

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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Hello gardening friends,

We've reached the end of the year and I hope everyone has been able to reflect on their goals for the garden. Whether you met your goals for the year or had some shortcomings, there is always something to be learned. This was a particularly troublesome year with the early summer heat and lack of rain, so don't be discouraged if things didn't go as planned. Sometimes no matter how hard we try Mother Nature still gets the best of us.

Fortunately, we have the promise of a new season just around the corner. I have already started looking at garden catalogs and websites to plan for the upcoming year. As many of you might already be aware, the demand for seeds and transplants has gone through the roof since 2020. In response, many of the seed suppliers have ramped up production to accommodate for the increased demand. Even so, it never hurts to plan early so that you can get the varieties you want. We have been working hard to put together next year's Gardener's Toolbox schedule and we are happy to announce that we will be hosting a robust assortment of classes in 2023. Be sure to keep an eye out in January for the release of our 2023 toolbox schedule.

We wish you all a happy Holiday season and we can't wait to see you all again next year!

Thank you,
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The Fayette County Extension Office will be closed for the Holidays December 26, 2022 - January 2, 2023.



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Understanding Your Seed Catalog

Nothing can put pep in a gardener's step like receiving seed catalogs after the holidays are over and cabin fever has set in. The vibrant and colorful pictures are enticing and can make you want to plant everything you come across; however, when thumbing through your catalog, there are some things you need to keep in mind.

Scout Ahead

When you start to dive into your crisp new seed catalog, where do you start? Where else but the beginning. Pull out your records from your past garden experiences. Be sure to consult your notes on what varieties grew well and what varieties did not. Consider even trying a new variety or two.

As you flip through the catalog, try to locate key symbols and wording that will be used throughout. You might find symbols that represent groundcovers, organic seeds, plants that attract pollinators or their sun requirement. You also might find different abbreviations for each variety of seed. The meanings of these abbreviations are found near the front of the catalog. For example, "PM" might mean that it is resistant to powdery mildew. Keep in mind that key symbols may vary in different catalogs.

From there, move on to the organized sections. You will find headings like vegetables, fruit, flowers, herbs, live plants, bulbs and more. They will be filled with articles, garden equipment, recipes or other items of interest to new and seasoned gardeners. Familiarizing yourself with symbols, terms, abbreviations and headings will assist you in finding the right information to grow a successful garden.

Common Terms and Abbreviations

Days to maturity: The number of days to harvest that is expected after planting transplants.

Direct sow: Seeds may be started directly in the ground; for many plants, this is done after all threat of frost is past.

Indoor sow: Seeds need to be started indoors under lights or in a greenhouse. Once ready, transplants can be planted outdoors once the threat of frost has passed.

Open pollinated (OP): These plants are pollinated by another plant, as opposed to pollinating itself. These are varieties that will come from true seed, look for this symbol if you want to save seeds to use in future plantings.

Hybrid: Seeds from a cross of two or more known varieties. Seed-saving from these varieties will result in plants not identical to the parent plants, some variance is expecting in vigor.

- F1 - First Generation
- F2 - Second Generation

Disease resistant: This is the degree of disease resistance exhibited by the plant. Disease resistance is often expressed with abbreviations, for example "V" for Verticillium Wilt. The abbreviations should be explained within the catalog. If you have had disease problems in the past, consider selecting disease resistant varieties; however, resistance could be compromised under high disease pressure.

Understanding Your Seed Catalog (continued)

Heirloom: Typically open pollinated, seeds from these plants have been passed down through many years. They tend to have a unique flavor, taste and color. These plants have poor disease resistance when compared to hybrids, and yield is unpredictable. These seeds can be saved from the harvest and can be planted and enjoyed year after year, preserving the variety.

Treated: The seeds are coated with fungicides or insecticides to protect them from disease and pests during their germination and seedling growth. It is common for companies to add color to these seeds to be able to differentiate them from untreated seeds.

