

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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Happy April Garden Friends,

We're right in the thick of spring so I won't dilly-dally with a drawn out introduction, and get right to the meat and potatoes of this month's issue of By the Yard.

The main thing I want to draw attention to is that we are bringing our Growing Community event back to its full glory. Since the events of 2020, we have been hosting a modified version of Growing Community here at the Fayette Co. Extension Office. This year we are going back out in the community and hosting it at the William Wells Brown Community Center. By popular demand we're also implementing our brief gardening classes during the event. Growing Community participants will have to attend 4 out of the 5 classes offered in order to receive their free garden kit. For more information about Growing Community please check out the flyer that we have included in this month's newsletter.

With the wacky weather we've had this spring, our winter weeds have been more prominent than usual. If your yard is anything like mine and seems to be more "weeds" than grass, we've included some articles on why these winter weeds may be more beneficial than you think. Keeping with the theme of wacky weather, we also have an article on the ever-present boxwood leafminer. This pest typically rears its head in early May, but we figured it would be a good idea to jump the gun in case it shows up earlier than normal this year. Last, but certainly not least we have included an excellent piece from Michigan State Extension on hardening off vegetable transplants. Keep in mind that the frost-free dates mentioned in this article are not representative of Kentucky, and our average frost-free date here in Central Kentucky is May 5th.

As always, if you have any questions please do not hesitate to stop by with your samples, email us your pictures, or call us with your questions.

Thank you,
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Tyson Gregory, Fayette County Horticulture Technician,
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The Kentucky Christmas Tree Association's 17th Annual Plant Auction will be held 10:00 a.m. until 12 noon, Saturday, April 15, 2023, 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 College of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the University of Kentucky. For further information please call 859 223-1140.



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Weeds for the Bees

Are you frustrated because there are dandelions and other weeds in your lawn? Did you know that dandelion flowers provide one of the first springtime sources of pollen for bees, butterflies, and other pollinating insects?



Dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*) provide one of the first pollen sources in the spring for bees and other pollinating insects. Barbara H. Smith, ©2020 HGIC, Clemson University

I live in the Upstate, and I have a “bee friendly” fescue and clover lawn. Every fall, when I core aerate my lawn to over-seed with fescue seed, I mix in Dutch white clover seed with my grass seed. When the clover blooms in May, my lawn is a haven for many different species of bees and butterflies, and it literally hums with insect activity. Clover is a good pollen and nectar source and is an excellent way to add greater food diversity in a landscape.



Dutch white clover (*Trifolium repens*) planted in with a fescue lawn. Barbara H. Smith, ©2020 HGIC, Clemson University

Unless you live in a community that is regulated by strict homeowner association rules, consider providing a wide variety of plant material in your lawn that will offer a broad range of food sources. A healthy lawn will not be overrun with unwanted plants, and tolerating some wildflowers in the lawn will be one of the most helpful things you can do to protect native bee populations.

If you take time to watch a honey bee gather pollen, you might notice a dazzling array of colors. Different flowers produce different pollen colors. You can even identify which flowers the bees are visiting by the color of the pollen in the corbicula (the sacs located on the honeybee’s hind legs). Henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*), a winter annual “weed”, has reddish-purple pollen; therefore, the honey bee’s corbicula will be filled with bright purple pollen. Crimson red clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*) has dark red pollen that will make the bee’s pollen sacs a dark red.



Henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*) has reddish-purple pollen. When a honeybee has gathered pollen from henbit, the pollen corbicula will be filled with bright purple pollen. Barbara H. Smith, ©2020 HGIC, Clemson University

Without a healthy population of pollinating insects, the production of many fruits, vegetables, and nut crops would be severely affected. According to the Pollinator Partnership Organization (<https://www.pollinator.org/pollinators>), “birds, bats, bees, butterflies, beetles, and other small mammals that pollinate plants are responsible for bringing us one out of every three bites of food.” This does not even account for the food pollinators provide to wildlife.

Source: Barbara H. Smith, HGIC Horticulture Extension Agent, Clemson University



This honey bee is gathering dark red pollen from crimson red clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*). Barbara H. Smith, ©2020 HGIC, Clemson University

Fly, Boxwood Leafminers Fly!

If you haven't noticed, spring has sprung in earnest. Spring flowering trees and shrubs have popped and are already fading. The buds of many other plants are breaking everywhere. Right along with the plants come the critters.

Of particular note are boxwood leafminer adults. Almost everyday this spring, the Plant Diagnostic Laboratory gets another sample of boxwood. Winter injury has been the most common diagnosis, but that is quickly changing to samples with boxwood leafminer damage and *Volutella* leaf and stem blight



Freshly emerged Boxwood leafminer adult and pupal exuviae. Photo: Sabrina Tirpak, Rutgers PDL



Volutella leaf and stem blight. Photo: Sabrina Tirpak, Rutgers PDL

Like all the winter injury, *Volutella* leaf and stem blight requires aggressive pruning to fix. Boxwood leafminer, on the other hand, takes a little more skill and precision to get under control.

