

# BY THE YARD

## HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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Native showy tickseed and swamp mallow in September.

As I write this, we are in the faux fall week of August with 55-degree mornings and days barely reaching 80. What a reprieve this summer! It has activated all things autumn in my gardening brain – winter squash, greens, pumpkins, herbal teas. Hibernation queues are prickling down my spine on these brisk mornings. Time to do a little less, a time to clean up the summer mess and almost a time to put it all to rest.

So, while we will inevitably have a couple more hot flashes of summer, let's start to embrace the settling down of the season. This month's newsletter will feature an herb you may notice blooming now and an insect that makes its presence known on our backyard milkweeds. We'll cover some activities to consider for lawn and garden maintenance as well.

And although the summer is winding down, there are still plenty of nature-based activities happening around Lexington. I know I'm going to try to make it to a few now that the weather is cooler and before the darkness of winter arrives.

In appreciation,

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## No Sorrow for Yarrow!

Common yarrow, or *Achillea millefolium*, has been named the 2024 Herb of the Year™ by the International Herb Association. With both native and non-native species being nearly indistinguishable, the true native range is difficult to determine. Yarrow pollen has been found in 60,000-year-old burial caves in Europe, indicating that humans have used it since prehistoric times.

Plants can grow as low as six inches or as tall as six feet, while others are medium height with strong stems suitable for containers. It thrives in sun but can tolerate shaded areas. Yarrow does well in average soil and is drought-tolerant blooming from April to October.

Cutting back plant stems before flowering in late spring can help control the height of the plant. It reproduces from both seeds and horizontal, underground stems (rhizomes). It can be aggressive and is best divided every two to three years to control its growth.



Fernleaf Yarrow, Illinois Extension

As cut flowers, they have an excellent vase life, and when dried, they fade to a cream color and work well for everlasting bouquets. The spicy-scented green foliage and the dried flowers add color and fragrance to potpourri.

This plant's flowers and leaves are toxic to dogs, cats, and horses and should be kept out of pastures.

Source: Carol Kagan, "Yarrow: Herb of the Year 2024." Penn State Extension, 2024

## The Milkweed Bug



Milkweed Bugs at the  
Fayette County Extension Office

Milkweed bugs, *Oncopeltus fasciatus*, feed on the seeds, leaves, and stems of milkweed plants. They are found in small groups on the plant, usually on the seed pods. Milkweed seeds seem to be the primary host food of the milkweed bug.

These bright red insects do little plant damage and are present for only a month or so. Though they can be prolific as the females can lay 25 to 35 eggs per day in small clusters.

If the milkweeds infested with milkweed bugs are grown as food plants for monarch butterflies it may be better to live with the damage. Simply remove leaf litter and spent stalks in the fall to eliminate overwintering sites.

Source: James Baker, "Milkweed Bug." PDIC Factsheets, NC State Extension, 2023

## Fall Lawn Maintenance

Fall is the best time of year to apply nitrogen to cool-season grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue. This helps the turf to develop a better root system, become very dense, and have much better color in late fall and early spring. Submit a soil sample to the Extension Office to determine what kind of fertilization will benefit your lawn best. You can fertilize now through the beginning of December.



Anna Evans, Unsplash

Early autumn is also the ideal time for laying down new seed or overseeding patchy areas. Be sure to rake back any debris to ensure good seed to soil contact and water thoroughly. If the weather is hot and windy, one or two light irrigations per day may be needed to ensure germination. Mid-August to early October is best for seeding cool season lawns.

Continue to spot treat broadleaf weeds with post-emergent herbicides. Remember that the best defense against weeds is a healthy lawn. Using good management practices may make herbicides unnecessary, but if you experience weed problems, you may choose to apply an herbicide so the turf can successfully compete with the weeds. You must accurately identify the kind of weed you want to control, so that you can choose the herbicide that will be effective in your environment. Feel free to contact us at the Fayette County Extension Office to help identify turf weeds. Be sure to read all herbicide labels thoroughly and carefully.

Source: UK AGR-206 Lawn Management, UK AGR-208 Weed Control for Kentucky Home Lawns, UK AGR-51 Renovating Your Lawns

## Recipe of the Month

### Apple Sage Pork Chops

- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 teaspoon dried sage
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground thyme
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 boneless center cut pork chops
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1/2 large onion, thinly sliced
- 2 thinly sliced red apples
- 1 cup unsweetened apple juice
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar (optional)

Wash hands with soap and warm water, scrubbing for at least 20 seconds. Gently clean all produce under cool running water. Mix flour, sage, garlic, thyme, and salt together in a small bowl. Sprinkle 1 1/2 tablespoons of the mixture over both sides of the pork chops. Remember to wash hands after handling raw meat. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Sear pork chops for 2 to 3 minutes on each side. Pan will smoke a little. Remove pork chops from the pan and set aside. Reduce heat to medium. To the same skillet, add onion and cook for 2 minutes, or until soft. Add apples, and continue cooking until tender, about 2 minutes. Add apple juice, brown sugar, and remaining spice mixture and stir to dissolve. Return pork chops to the skillet by nestling them in the pan. Bring the liquid to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 5 minutes or until the pork is cooked through and reaches 145 degrees F on a food thermometer. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

**Yield:** 4 servings. **Nutrition Analysis:** 310 calories, 10g total fat, 1.5g saturated fat, 50mg cholesterol, 660mg sodium, 35g total carbohydrate, 3g fiber, 25g total sugars, 7g added sugars, 22g protein, 6% DV vitamin D, 2% DV calcium, 6% DV iron, 15% DV potassium.