Determinate plants: This term refers to the growth habit of a tomato plant. Plants will grow to a fixed, determined size, ceasing growth after flowering. They will mature all their fruits in a short period of time (usually about two weeks or so). These are most ideal for small spaces and container gardening.

Indeterminate plants: Plants continue to grow and set fruit throughout the growing season until killed by frost. These plants are vining and will need a trellis system.

Number of seeds: The amount of seeds a packet will contain. Many will indicate how long of a row in feet that a packet can plant.

Early, mid-season, late season: These terms can be used in place of "maturity." It refers to when fruit will be yielded in relation to the growing season.

Average yield per 100 feet: This will indicate how many pounds of produce to expect for per 100-foot row.

Vernalization: The process of exposing the plant to cold temperatures for a specific length of time to induce flowering.

Monoecious: Male and female flowers grow on the same plant.

Dioecious: Male and female flowers grow on different plants; a male and a female flower must be present for fruit production.

Gynoecious: Plants that produce only female flowers; must be pollinated by male flowers to set fruit.

Parthenocarpic: Does not require pollination to set fruit. When successfully isolated from pollen, their fruit will be seedless.



Understanding Your Seed Catalog (continued)

USDA Hardiness Zones

This is one of the most important aspects you need to consider when selecting your seeds. The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map is the standard by which gardeners and growers can determine which plants are most likely to thrive at their location. The map is based on the average annual minimum winter temperature, divided into 10-degree F zones. Check out the map and determine your area's zone. Use this zone number as a general guideline when selecting seeds.

You also might stumble across a catalog that uses the Heat Zone Map created by the American Horticultural Society. This map uses average high temperatures to assign gardening regions. Another map that you might not see as often is the Sunset Climate Zone Map. This map uses several factors, such as latitude, elevation and microclimates, to create zones.

Once you have identified which zone you are in and the map associated with the catalog you're using, you will be able to make a list of plants that are hardy for your area and can successfully grow.

Underestimate Your Need for Seeds, Overestimate Your Need for Space

Milling through the colorful glossy pages of your seed catalog can make you want to sow a garden that will feed your whole community, but remember you only have so much space. Whether you are looking to line your driveway with flowers or you are selecting vegetable varieties for your garden, it is important to know the amount of space you have to work with and how much space is needed for the plants to thrive.

Before selecting your seeds, measure out the space that you are intending to sow. Once you have measured, create a map using the appropriate dimensions. Locate the plants you are interested in growing in your catalog and determine their mature size. Use your map and the mature sizing to lay out your garden with appropriate spacing, which will help determine the amount of seeds you will need.

Keep in mind that not all seeds will germinate. Instead of purchasing more seeds this year, consider waiting until next winter. Start with a smaller plot to see how they grow. Keeping a seed journal is highly encouraged, not only for purchasing seeds in the coming years but to keep track of the amount of produce you have grown in a season to make sure you're meeting your needs.

Shop Around

Do not rely on one catalog to fill all your needs. If there is a variety you like, find it in several catalogs and compare. There is a good chance that the quantity of seeds in a packet will vary, but the price conversion is simple math.

For example, if a packet of 25 eggplant seeds is \$4.75, divide 4.75 by 25 and you'll get 0.19. Each plant will roughly cost 20 cents. Keep in mind that heirloom varieties and certified organic seeds typically cost more.

Who doesn't enjoy happy mail? Order your seed catalogs today and start planning for your garden! Always select seeds and plants from a reputable source, and reach out to your local Extension office for assistance on varieties, pest and disease management, storage and preservation of your garden!

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Last Reviewed: March 2021

Plant spotlight: Eastern Red Cedar

One of the most common questions we get here at the Extension Office is: “What kind of evergreen should I use for privacy screening?” This question is normally prefaced by a comment or discussion about yellowing white pines, spruces losing their needles, or arborvitae with large dead patches. The answer to the original question is almost always our native Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*).

