

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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Gardener's Toolbox Classes

Stump the Hort Agent: Ask Anything Q&A Session ~ Tuesday, November 7th at 6:00pm: Question and answer session: an opportunity for the audience to steer the conversation to whatever topics you desire. Put the experts in the hot seat and hopefully we will know the answers. Vegetables to perennials. Cost: Free, but must register in advance to reserve a seat.

Easy Houseplants ~ Thursday, November 16th at 6:00pm: We all yearn for lush indoor plants yet often fail to keep them healthy. We will discuss which plants are easier to grow and maintain indoors, and provide basic information about indoor plant care. At the very least, I will try to convince you it is ok to occasionally kill your houseplants. They last for months and are often cheaper than cut flowers. Participants will receive a plant to take home. Cost: \$20.00

Attracting Birds ~ Tuesday, December 5th at 6:00pm: There is great joy in observing birds in the garden during the gray winter days. We will focus on plants you may want to include in your landscape that attract them. We will also discuss the importance of habitat, nesting sites, water, and feeders. Cost: Free, but must register in advance to reserve a seat.

Orchids for Beginners ~ Tuesday, December 12th at 6:00pm: Orchids have a reputation as difficult to grow. They are not necessarily difficult but do require different care than other types of plants. Some varieties make better choices for the beginner. This is an introduction to some of the easier species for the novice. We will have a few plants to give away as door prizes. Cost: \$5.00

Register on-line: <https://fayette.ca.uky.edu/classregistration>

HAPPY
Thanksgiving

The Fayette County Extension Office will be closed for the Thanksgiving Holiday November 23 & 24, 2023



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How to Start Feeding Birds in Your Yard, Including Feed to Use

For many, gardening and bird feeding go hand in hand.

While not an expert, I enjoy attracting our feathered friends to the backyard. I started by only feeding in the winter, but now I feed year-round.

Birds need a steady supply of food, water and shelter. Birds often struggle to find a food source in the winter months. Dry conditions can also impact the amount of native food available.

Backyard bird feeding is one way we can help out.

There are many bird food mixes on the market as different species prefer different grains. The seed with the most universal appeal to birds is the black oil sunflower seed. If you are new to bird feeding, this is a place to start — it attracts the greatest diversity of birds to the feeder.

Alternatively, if you feed with a mixture of seeds, make sure it is one of the main ingredients. White proso millet is the second most popular seed at the feeding stations.

As you become more interested in bird feeding, you may want to use several types of feeders and locations, each stocked with a different seed or grain.

Here is a handy list of favorite food sources for birds:

- Black oil sunflower seeds: superior food for most species;
- Black striped sunflower seeds: most species will use, preferred by titmice and blue jays;
- Gray striped sunflower seeds: not as preferred as the other types of sunflower seeds;
- White proso millet: favored by juncos, mourning doves and sparrows;
- Red proso millet: can be a substitute for white millet;
- Peanut kernels: eaten by many species including blue jays;
- Niger thistle seed: preferred by finches but also many other species;
- Cracked corn: not as desirable and may attract other non-invited guests;
- Suet, an animal fat mixture: for high-energy birds such as woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice.

Many first-time bird feeders purchase less expensive mixes. A word of caution — these mixes most often contain a high amount of milo or grain sorghum, a BB-sized orange or white grain seed. No common backyard bird prefers these seeds. You will attract birds using this type of mix, but you will most likely experience more waste because the birds kick the milo out of the feeder searching for the more desirable seeds.

In my backyard feeders, I have started feeding more cracked sunflower seeds, which have the hull removed, reducing the trash around the feeder. The drawback is that it's more expensive.

I have two feeders. In the one closest to the house and located in a garden bed, I feed the sunflower chips. In a more open area, I use a mixed feed that creates hull waste.

Each feeder attracts different birds, as some species are perch feeders while others like to scavenge the ground. Whichever variety of feed you choose, you will enjoy the sights and sounds of birds in your garden.

Source: Dennis Patton Horticulture Agent with Kansas State University Research and Extension.