## To Cover Crop or Not?

There are many considerations when determining whether a cover crop program would be right for your garden. A cover crop is a plant grown in the offseason to provide a variety of benefits to a garden. As with most gardening practices, benefits can also have drawbacks. Here's what you need to know when making the decision.

Benefits for incorporating a cover crop include...

- Providing a surface barrier that will hold soil in place and prevent erosion during winter and early spring.
- Capturing excess soil nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus that otherwise can contaminate groundwater.
- Providing a buffer for both saturated and drought soil conditions. They take up winter precipitation preventing soggy soils while also establishing root channels that can be used by other crops during dry months.
- Cover crop residue (as a mulch) increases infiltration by preventing surface sealing and slowing runoff. Like any other mulch, it will also hold soil moisture for longer periods of time.
- As cover crop roots decompose, they increase soil organic matter, stimulating microbial activity.
- Legume cover crops such as crimson clover and hairy vetch can add nitrogen to the soil.
- Cover crops can reduce weeds both during growth due to competition and as a weed-suppressive mulch.

Some challenges when growing cover crops could be...

- Contributing to nutrient immobilization by feeding microbes instead of future crops.
- If not terminated properly and at the right time, cover crops can become weeds for many years to come. It's best to mow them down and turn them under before the flowering stage.
- In dry springs, cover crops can deplete the soil water needed for germination of other crops. Be sure to terminate the cover crop earlier in dry springs to minimize water loss.
- In wet springs, cover crops as a mulch can keep the soils too wet for planting. Similarly, cover crop residue can delay soil warming which can ultimately reduce crop establishment and yield.

Certain cover crops can be hosts to various soil pathogens. Growing cover crops can also provide habitat and cover for certain insects, slugs, and other pests.

Source: UK AGR-240 Cover Crop Benefits and Challenges in Kentucky

Cover Crop	Characteristics	When to Plant
Annual Ryegrass	Hardy, tolerates we soils, can be difficult to control if goes to seed	August – September
Austrian Winter Peas	Legume, does not compete well with winter weeds, must establish early fall	September – November
Buckwheat	Rapid germination and growth, frost sensitive, drought tolerant	May – August
Cereal Rye	Hardy, rapid growth, matures rapidly in spring	September – October
Crimson Clover	Legume, grows more slowly than vetch	August – September
Hairy Vetch	Legume, slow initial growth, grows quickly in spring, can be difficult to kill	August – September
Winter Triticale	Produces more vegetation than cereal rye or winter wheat	August – September
Winter Wheat	Most common cover crop, covers soil well, matures slowly	September – October
Turnip/Mustard Greens	Grow well in fall, strong taproots to break compacted layers, edible	August - October

Characteristics and planting times for various cover crop species.

## 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!**

- September 7 – Volunteer Morning @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- September 7 – Story Walk: Planting the Wild Garden @ McConnell Springs Park
- September 8 – UK Arboretum Bird Walk
- September 8 – 11 – Black Soil's State of the Soil Conference
- September 12 – Gardener's Toolbox: Perennials for Shade @ Fayette Extension Office
- September 12 – Naturalist Series: The Unique Flora of the Mississippi Embayment @ UK Arboretum
- September 12 – Organic Association of Kentucky Farmer Field Day @ Seedleaf's Headwater Farm
- September 13 – Second Friday Bird Walks @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- September 15 – Mindful Moments Outdoors: Healing Hike @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- September 15 – Wildflower Walk @ McConnell Springs Park
- September 17 – Perennial Gardening Series: Goldenrod, Asters & Anemones @ UK Arboretum
- September 18 – Tiny Tot Naturalist: Seed Exploration @ McConnell Springs Park
- September 22 – Monarch Fest @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- September 26 – KY Climate Symposium @ UK Student Center
- September 28 – Seedleaf's Community Garden Walk & Bike Tour
- September 28 – Bluegrass Nature & Land Symposium @ Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

## September Quick Tips

- Many post-bloom perennial flowers can be found at discounted prices late in the season, and most are suitable for planting now. Avoid late planting for common fall flowering favorites that need a long establishment time. Fall flowers that are best with spring planting include, mums, asters, and Japanese anemone. Most others work great for September planting but try to plant with six weeks' time to establish before freezing weather in late November and December.
- Continue to seed and renovate lawns this month. Good seed to soil contact is critical. Consider renting a power seeder if you are working with a large area.
- Order spring flowering bulbs now or shop garden centers for the best selection. Bulbs may be planted right away or stored in a cool place for later planting.
- Begin early garden cleanup with the removal of diseased plant materials. This will help prevent problems next year. Healthy plants can be left for late fall or early spring clean up.
- Plant fall vegetables. You still have time to direct sow radishes, turnips, spinach and lettuces. You can still succeed with transplants of broccoli, and fast maturing cabbage varieties if planted right away.
- Plant trees and shrubs. Fall is a wonderful time to plant woody ornamentals. Try to allow plants time to establish before the onset of severe weather.
- Divide peonies, iris, and daylilies through the middle of this month.
- Visit a local orchard or farmer's market for apples, pears, fall raspberries and other seasonal treats.
- Register and pay online for Gardener's Toolbox Classes: <https://fayette.ca.uky.edu/classregistration>



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