Adult boxwood leafminers are easy to find hovering over infested plantings at this time. Simply brush your hand (or use a sweep net) over the new growth and you will see scores of tiny orange flies flittering about. This insect can only lay eggs in succulent tissues, so in plantings with numerous adult flies and a history of problems, an insecticide intervention now would be prudent.

Use a translaminar material, like abamectin, acephate or dinotefuran, to protect the new growth. Check local recommendations for other options.

Last week, I attended a symposium at the National Agriculture Library on boxwood blight. Part of the program included Dr. Michael Raupp of the University of Maryland who gave a talk on boxwood insects. During his talk, Dr. Raupp (the bug guy) suggested that using neonicotinoid insecticides on boxwood might cause secondary pest outbreaks of boxwood mites.

The phenomenon was recently documented on elms treated with imidacloprid for Asian longhorned beetle. Apparently, mites are insensitive to the toxic effects of neonicotinoid insecticides. In fact, mites that feed on neonicotinoid treated plants actually lay more eggs. Furthermore, mites feeding on treated plants acquire the toxin, which provides a conduit to the predatory insects that are feeding on them. As a result, the good guys become impaired and fail to do their job eating mites. As such, the populations of mites increase! Dr. Raupp suggests sticking to abamectin (Avid) to avoid this phenomenon, because it is not only effective for our nemesis, the boxwood leafminer, but also effectively controls boxwood mites. That bug guy is pretty smart!



Boxwood mite eggshells and cast skins. Photo: Sabrina Tirpak, Rutgers PDL

Source: Richard Buckley, Director: Plant Diagnostic Lab, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Quick Tip

The best time to treat for boxwood leafminer with abamectin is while the adults are actively flying around the plants. Remember to follow all label instructions when applying a pesticide.

Plant Spotlight: Common Blue Violet



A small colony of the typical form of Common blue violet in bloom. Photo by Cathy Dewitt, NC State Cooperative Extension

One of the most frequent questions we get at the Fayette County Extension Office in the spring is how to control those pesky wild violets in the lawn. Despite its negative reputation amongst many homeowners, the common wild violet (*Viola sororia*) is a real powerhouse in the world of pollinators, and it can be very useful as a landscape plant.

For anyone unfamiliar with the common blue violet, it is a small, native perennial that overwinters as a small rhizome that rests at or just below the soil surface. There is a lot of diversity in the morphology of the common blue violet, but typically the leaves are heart shaped and around 3 inches long and 3 inches wide when fully mature. The leaves vary in color from dark green to a pale yellow-green when exposed to full sun. The flowers of common blue violets are most commonly medium to dark violet in color, but flower color can vary great between individuals. Some common color variances are white, bi-color white petals with purple throats, pale purple, and even white with purple freckles.

Anyone with prior experience with this plant might be questioning what value common blue violets have with their weedy spreading habit. Well, it turns out that the common blue violet and other wild violets are incredibly important to pollinators. The common blue violet blooms very early in the spring when other flowering resources are not readily available to pollinators. The flowers are frequently visited by our native bees as they provide both nectar and pollen resources. Wild violets are so important to pollinators that a specialist mining bee, the Violet Miner (*Andrena violae*), only visits native violets to gather the pollen that it feeds its young. Wild violets are also host plants to fourteen species of greater fritillaries (genus *Speyeria*) and sixteen lesser fritillaries (genus *Bolloria*). These charismatic butterflies will only lay their eggs where there are violets for their larva to feed upon.



The great spangled fritillary (*Speyeria cybele*) is one of the many fritillary butterflies whose larvae host on wild violets (*Viola* spp.) Photo by David Cappaert, Bugwood.org

Because of its importance to pollinators, the common blue violet should be cherished and encouraged to grow in the landscape. We can use the spreading nature of this plant to our advantage by utilizing it as a vigorous groundcover. The aggressive nature of common blue violet allows it to quickly fill gaps between established plants and the dense coverage of foliage acts as a "green" or living mulch. This "green mulch" shades the soil surface and inhibits the germination of weed seeds that require light to germinate. When used in mixed perennial beds, the violets provide early soil cover until the larger surrounding plants fill the space as summer progresses. By using the violets as green mulch, one can save a lot of hassle with weeding and mulching. Common blue violet can also make a great lawn alternative in shady situations where traditional turfgrass has difficulty growing. It thrives in the root zones of large trees and keeps its foliage in all but the hottest and driest conditions. Allowing common blue violets to naturalize in shady parts of the yard is a great way to provide pollinator habit without changing your current maintenance practices.

Hopefully the next time you find this little plant in your yard or garden you'll look at it with a bit more admiration for all of the wonderful services it provides to our pollinators. Maybe even consider setting aside the herbicide and trowels to let the common blue violet grow in your yard or garden.

Hardening off vegetable transplants is easy!