The Fall Field Cricket, a Singing Invader

According to the calendar, we are entering the autumnal portion of 2020, even if it definitely doesn't feel like it here in Kentucky. Hopefully, temperatures will start dropping soon and we can enjoy apple picking, pumpkin carving, and cricket singing! Cricket mating calls are a classic component of fall and though their chirping annoys some folks, it is beautiful in its own way. In the fall, the chirping that you hear is produced specifically by the fall field cricket.

Description & Biology

This species (*Gryllus pennsylvanicus*) is large (half to full inch long) and has a dark black coloration normally. They are also known for having a large noggin relative to the size of their body. They usually have long antennae and both males and females have two long cerci, which are sort of like rear antennae. Females also have a long, sword-like egg laying device called an ovipositor that they use to insert their eggs into the soil.

Fall field crickets spend the winter as eggs and hatch out in the spring. They develop through several nymphal stages as summer progresses and become full-fledged, singing, and hopping adults by the time fall rolls round. They can live nearly anywhere in their broad U.S. range, including lawns, forests, fields, caves, and even near/inside of homes. They love to be under heavy objects or down in cracks and crevices where they can hide. They can live up until the first frost or slightly longer if they have made it inside a building. Usually it is too dry and there isn't enough food for them to last long in structures.

Both males and females can sing, which makes them different from other musical insects such as cicadas. The male is the louder of the two and will use burrows or cracks to amplify its sound. The chirping is created by rubbing the wings together; the right wing has rows of "teeth" that rasp against the left wing to generate sound. If you would like to listen to some of the calls of crickets, you can check out "[The Songs of Insects](#)" webpage. Be sure to use your headphone unless you want to confuse your friends and family. Cricket songs have been extensively studied and there are a lot of interesting tidbits about them. For example, you can count the number of chirps a male cricket makes in 13 seconds, add 40 to this number, and that gives you an approximation of the local temperature in degrees Fahrenheit.

Preventing Cricket Home Invasions

If you feel plagued by crickets in the fall, you will want to rely on pest-proofing to prevent them. Making sure that windows and doors seal shut properly, that there are no cracks in caulking, and that screens are affixed over openings in the house will all help to minimize cricket incursions. You can look at the Kentucky Pest News article, "[Protect Your Home from Fall Invaders](#)" for more information. If crickets are already inside, it is best to scoop them up and dispose of them or use glue board traps near the base of the wall to snare them. Alternatively, you can let them serenade you as you enjoy some other autumnal activities!

Source: Jonathan L. Larson, University of Kentucky, Extension Entomologist



You can tell male and female crickets apart by looking at the rear-end of their abdomen. If you see three appendages attached, that is a female with her two cerci and one ovipositor. If you see only two appendages, that is a male with his cerci.

(Photos: Jim Kalisch, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Entomology).

What's the Difference Between Sweet Potatoes and Yams?

Pass the sweet potatoes. Or is it pass the yams? We often use these names interchangeably, but in reality, they are two very different plants. So, what is the difference between sweet potatoes and yams?

True yams are monocots (like grasses and lilies) in the family Dioscoreaceae that are native to Africa and Asia. Sweet potatoes are dicots that are native to Central and South America and are part of the morning glory family (Convolvulaceae). Additionally, sweet potatoes are not related to potatoes (also called Irish or white potatoes) either, which belong to the nightshade family (Solanaceae) along with tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants.

Yams belong to the genus *Dioscorea*, which contains over 600 species of plants, most of which are tropical. Several different species of yams are cultivated, with the most commonly grown being white yam (*Dioscorea rotundata*) from Africa and water yam (*Dioscorea alata*) from Asia. A majority of yam production takes place in Africa (95% of global production), with Nigeria being the largest producer. Yams that are available in the United States are typically grown in Caribbean countries.

Yams grow as a vine and produce an underground tuber, which vaguely resembles sweet potatoes, that are long and cylindrical. Yams can range in size from the size of a potato to extremely large, up to five feet long and weighing over 100 pounds! Their flesh can be white to bright yellow to purple or pink, and the tuber is covered in a tough, scaly skin that is difficult to remove. They are often boiled and mashed as well as fried, roasted, or baked (like baked potatoes). Yams are starchier and drier when compared to the sweet potato varieties most commonly grown in the United States.

Sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) produce storage roots that have smooth thin skin that can range in color from white to yellow, red, purple, or brown. These roots are short and blocky and have tapered ends. The flesh also ranges in color from white to yellow, orange, or orange-red. Sweet potato varieties are classified as either 'firm' or 'soft'. When cooked, 'firm' sweet potatoes remain firm and are dry and crumbly (like a 'regular' potato), while 'soft' varieties become soft, moist, and sweet. 'Soft' types typically have dark orange skin and orange flesh. In the United States, these are the sweet potatoes we usually refer to as yams (they are also the most commonly grown sweet potatoes).

So why do we sometimes call sweet potatoes yams? According to the Library of Congress, the confusion between yams and sweet potatoes began when soft varieties of sweet potato were introduced to the United States: "In the United States, firm varieties of sweet potatoes were produced before soft varieties. When soft varieties were first grown commercially, there was a need to differentiate between the two. African slaves had already been calling the 'soft' sweet potatoes 'yams' because they resembled the yams in Africa. Thus, 'soft' sweet potatoes were referred to as 'yams' to distinguish them from the 'firm' varieties."

Today the USDA requires that when the term 'yam' is used to describe sweet potatoes, it must also be labeled as a 'sweet potato.' Unless you specifically search for yams, which can often be found at ethnic markets, you are probably eating sweet potatoes.

Armed with this knowledge, you now have a great conversation starter for the Thanksgiving table. Or, if your family is anything like mine, they'll roll their eyes and grumble here they go again.

Source: Ken Johnson, University of Illinois Extension Educator, Horticulture

Why is That There?

When we see a problem in our home and garden, our first inclination is how do I fix this? But the better question to ask ourselves is why is it there? By thinking about the root cause of the problem, often we can prevent it from happening again in the future.

For example, if an insect is in a place it really should not be, try to figure out why it is there in the first place.

- How did this insect get in the house? Could it have come in under a door or in with something I brought from outside such as firewood?
- Is it coming inside because the weather outside is turning cooler? Lady bugs and stink bugs make their way in doors this time of year because they are think our houses look like rock outcroppings, a great place for them to overwinter.
- Is there something here it wants? Is it attracted to something inside, like fruit on the counter or grains in your pantry? Pantry pests such as grain moths can become a problem in kitchens when your stored grains and cereals become infested.

Another example of a problem you might encounter is nuisance wildlife.

- What is this animal attracted to? Is it hungry? Chipmunks are very common around birdfeeders. Controlling the amount of seed that falls to the ground can help with control of these animals.
- Has the environment somehow changed to make things more attractive for this animal? For example, is a porch light causing the area to be darker at night.
- Is there a place that is attractive for it to live? Is there easy access under your deck or an old groundhog den nearby? These can be attractive places for skunks to take up residence.

You can also look at diseases in our lawn, garden and landscape the same way.

- If you had blossom end rot on your tomatoes, why might the spot have shown up? We have plenty of calcium in our soils so this problem is often associated with uneven watering.
- What is causing the spots on the leaves of my tree? Have we had strange weather patterns this year? If I look at the leaves, do I see insect damage? Leaf galls, which are irregular plant growths caused by insects have been bad this year, but in most cases are not a serious problem.
- Why are some areas of my landscape showing disease problems and not others? Am I doing anything different in that area? Does that area not drain as well? Is there a down spout in the area contributing the amount of moisture in the soil?

By changing the way we look at problems, we can help prevent them in the future. By being proactive, we do not have to reach for pesticides as often.

Source: Amanda Sears, Horticulture Agent for Madison County



If chipmunks are a problem, check your birdfeeders to make sure there are not a lot seeds on the ground.

Tool Maintenance

Sharp, non-rusty tools are important for the ease and safety of performing gardening tasks. A flat file can be used to sharpen the blades on a set of pruning shears or a lawn mower. Sharp blades cut rather than tear or bruise plant tissue. Many diseases enter turfgrass plants through damaged tissue, so a clean cut will help reduce disease problems.

