MEMORIAL DAY

Remember And Honor  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Our office will be closed  
Monday, May 26, 2025



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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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## Plant Sales: What to Look For

They're popping up everywhere! Plant sales, giveaways and exchanges are only growing in popularity and for good reason. Often these events support small, local nonprofits and organizations that need community involvement now more than ever. While participation in these events is highly encouraged, here are a few tips to ensure you are receiving plants that will thrive. This information is also incredibly helpful, and sometimes even more important, when shopping for plants in big box stores or local nurseries as well.

1. Evaluate Habit & Form. The overall habit or shape of the plant should be well-balanced and not too big or small for the container. Trees should have well-spaced branches with no double leaders. Perennials, annuals, and vegetable transplants should be sturdy, robust, and compact. Bigger is not necessarily better! Spindly or lanky plants, especially with annuals and vegetables, do not transplant well.

2. Look at Condition & Quality. Leaves should not be discolored or mottled, and the plant should not be missing or dropping leaves. A few brown leaf edges or minor spots are not typically a problem. Plants with excessive leaf damage, however, should not be purchased. Perennials, annuals, and vegetables should be firm and upright – not limp or wilted. Trees and shrubs should be free of broken branches and scrapes or damage to the trunk or stems.

3. Inspect the Root System. One of the hardest things to evaluate is the root system, but it is one of the most important. Don't be shy about slipping the pot down to inspect the root ball. The roots should be firm and white, not mushy and brown. There should not be an excessive number of roots coming out the bottom of the pot.

The roots of balled and burlaped trees can be difficult to evaluate. Root balls should have a minimum diameter of 10 to 12 inches for every inch of stem diameter. For example, a two-inch diameter tree should have, at minimum, a root ball that is 20 to 24 inches across. While some roots may extend out of the burlap into the surrounding mulch, an excessive number of roots, or burlap that has begun to break down, is an indication that the tree has been in storage for too long.

4. Check for Insects, Diseases, & Weeds. Inspect all plants for signs or symptoms of disease or insect pests. Look under the leaves and near the crown (base) of the plants. Avoid containers with excessive weeds alongside the desired plant.

5. Don't Be Swayed by Flowers. Remember, while flowers are pretty, they are not required for purchase. Buying only plants that are in bloom often creates garden spaces with heavy spring bloom and little interest later in the season because you do most of your plant shopping in spring. Pretty flowers are nice, but they are not a universal sign of good health and high quality!

*Source: Aaron Steil, "Tips for Shopping and Selecting Quality Plants," Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, 2025*

### WILD ONES NATIVE PLANT EXCHANGE

Join Wild Ones Lexington to celebrate and support native plant gardening. Bring your extra native perennials, shrubs, trees and grasses and replace them with new natives in our plant exchange. Plants (natives only) should be potted and labeled. No native plants to donate? Bring drinks or snack food. A drawing for door prizes will also take place. Enjoy an evening of learning more about native plants, meeting plant enthusiasts, and exchanging gardening tips. May 1st at 5:30 pm at St. Michael's Church (2025 Bellefonte Dr). \$10 admission fee – cash or checks only!

## Cicadas! This is the year!

Kentucky will be the epicenter for the emergence of billions of Brood XIV cicadas this spring. While periodical cicadas have appeared in Western Kentucky counties over the past few years, the largest emergence area for 2025 will occur across most of Central and Eastern Kentucky.

While these time-keeping, red-eyed insects are not harmful to humans or pets, their egg-laying habits could damage the branches of young trees and shrubs. Tree netting is the most effective, non-invasive way to protect your landscaping and fruit trees.

The 17-year periodical cicadas are expected to emerge from the soil to molt into their flying, adult form in late April to early May, when the soil warms to the mid-60s. Periodical cicadas emerge much earlier than annual cicadas and in greater numbers.

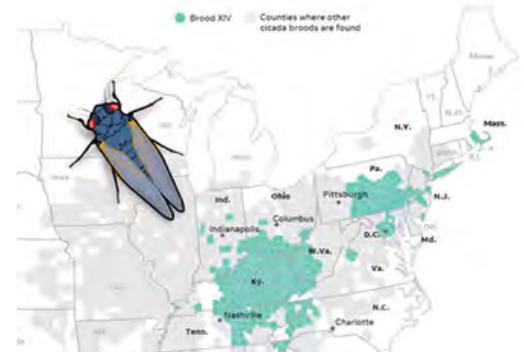
Cicadas do not bite or sting, and the feeding habits of the adults do not damage plants. Some may find the abundance of molted shells and loud, near deafening singing a nuisance, while others will enjoy this pageantry of nature. The periodical cicadas' choral song, however, is a cue to protect landscaping and orchards.

