

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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Food and Environment
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Happy November everyone!

This has been quite the unusual fall with very cool temperatures and an incredibly early leaf color and drop. I am used to peak fall color beginning in November and not the middle of October! At least this has given us more time to pick them up before the weather has become too cold and nasty.

I was very unprepared for this unusually cool weather and had to scramble to prep my houseplants for overwintering inside. I hope you readers did not procrastinate as long as I did and had ample time to prepare. If not, we have included an article on how to deal with one of the most common houseplant pests that sneaks its way inside for the winter, Fungus gnats.

For those who grow cool season veggies, I hope the cool dry weather has not impacted your crops too much. If you have not already, you might consider utilizing floating row covers to extend your growing season a few extra days to counter for the slower maturation these cool temperatures have caused.

Hopefully, this newsletter reaches you in time because there is only one Toolbox Class this month: Garden Clean Up with Emphasis on More Natural Approaches (video) on Tuesday, November 1st. The class is free, but you must pre-register to receive the video link.

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,
Jamie Dockery, Fayette County Extension Agent for Horticulture,
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Tyson Gregory, Fayette County Horticulture Technician,
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The Fayette County Extension Office will be closed for the Thanksgiving Holiday November 24 & 25, 2022



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How to Reuse Fallen Leaves at Home

Now that we've had some cooler temperatures to go along with shorter days, we're starting to see the leaves change colors. In the next few weeks, we can look forward to our landscapes being awash in yellows, oranges, and reds. As the saying goes, though, all good things must come to an end. Eventually, all of those leaves will end up on the ground, and we'll begin our annual battle of what to do with them.

What to do with tree leaves in the fall?

Mow over a light layer of leaves

If you only have a light covering of leaves in your lawn, they can be mowed. It's best to mow leaves when they are dry, so they don't clump together and make it more difficult to mow. When mowing leaves, make sure you can see the grass beneath the cut-up leaves. If the leaf layer is too thick, it can smother and kill the grass.

By mowing the leaves and chopping them into small pieces, they will drop between the blades of grass to the soil surface. Once there, microbes can begin to break them down. As the leaves are broken down, they will contribute to the organic matter present in soils and nutrients will be released for turf to utilize.

Add leaves into garden beds

If you have too many leaves to mow, add them to your garden beds. Adding a 6 to 8-inch layer of leaves and incorporating them into garden soils by tilling can help improve them by increasing organic matter. In heavy clay soils, this will help with drainage and aeration, and in sandy soils, it will improve the soil's ability to hold onto water and nutrients.

If you decide to incorporate leaves into garden beds, it's best to do this in the fall. This will allow for plenty of time for the leaves to break down before you plant in spring. Leaves have a high carbon-to-nitrogen ratio and can take a while to break down. If you want to speed up the decomposition process, add some fertilizer to the soil after the leaves have been incorporated.

Use leaves as mulch

Leaves can also be used as a mulch in vegetable gardens, flower beds, and around trees and shrubs.

- A layer of mulch can be rather beneficial in our landscapes. It can help:
- Conserve soil moisture
- Moderate soil temperatures
- Prevent soil crusting and erosion
- Control weeds
- Contribute nutrients and organic matters to soils

When using leaves as mulch, it's a good idea to shred them first because leaves may clump together, forming a mat that can prevent moisture from reaching the soil. Shredded leaves are more likely to stay in place compared to unshredded leaves.



(continued)

How to Reuse Fallen Leaves at Home (continued)

Use leaves to insulate plants

Leaves can be used to help insulate plants too. By using leaves as insulation, we can keep the soil uniformly cold and prevent freezing and thawing cycles that can damage marginally hardy plants, such as some hybrid tea roses, lavender, etc. This can be done by placing shredded leaves around the crowns of these plants, or wire frames can be built and filled with leaves. If using leaves as insulation, don't put them on plants until temperatures are consistently below freezing.

Use leaves in composting

If you've ever done any composting, you know how valuable leaves can be as a 'brown' material. For the uninitiated, compost is a dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling form of organic matter that has gone through a natural decomposition process. If you have a garden, lawn, trees, shrubs, or even planter boxes or houseplants, you have a use for compost. Explore a variety of Composting Resources on our website.

While we often dread the appearance of leaves in our yards, they are a valuable and free resource for our landscapes. Before you use up all of your leaves, take some time to make a big pile of them, and relive your childhood.

Good Growing Tip: While we're often in a hurry to clean up leaves in the fall, they can be important overwintering areas for a variety of wildlife. Many different types of insects, such as butterflies and bees, as well as other animals such as salamanders and toads, will rely on leaf litter as habitat to make it through the winter. To conserve these animals consider leaving part of your yard as is until spring.

Source: Ken J. University of Illinois



Don't Accidentally Invite Fungus Gnats In!