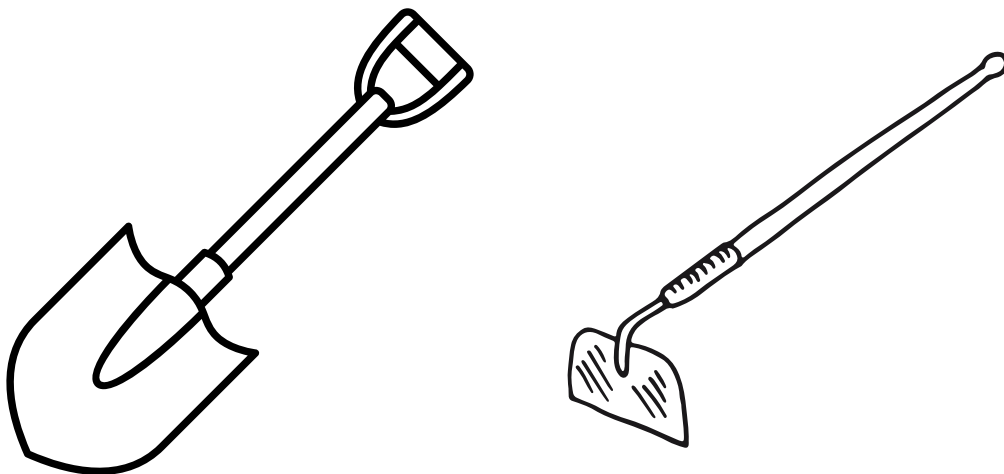
Shovels and hoes also need to have sharp edges to give a good cut. Use a flat file to sharpen the cutting edge of a shovel. This reduces the amount of force you have to use when digging. When you encounter a root, a sharp-edged shovel will allow a nice clean cut, and the root will recover faster. Cutting weeds with a sharp hoe requires less work, and it's easier on the hands and back.

When sharpening with a flat file, wear a pair of gloves to reduce the risk of cutting yourself on the sharpened edge. Long, diagonal strokes of the file give a more uniform cutting edge to the tool than short strokes in one spot on a blade. If a bench grinder is available, the sharpening goes much more quickly.

After use, push shovel blades into a five-gallon bucket of oily sand so rust won't form on the blades. Wipe pruners and other cutting equipment with an oily rag to prevent rust formation. Be careful not to cut yourself on the new sharp edges.

When sharpening gasoline or electric-powered tools, be sure to disconnect the spark plug and unplug electric tools from the power source.


Source: Colorado State University



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



Yummy Sweet Potato Casserole


6 medium sweet potatoes ¼ cup maple syrup 2 tablespoons brown sugar 2 eggs ½ teaspoon salt	¼ cup low-fat vanilla Greek yogurt ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract 1 tablespoon cinnamon	Topping: ½ cup brown sugar ½ cup ground rolled oats 1 tablespoon maple syrup	3 tablespoons melted butter ¼ teaspoon salt ½ teaspoon cinnamon ½ cup chopped pecans
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Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. **Peel** sweet potatoes and **cut** into 1-inch cubes. **Place** sweet potato cubes in a medium saucepan and **cover** with water. **Cook** over medium-high heat until tender. **Drain** and **mash**. In a large bowl, **mix** together mashed potatoes, maple syrup, brown sugar, eggs, salt, yogurt, vanilla and cinnamon. **Blend** until smooth. **Pour** into a 13-by-9 inch baking dish. Topping: In a medium bowl, **mix** the brown sugar and oats.

Add in syrup, melted butter, salt and cinnamon; **blend** until mixture is coarse. **Stir** in pecans. **Sprinkle** over sweet potato mixture. **Bake** 30 minutes, or until topping is lightly browned.

Yield: 12, ½ cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 190 calories, 7 g fat, 2.5 g saturated fat, 10 mg cholesterol, 190 mg sodium, 31 g carbohydrate, 20 g sugars, 4 g protein.



For More Plate It Up Recipes, Visit: <http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/plate-it-kentucky-proud>