Female cicadas will lay their eggs into the new, lower branches of several species after mating: apple, arborvitae, ash, beech, berry and grape vines, crab apple, cherry, dogwood, hickory, holly, maple, lilacs, magnolia, oak, peach, pear, rose bushes, spirea and willows are the most likely targets.

The cicada's ovipositor is long and sharp, and they will inject 200 to 600 eggs into the stem tissue. This "flagging" may cause the tender branches to snap. The fallen branch makes for a much shorter journey for the hatching nymphs from egg to soil but is not beneficial for the growing tree. Once the eggs hatch, the nymphs will feed on root sap, and a heavy population of nymphs in the soil may also impact the tree's root system.

While using insecticides may be less costly, the safest and most effective way to prevent tree and shrub damage is by using cicada netting, which prevents females from laying their eggs. Netting is suggested for use on new and smaller trees and should be installed when the cicadas begin to sing, about mid-May for most of the area. Trees that are established in the landscape—too tall to net for most people—will grow throughout the egg-laying period.

*Source: Jonathan Larson, "Periodical cicadas emerge across Kentucky this spring: How to protect your trees and shrubs," UK Marketing & Ag. Communications Exclusives, 2025*



Map of predicted emergence of Brood XIV.  
Janet Loehrke/USA Today.



A red-eyed periodical cicada.  
ENTFACT-446

## Mulching for Success

Excessive or improperly applied mulch can adversely affect plants. The International Society of Arboriculture advises to apply mulch properly; if it is too deep, piled against the trunk, or the wrong material, it can cause significant harm to trees and shrubs.

The benefits of mulching are well documented and include the following:

- Conserves soil moisture by increasing water infiltration and slowing evaporation
- Improves soil structure, fertility, and aeration as it decomposes
- Moderates soil temperature, protecting roots from extreme summer and winter temperatures
- Eliminates potential tree damage from mowers and trimmers
- Prevents soil compaction by reducing foot and vehicle traffic, allowing roots to "breathe"
- Impedes growth of weeds and grass that compete with tree roots for water and nutrients



A properly mulched tree.  
University of Maryland Extension.

## Mulching for Success (continued)

Here are tips to ensure you are using a proper mulching method:

- Organic mulches are preferable due to their soil-enhancing qualities. Hardwood bark makes very good, inexpensive mulch, especially when it contains a blend of bark, wood, and leaves.
- Mulch can be applied to landscape trees at just about any time of the year. However, the best time to apply mulch is in the middle of spring, once soil temperatures have warmed enough for root growth to begin.
- Mulch as much of the area as possible, preferably to the outermost edge of the tree's canopy, referred to as the "drip line." Keep in mind, the drip line moves out as the tree grows.
- Apply a 2- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch and no more; use less if the soil is poorly drained. More than 4 inches may harm the tree's root system. If using finely textured or double-shredded mulch, use 1 to 2 inches since these materials allow less oxygen through to the root zone.
- For tree health, keep all mulch material away from the trunk. Allow the root flare (where the trunk meets the soil) to show. The root flare is at or near the ground line and is identifiable as a marked swelling of the tree's trunk where roots begin to extend outward.

Source: David R. Jackson, "Mulching Landscape Tree," Penn State Extension, 2018

## Fire Blight

Fire blight is a highly destructive disease of apple and pear trees. Many landscape trees and shrubs in the rose family are also susceptible to fire blight.

Fire blight is generally favored by high relative humidity or rainy conditions. Temperatures between 65°F - 70°F are ideal for the disease, although it may develop at temperatures outside of this range. Under these conditions, bacterial populations can build up rapidly. At 70°F, numbers of bacterial cells double every 20 minutes; one cell can become one billion cells overnight, each capable of causing a new infection.

The earliest disease symptoms are evident when blossoms are infected and become water-soaked, wilted, and darkened. As blooms collapse, infection spreads rapidly into other blossoms in the cluster, causing the entire spur to wilt suddenly and die. Small creamy white to amber droplets of bacterial ooze may be present on infected blossoms during periods of rain or high humidity. Diseased tissues usually remain attached to trees.

The key to fire blight management is preventing blossom infections; once infected, blossoms serve as a source of spread for the rest of the tree, as well as other trees in the planting or orchard. While few cultivars of apple, pear, or the various ornamental host species are immune to fire blight, some cultivars are more resistant or tolerant than others. Whenever possible, plant tolerant cultivars and cultivar/rootstock combinations.

Implementing cultural practices is also important in managing fire blight. Avoid practices that stimulate rapid tree growth; young plant tissue is susceptible to infection. Avoid excess fertilization. Avoid aggressive pruning that will stimulate tissue growth. Selectively prune trees to improve air circulation and to promote rapid drying of foliage. Do not plant new trees downwind from or near already infected trees. Remove and/or destroy debris; do not leave them on the ground.