As we have had our first frosts in Kentucky, a lot of folks have been bringing their plants inside. While this is advisable to protect those tender leaves from freezing, it's good to be aware that you could also unintentionally be bringing in fungus gnat maggots with your potted plants.

What is a fungus gnat?

Fungus gnats, specifically dark-winged fungus gnats, are insects that lay their eggs in areas of wet soil for an egg laying site. Adults are 1/8 inch long and are gray to gray-black. They have long, skinny legs and sort of resemble mosquitoes in shape and in flight. They usually like damp, dark areas, so if you live in a wooded area or have lots of trees on your property, they might be a part of your landscape. They will also lay eggs in rotting wood, leaf piles, and most importantly for us, potted plants.

Fungus gnats go through complete metamorphosis. They start as eggs, from which maggots will hatch, then they pupate before turning into adults. Adult females can lay between 100 to 150 eggs, which can hatch in 5 to 7 days. After this, the larvae will feed for 10 to 14 days before pupating. Larvae are legless, thin, and white with a dark head capsule. They also look very slimy. Usually, the larvae aren't seen with indoor infestations. The larvae will pupate and hatch out as adults 5 to 6 days later. This rapid development and the fact that the different stages can be overlapping means large numbers of fungus gnats can be seen in the home over winter.

What is the issue?

If potted plants are brought inside, the warmth of our homes and ease of access to wet soil in the pot can help create a thriving population. If you notice what look like small mosquitoes in your home during the winter months, you may be dealing with a fungus gnat issue.

Fungus gnat larvae sometimes damage the roots and lower stems of plants growing in pots. Greenhouse growers routinely deal with and eliminate fungus gnats because of this. Usually in a home, the main problem is annoyance, though. Fungus gnats fly slowly around the house and are also attracted to lights. This means they will fly towards televisions and computer screens while people are using them.

Dealing with the problem

As you bring plants inside, you should consider using monitoring tools to see if fungus gnats have taken up residence.

- To check for adults, you can use yellow sticky cards staked near the plant. The adults like the color and get trapped on the glue-covered surface.
- To monitor for larvae in the soil, take slices of raw potato (1/4 inch or so) and lay them on the surface of the potting medium. Check them before they dry out to see if maggots have attached to them to feed.



Figure 1: If you bring in your plants this fall and then in the near future start to notice, 1/8 inch-long grey/black, flying insects that resemble mosquitoes, you may have accidentally brought in fungus gnats, too. (Photo: Jim Kalisch; University of Nebraska-Lincoln)

Don't Accidentally Invite Fungus Gnats In! (continued)

If you find that you have a problem with fungus gnats, you can use several methods to control the population.

- Changing the potting medium out for new stock removes the problem entirely but is not always feasible for certain plants.
- You can also run a fan over the pot to dry out the soil to reduce fungus gnat attraction or water less frequently.
- To treat them, you can try to mix a solution of 9-parts water with 1-part bleach and run it through the soil to kill larval gnats. Test this with lesser desired plants first as some may not tolerate the mixture. For an organic approach, use a product containing Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) specific to flies. One common trade name is "Gnatrol." It will take time and effort, but if you follow through you can eliminate these pesky invaders!



Figure 2: Fungus gnat larvae are creamy white with a dark black head capsule. They have a slimy appearance and live in the upper layer of soil. (Photo: Jim Kalisch; University of Nebraska-Lincoln).

By Jonathan L. Larson; Entomology Extension Specialist

Mulching Strawberry Plants

Hopefully, you had a chance to mulch your strawberry plantings before the early winter cold.

Mulch helps reduce the freezing and thawing of the soil that breaks off the small roots and, in some cases, can lift the plants partially out of the ground, translating into smaller berries and reduced yields.

Mulching also slows plant development in the spring which reduces the chances of frost injury to the flowers.

Mulch conserves moisture, keeping berries off the ground, which reduces rot development and keeps dirt off of the berries. It can also reduce weed development making harvest much nicer under wet conditions.

Wheat straw is the preferred mulch material, but oat and rye straw also work well. Try to acquire mulch that does not contain a lot of weed, wheat, oat, or rye seeds as this can substantially increase weed control requirements in the spring. Apply the mulch when the night temperature is expected to reach about 20 degrees F which is usually sometime in mid-December in Kentucky, although this year the lower temperatures came earlier.

Cover the plants so you can still see a number of leaves peeking out from beneath the straw. Excessive mulch can smother plants.

When spring comes, don't hurry mulch removal. The mulch will protect the strawberry fruit buds as long as it remains on the plant. Remove the mulch when the plants have begun to grow, and the foliage looks slightly yellow. If the mulch is left on too long, it could substantially reduce your yield.

If you are a fruit or vegetable grower or are thinking about becoming one, the Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference will be held January 2-4 in Bowling Green, KY.