The eastern red cedar is a long-lived medium sized evergreen tree that typically grows 40 to 50 feet tall and roughly 10 to 20 feet wide at maturity. This tree has one of the largest distributions of any conifer in the US and naturally occurs in 37 of the lower 48 states. Because of its wide distribution, there is a great variance of size and form between individuals. The eastern red cedar also boasts incredible tolerance to a wide range of cultural conditions, thriving in everything except the most saturated soils. In fact, this tree’s adaptability has led it to become a nuisance species in many situations. This species is well known for its ability to rapidly colonize disturbed areas, and any drive around Kentucky’s highways will demonstrate this behavior. Although this tree can be found throughout the state it is most prevalent in the limestone rich soils of the Bluegrass region where it forms dense stands on roadcuts and other neglected areas.

Eastern red cedars are typically densely branched with a conical form when young and covered in small, sharp, blue-green awl shaped needles. As the plant matures the foliage becomes softer with scale like leaves. The branching habit also tends to open up and reveal an attractive greyish-brown bark, which gently exfoliates in long fibrous strips. To top it off female eastern red cedars produce small waxy cones that are frequently a beautiful shade of frosted blue. These ornamental cones are a favorite food of cedar waxwings, but many other species of birds enjoy the fruit as well.

All the traits listed above make this tree very useful for ornamental purposes, and the horticulture industry has selected many cultivars that expand upon those traits. One of the most unusual cultivars, ‘Grey Owl,’ is actually a compact shrub with a spreading growth habit and silvery grey foliage. It rarely grows over 3 feet tall with a spread of around 6 feet. Another unusual and very prominent cultivar is the ‘Taylor’ juniper which displays a sharply vertical growth habit reminiscent of the Mediterranean Cypress. ‘Taylor’ is a vigorous selection growing up to 2 feet per year in optimal conditions. The mature size of this cultivar is frequently listed at 20 to 30 feet tall and only 3 to 4 feet wide, although it is likely to grow taller with age.

Some additional cultivars you might find are: ‘Burkii’ which has a clean conical shape paired with steel blue foliage, and ‘Canaertii’ which has profuse amounts of dusty blue cones that contrast nicely against the dark emerald, green foliage. You may find other cultivars as well, but they are infrequently encountered in nurseries.

To successfully grow this plant at home all you need is full sun and non-waterlogged soils. It is perhaps one of the most adaptable plants that can be grown in a garden setting. The eastern red cedar will happily grow in the heavy clay soils that so many of our other evergreens despise. However, there is one thing you should keep in mind before planting this tree. Eastern Red Cedar is a preferred host for a naturally occurring fungal pathogen called cedar apple rust, which is particularly troublesome on woody species in the rose family like apples, hawthorns, and serviceberry. This pathogen does not harm the eastern red cedar, but can significantly impact the rose family plants mentioned above. Thus, it is not recommended to plant eastern red cedar near apples or other rose family plants.

If you find yourself needing to replace a failing privacy screen or looking to add a new evergreen specimen for the garden, I hope you consider this amazingly beautiful and durable plant. It would be a welcomed addition to almost any garden.



The unique distinctly branched growth habit of the ‘Canaertii’ cultivar. Credit: Jim Robbins, North Carolina State Extension

Cover Your Soil!

Covered soil is happy soil and happy soil means happy plants! Keeping the soil covered over the winter is very important for maintaining and even improving soil health. Soil that is covered over the winter will be less compacted and maintain more nutrients as it is less prone to experiencing soil runoff or erosion.

As you know, we LOVE cover cropping for winter soil protection and hope that you took advantage of this year's winter kill mix (which should already be planted!). However, we know that several folks opted out of the winter kill cover crop so we want to offer some other options that can be implemented this month:

- Plant a root-based cover crop: turnip, groundhog radish or Hakurei Turnips will all cover the soil and send their large tap roots down into the soil helping break up those big clay chunks, naturally decreasing soil compaction over the winter. Plus these crops can either be harvested for food OR turned into the soil for added organic matter in the spring.
- Cover your soil with fallen leaves: a heavy layer of chopped-up leaves from your yard can add a good layer of organic matter to your soil. When tilled into your garden in the spring, these leaves will add organic matter that can mix with the clay for added "fluff" to your soil. Just be aware of the leaf type. Walnut leaves contain the growth inhibitor juglone and should not be added to the garden.
- Cover your soil with wood chips, straw or mulch: These materials are great at providing cover for your soil to decrease compaction and erosion caused by wet winter weather. Plus, they can either be used as a weed barrier (when applied 2-3" thick) in the spring OR be tilled into the soil to add organic matter to your soil. Finally, all these materials are great insulators so that the soil will stay warmer, meaning you can plant earlier in the spring.
- Cover your soil with manure: Animal manure (only from herbivores, like horses, cows, goats, rabbits) can be a great option for soil coverage over the winter. Just like the fallen leaves and mulches, manure adds a lot of great nutrients and organic matter into your garden BUT it comes with extra risks. Manure should be aged at least 6 months to protect both you and your plants from any pathogens. If you plan on adding manure, ask how long it has been sitting before applying it to your garden and plan to do your first planting 6 months later. You can also purchase finished manure at many lawn and garden centers which will ensure that the manure is safe for use.

Covered soil is happy soil, so be sure to do your garden and favor and cover it up this winter.

*Source: Bethany Pratt,
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Groundhog radish cover crop

December Quick Tips

- Outdoor pond inhabitants may encounter problems if the pond freezes over and gases cannot escape. A basketball floated on the surface will often keep a small spot from freezing.
- If you haven't already, empty and store flower pots for the season. Many pots, particularly clay and ceramic, will be damaged by moisture and freezing temperatures.
- Plan gardens and place seed orders. Many popular items and new offerings will sell out first.
- Use fallen leaves to mulch your vegetable garden. These can be tilled in next spring to add valuable organic matter. They will also protect the soil by preventing erosion, compaction, and to a degree, inhibit cool season weeds from germinating.
- Water is often as limited a resource for birds as food. If you enjoy feeding and watching birds, try a bird bath deicer or electric pet bowl. See if you don't attract more feathered friends than before.
- If you will be establishing a new lawn this spring, Do A Soil Test Now! New ground usually benefits from an application of nitrogen, and sometimes phosphorus, potassium or lime (only if pH is too low).
- Be careful where you throw de-icing salt, as well as the contaminated slush, snow and ice which you scoop off the walks. Most plants are easily damaged by these salts. Try using sand, sawdust, urea fertilizer or kitty litter for traction rather than the de-icing salts or buy a brand which is labeled "safe for plants".
- Avoid walking on frozen turf as much as possible. Whenever you hear the crunch of icy grass, you are actually damaging the crown (growing point) of the frozen grass plant.
- Your landscape can be a great source of materials for holiday decorating. Light pruning will generally not harm your plants in the winter, and you may be surprised at the variety in your own yard. Don't just consider evergreens, use ornamental grasses, pine cones, fruits, berries, even mosses in your decorating.
- Watch for January, 2023, By The Yard newsletter for the class schedule: "Gardener's Toolbox 2023"!

Recipe of the Month



Morning Carrot Muffins

1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour	2 cups shredded carrot	3 eggs
¾ cup whole-wheat flour	½ cup raisins	¼ cup vegetable oil
1 cup sugar	½ cup chopped walnuts	1 cup unsweetened applesauce
2 teaspoons baking soda	½ cup unsweetened coconut	2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 tablespoon cinnamon	1 finely chopped medium apple	
¼ teaspoon salt		

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. **Spray** 18 muffin cups with nonstick spray or line them with muffin liners. In a large bowl, **mix** together flours, sugar, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt. **Stir** in carrots, raisins, nuts, coconut, and apple. In a separate bowl, **beat** together eggs, oil, applesauce, and vanilla. **Stir** wet ingredients into the flour mixture until just moistened. Do not overmix.

Scoop batter into prepared muffin cups. **Bake** for 20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Yield: 18 muffins

Nutritional Analysis:
170 calories, 6 g fat, 1.5 g saturated fat, 30 mg cholesterol, 180 mg sodium, 27 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 16 g sugars, 10 g added sugars, 3 g protein