Pruning can play an important role in a comprehensive fire blight management program. While removal of sources of the pathogen is desirable, pruning when the bacterium is active can further spread the pathogen. Due to the high risk of bacterial spread, we recommend that pruning blighted twigs and cankered branches be delayed until winter.

Diseased limbs may be flagged or painted during the growing season so they can be easily identified during winter. During late winter or early spring prune carefully so that ALL infected branches are removed. Blighted twigs should be pruned at least 6 to 8 inches below cankers and infected areas, preferably down to the branch union. Remove and destroy pruned material to eliminate potential sources of inoculum for subsequent growing seasons.



*Fire blight infected apple blossoms.*

Source: Nicole Gauthier & Cheryl Kaiser, "Fire Blight," Plant Pathology Fact Sheet PPFs-FR-T-12, UK Extension Plant Pathology, 2022



Cooperative  
Extension Service

# LIVING WITH ALPHA-GAL SYNDROME

Learn more about Alpha-gal Syndrome (red meat allergy) and how to reduce your risk with University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension during this free online class.

## TOPICS COVERED

- ALPHA-GAL SYNDROME BASICS
- TICK BITE PREVENTION
- DIET & LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT
- Q/A SESSION



Scan the QR Code to register for the online class. A watch party will be available at the Fayette County Extension Office for those unable to attend online.

**MAY 29, 2025**  
**7 - 8:30 PM**

Please contact the Fayette County Extension Office to RSVP for the webinar watch party or if you have any questions!

**LIMIT 30 PEOPLE FOR IN PERSON VIEWING**

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## What to Plant Now?

Earliest Safe Planting Date*	Planting Method	Vegetables
MAY 8	Start seeds outdoors	Sweet corn, mustard greens, radishes, lettuce
MAY 15	Start seeds outdoors	Green beans, lima beans
MAY 15	Move transplants to garden	Tomatoes, muskmelons, watermelons, squash

\*Dates are approximate for the Central Kentucky region

## Recipe of the Month





### Lean Green Lettuce Tacos

8 large lettuce leaves	$\frac{3}{4}$ pound extra lean ground beef	1 tablespoon finely chopped cilantro
1½ cup cooked brown rice	1 small zucchini, chopped	1 teaspoon lime juice
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup fresh corn kernels	1 ounce packet low-sodium taco seasoning	1 tomato, chopped
1 cup canned black beans, drained and rinsed	4 ounces low sodium tomato sauce	1 small red onion, chopped
1 tablespoon olive oil		

**Wash and dry** lettuce leaves. **Prepare** rice according package directions. **Cut** corn off cob. **Drain** and **rinse** black beans. In a skillet, **heat** the oil to medium; **add** ground beef and begin to **cook**. When beef begins to brown, **add** zucchini, corn and black beans to skillet. Continue to **cook** until vegetables are tender and beef is done. Do not overcook. **Add** in taco seasoning and tomato sauce and heat through. **Add** cilantro and lime juice to the cooked rice. **Place** equal amounts of rice mixture and taco mixture into lettuce leaves. **Top** each taco with chopped tomato and onion.

**Yield:** 8 servings

**Nutritional Analysis:** 180 calories, 4.5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 20 mg cholesterol, 350 mg sodium, 23 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 5 g sugars, 12 g protein.

## 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!**

- May 1 – Wild Ones Native Plant Exchange @ St. Michael's Church
- May 3 – GROWING COMMUNITY! @ Marksbury Library Branch
- May 3 – Spring Plant Exchange @ The Arboretum
- May 3 – Tree Planting with Trees Lexington @ Bluegrass United Church of Christ
- May 10 – Beginning Nature Drawing @ Floricliff Nature Sanctuary
- May 15 – Golden Hour Hike @ Floricliff Nature Sanctuary
- May 17 – Tree Planting with Trees Lexington @ God's Pantry
- May 27 – Building A Better Monarch Garden Seminar with Floricliff Nature Sanctuary

## May Quick Tips

- Mulch beds for weed control and moisture retention. Make sure to keep mulch away from tree trunks and the bases of shrubs.
- Monitor evergreens for bagworms. Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) is an effective organic control if you catch the larvae while they are small. Do not wait for the large "bags" to appear, as control will be difficult on older insects.
- Plant and seed vegetable gardens. Most warm season vegetables can be planted early this month and heat-lovers like peppers, squash, and sweet potatoes can go in later in the month.
- Replace pansies and other cool season plants with appropriate summer choices.
- Plant flowers. We should be frost free and good to go, although vinca will appreciate warmer temperatures later in the month.
- Divide and fertilize pond plants that have become overgrown.
- Move house plants outdoors later this month. Make sure you place them in a shady spot, or they are likely to sunburn.
- Prune evergreens now through August.
- 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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# Newsletter Enclosed *Fayette County* *“By the Yard”*

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