Topics include commercial fruit and vegetable production, farmers' markets, organic farming and gardening, high tunnel production, direct marketing, and home-based produce microprocessing.

Submitted by Dr. John Strang, Extension Fruit and Vegetable Specialist, University of Kentucky



Plant Spotlight: Winterberry Holly

Many of us are familiar with the delightful red berries of holly bushes. The contrast of the brilliant red berries against their dark emerald green foliage provides phenomenal interest in the garden when all of our other plants have gone dormant. But those spiny defensive leaves are not always well received by gardeners. Fortunately, there are a few species of holly that keep those ornamental berries but lack the spiny tough leaves of evergreen hollies. The species best suited for here in Central Kentucky is our native Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata*).

Winterberry holly is a deciduous holly that has spine free and rather bland foliage. Despite the unremarkable foliage, the fruit set of the female plants is perhaps the most ornamental out of any holly species. I would even go so far as to say it has the most ornamental fruit out of any fruiting shrub that we can grow in Central Kentucky. It's also remarkably tolerant of wet compacted soils as it normally grows in boggy wet areas in the wild. The wild winterberry holly will typically grow between 6 to 10 feet tall, but many of the cultivars available at nurseries have been selected for a more compact form ranging from 4 to 8 ft tall at maturity. Winterberry holly also has a slow suckering habit so expect them to spread a little in the landscape.

The fruit of winterberry holly are small, typically red berries that are held in clusters spread throughout the branches. Recent breeding programs have produced a myriad of cultivars with a variance of fruit sizes and colors that range from shades of red, orange, and even gold. Take note that all cultivars are not created equal. The fruit of the orange and gold fruited cultivars often do not persist as long as the red before bleaching out or becoming blackened by freezing temperatures. The red fruited cultivars like 'Winter Red' are considered to be some of the best, and the fruit will consistently last long into the winter before losing its ornamental value. These ornamental berries are not only attractive to us but are also a particularly important food source for our overwintering birds. In my experience winterberry holly is a preferred food of robins and a small flock will pick a shrub clean in as little as a week.

Now before you decide to purchase a few of these plants for your landscape, it is important to make sure you buy a male plant to ensure that pollination occurs. All hollies are dioecious and have separate male and female plants. Winterberry holly is no exception. You need to have at least one male for every 6-10 females for proper pollination to occur. It is also important to select a male cultivar that blooms at the same time as your female cultivars for best fruit set, so make sure you look up compatible pollinators before purchasing them.

Winterberry hollies are fairly problem free, but they do require acidic soils to grow their best. They are very prone to developing iron chlorosis in alkaline soils, which causes the foliage to develop a sickly yellow color. To prevent the development of iron chlorosis only plant winterberry holly in soils with a pH lower than 7.0. You can determine your soil pH by submitting a soil sample to your local County Extension Office. Other potential problems are from root rot diseases known as Phytophthora and Black Root Rot. If you have had any issues with these diseases previously, it would be best to avoid planting winterberry holly.

If you would like a plant that provides exceptional winter interest to the landscape than look no farther than our native winterberry holly. They are extremely common in the nursery industry and many cultivars are available for purchase. This plant makes an outstanding shrub border where it can be allowed to sucker freely and grow together. The fruits even hold up surprisingly well when cut and used in winter arrangements. The brilliant red berries make a wonderful addition to a live wreath or other cut green display. Another surprising bonus is how popular the flowers are with pollinators. A study performed here at the University of Kentucky identified winterberry holly as the most popular holly with pollinators when in bloom and was very highly ranked for its use by our native bee species. If you have the right growing conditions for this plant, I would definitely recommend giving it a shot in your yard or garden.



Fruit of 'Winter Red' Winterberry Holly.
Photo by Paul Snyder, Buckeye Yard and
Garden onLine, Ohio State University
Extension

November Quick Tips

- Although we are passed the best time for seeding, lawns will benefit from a fall application of nitrogen. October and November are excellent months to feed as you can promote vigor without excessive growth.
- Mow new grass seedlings when they reach two- and one-half inches tall. Continue to mow lawns as late as needed.
- Remove leaves from lawns, especially new plantings, to prevent grass from being damaged.
- When you are finished with tools and equipment for the season clean, sharpen, and oil tools for next year. Make sure to drain, or add fuel stabilizer to, gasoline powered equipment.
- If you have not dug and stored tender bulbs like dahlias, cannas, and gladiolus, do so before the ground freezes.
- Clean up peony foliage if you have had any of the leaf spotting diseases. This will help prevent the problem next year.
- Drain and store garden hoses and irrigation systems.
- November is an excellent time to plant fall bulbs for next spring.
- Start a compost pile with all of those leaves. It doesn't have to be elaborate or technical. A simple pile will make compost if left long enough.
- Plant paperwhites, amaryllis and other ready to bloom bulbs for the holidays.
- Protect the trunks of fruit trees with wire mesh to prevent gnawing damage from rabbits and voles.
- Do a thorough cleanup of the vegetable garden. This will remove many insect and disease problems before they can become a problem next year.
- Monitor houseplants for insect problems. Most common pests can be controlled if detected before they become major infestations.