As we approach May and June frost-free dates across Michigan, it is time to prepare for transplanting warm season vegetable plants such as tomatoes, peppers and squash that do not tolerate frost. Gardeners using vegetable transplants should plan for the process of hardening off their seedlings to outdoor conditions. Vegetable transplants are started indoors before the frost-free date to protect them from climate extremes outdoors. Indoor plants are not adapted to outdoor climate conditions and rely on their gardener to help them transition to light, heat and wind of the outdoor garden.

While vegetable transplants can eventually thrive in a sunny spot in your yard or patio, you will increase your chances of success by gradually easing them into your garden conditions. Each plant species has an ideal range for light, temperature and moisture level. Rapid swings between climate extremes, even if within its ideal range, can lead to damage and stress. An indoor-grown plant thrust into full sun may wilt or have tissue browning on the leaves. Tender seedlings that suddenly transition to colder or hotter temperatures may become stunted, experience leaf discoloration or die. The goal of hardening off is to help your plants adapt to their new garden home without stress.



Begin hardening off in a spot outdoors that is shady and shielded from heavy wind.
Photo by Sarah Rautio, MSU Extension.

Begin hardening off seven to 10 days before your area's frost-free date. Warm season vegetable seedlings should not be exposed to freezing or near freezing temperatures and grow best when the nights are at least 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures below 50 F can stunt some warm season crops such as melons. Keep in mind that this is a general guide to hardening plants. If you miss a day, continue when you can. Keeping plants in a wagon or other wheeled container will make this process simpler.

- Choose a spot outdoors that is shady and shielded from heavy wind. Start by placing your transplants outdoors for an hour in this protected spot before returning them indoors. Protection from the sun can be the dappled shade of a tree, the awning of a porch, an open garage, or a shade cloth you have suspended over them.
- Each day, increase the amount of light and the total time spent outside by 1-2 hours. Gradually increase the light until the plants spend the entire day in the sun bringing them in each night. As you increase the time in the sun, monitor the appearance of your plants for signs of stress such as wilting.
- After the transplants have spent several full days in the sun, leave them outside for several days and nights.
- Your seedlings are now hardened and are ready for planting.

Source: *Lori Imboden and Barslund Judd, Michigan State University Extension*

Quick Tip:
Consult the publication ID-128: Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky for a list of earliest safe planting dates.



Sun damage on the leaf tips of recently transplanted pepper plants. Photo by Gerald Holmes, Strawberry Center, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Bugwood.org.



SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2023

**WILLIAM WELLS BROWN COMMUNITY CENTER
548 E SIXTH ST, LEXINGTON, KY 40508**

9:00 A.M. TO NOON

OR UNTIL WE RUN OUT, WHICHEVER COMES FIRST!

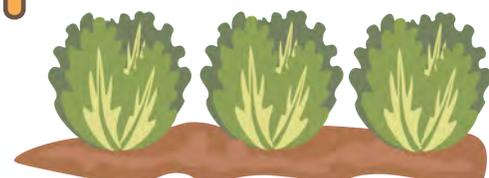
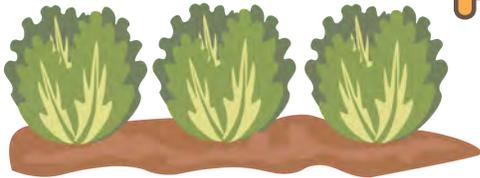


Attend 4 of the following classes:

- Soil Prep
- Planting
- Container Gardening
- Maintenance
- Using Fresh Produce
and receive a



FREE GARDEN KIT



Kits will contain plants, seeds and our vegetable gardening guide which will provide all the “how to” info on gardening and growing your own food.

While supplies last, limit one Garden Kit Per Family



March 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 as 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.
- Crabgrass preventer should be applied by the middle of the month.
- 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://fayette.ca.uky.edu/classregistration>

Recipe of the Month



Spring Harvest Salad

5 cups torn spring leaf lettuce	Dressing: 4 teaspoons lemon juice	2 teaspoons Kentucky honey
2½ cups spinach leaves	2½ tablespoons olive oil	½ teaspoon salt
1½ cups sliced strawberries	1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar	¼ cup feta cheese crumbles
1 cup fresh blueberries	1½ teaspoons Dijon mustard	½ cup unsalted sliced almonds
½ cup thinly sliced green onions		

1. Combine leaf lettuce and spinach leaves with sliced strawberries, blueberries and green onion in a large salad bowl.

2. Prepare dressing by whisking together the lemon juice, olive oil,

balsamic vinegar, Dijon mustard, honey and salt; **pour** over lettuce mixture and toss to coat.

3. Sprinkle salad with feta cheese and sliced almonds.

4. Serve immediately.

Yield: 8, 1 cup servings.

Nutrition Analysis: 130 calories, 9 g fat, 1.5 g sat fat, 240 mg sodium, 12 g carbohydrates, 3 g fiber, 7 g sugar, 3 g protein.

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