Recipe of the Month



Sweet and Spicy Brussels Sprouts

1 pound (2 cups)
Brussels sprouts
1 tablespoon olive oil
½ teaspoon sea salt
1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon fresh
cracked black
pepper
1 teaspoon red
pepper flakes

Drizzle:
½ teaspoon hot
sauce
1 tablespoon honey

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. **Wash** Brussels sprouts, **remove** outer leaves and **cut** each sprout in half. **Mix** olive oil, sea salt, garlic powder, black pepper and red pepper flakes in a medium sized bowl. **Add** Brussels sprouts to the mixture and **stir** to coat evenly. **Mix** the hot sauce and honey in a small bowl and set aside. **Place** Brussels sprouts on a greased baking

sheet. **Bake** 30 minutes or until tender. **Drizzle** hot sauce mixture over top of cooked Brussels sprouts.

Yield: 4, ½ cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 70 calories, 3.5 g fat, 0.5 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 320 mg sodium, 9 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 5 g sugars, 2 g protein.





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HOLIDAY CREATIONS AND DISCOVERIES

 **TUESDAY - DECEMBER 6 - 1-4PM** 

**COME & JOIN FAYETTE COUNTY EXTENSION
HORTICULTURE AND FAMILY AND CONSUMER
SCIENCES PROGRAMS**

We will demonstrate how to create wreaths, centerpieces, and swags from fresh greens at home and make homemade gifts straight from your kitchen!

At the end of class, have an opportunity to pick up an ornament from our ornament swap table!

**COST: ONE CANNED
GOOD TO BE DONATED
TO A FOOD PANTRY**

**BRING ONE
ORNAMENT FOR
OUR SWAP TABLE**

**FAYETTE COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE
1140 HARRY SYKES WAY
LEXINGTON KY 40504**

**SPACE IS LIMITED
CALL THE EXTENSION OFFICE
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LET'S TALK TURKEY

Unsafe handling and under-cooking your holiday bird can cause foodborne illnesses. Here are a few tips from the USDA to keep your Thanksgiving safe and delicious!

Types of turkeys regulated by the USDA:



*For more information about each type of turkey, visit fsis.usda.gov.

3 WAYS TO THAW

While frozen, a turkey is safe indefinitely. As soon as it begins to thaw, bacteria that may have been present before freezing will begin to grow again. Here are three ways to safely thaw your bird:

Refrigerator:
Safe to store the turkey for another 1 – 2 days in the refrigerator.
This is the USDA recommended thawing method.
How to thaw:
Allow approximately 24 hrs. for every 4-5lbs of bird.

Cold water:
Cook immediately after thawing.
How to thaw:
Submerge the bird in cold water & change every 30 mins.

Microwave:
Cook immediately after thawing.
How to thaw:
Use defrost function based on weight

For more information on safe thawing methods, visit fsis.usda.gov

DID YOU KNOW?

It's safe to cook a frozen turkey though cooking time will be 50% longer!

Clean

Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm water.

Utensils
Plates
Countertops
Cutting boards
SHOULD ALSO BE WASHED

Bacteria, which can be present inside and outside a turkey, can't be washed off the bird! Cooking is the only way to destroy this potentially dangerous bacteria.

SO DON'T WASH YOUR TURKEY!!

SEPARATE

Separate raw turkey from fresh food, and use separate cutting boards, plates, and utensils.

Keep dishes that touch raw food separate, too!

Wash items that touch raw meat with soap and warm water.

COOK

Your bird is not safe until it reaches 165 °F — you cannot tell by the color.

Remember to ensure any stuffing cooked with the bird reaches 165 °F, too!

Use three places to check the temperature.

- Thickest part of breast
- Innermost part of wing
- Innermost part of thigh

When turkey is removed from the oven, let it stand 20 minutes before carving to allow juices to settle.

CHILL

Take your time around the dinner table, but refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours!

Safe in fridge 3-4 days

Safe frozen, but use within 2-6 months for best quality.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat

Last day Thanksgiving leftovers are safe from the fridge.

Leftover turkey should be cut into smaller pieces, and store items separately in smaller containers.

Be sure to pack leftovers in a cooler if traveling.

Reheat thoroughly to a temperature of 165 °F.

Remember, bacteria that cause foodborne illnesses can't be smelled or tasted!

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Visit foodsafety.gov

If you have a specific question, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHOTLINE or visit AskKaren.gov. Visit PregunteleaKaren.gov for questions in Spanish.

