

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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Inside this issue:

- Do's and Don'ts of Spring Lawn Care in Kentucky
- What is the Difference between Cool Season and Warm Season Vegetables?
- KY Christmas Tree Association Plant Sale
- Plant Spotlight: Spring Beauty
- Fire Blight
- For Your Information: Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day
- March Quick Tips
- Recipe of the Month

Happy Spring folks!

I hope you've had a good winter's rest because spring has already arrived. With all the warm weather we've had, I've seen crocuses, hellebores, snowdrops and more in bloom since the middle of February. I have my fingers crossed that March bucks the old idiom and both enters and leaves as a gentle lamb.

With such unseasonably warm weather many of the tasks on our spring to-do lists are just waiting to be checked off. We've included a little reminder of some spring lawn care do's and don'ts along with an article on fire blight for those eager to work with their fruit trees.

Just as we find our garden task list growing longer, so does our list of toolbox classes for the month. We have three Toolbox classes in March with the first being the Early Vegetable Garden on Thursday, March 9th at 6:00pm. Which is then followed by Growing Decorative Gourds and Pumpkins on Tuesday, March 21st at 6:00pm and Growing Great Zinnias on Thursday March 30th at 6:00pm. Register on our website: <https://fayette.ca.uky.edu/classregistration>

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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4-H Summer Camp

Picture this: your first summer camp experience-warm weather, campfires, star gazing, cabin living, swimming, fishing, friendships, and so much more.

4-H summer camp is a well-rounded experience that allows youth to build positive adult relationships, become self-reliant, develop team building skills, improve overall health, and create memories. We are always looking for individuals interested in being an adult volunteer for 4-H Camp but, while volunteers play a major role in the camp experience, summer fun has a cost. This summer, the cost of the five-day, four-night camping experience with Fayette County is \$290.00. For some in need, this cost can be reduced with the use of a scholarship. If you, your business, or organization wish to help a Fayette County child in need attend summer camp, please consider making a charitable gift today! *Your gift to Fayette County 4-H Council, Inc. is fully tax deductible.*

Fayette County 4-H is dedicated to reaching underserved youth in the community. We believe the summer camp experience should be available to every Fayette County child. That's why it's our goal to ensure that no child is denied the camp experience due to their inability to pay. No matter what the circumstances are, they all have one thing in common, they have a child who desperately wants or needs to come to 4-H summer camp, and they need help to make it happen. If you have questions about our scholarship program, 4-H summer camp, volunteering, or 4-H in general, please contact Genaea Sarantakos at genaea.sarantakos@uky.edu or call 859-257-5582.



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Do's and Don'ts of Spring Lawn Care in Kentucky

Do: Get your Mower Ready for the Season!

- Having your mower ready to go before the season starts will save you downtime during the growing season.
- Sharpen blade. Having sharp mower blades are very important to turf aesthetics and health.

Do: Apply a Pre-emergent Herbicide.

- Annual grassy weeds such as crabgrass and goosegrass begin to germinate in the spring. By applying a pre-emergent herbicide prior to germination, weed numbers can be drastically reduced and your lawn can have the chance to flourish without fighting weeds for space, nutrients, light, and water.
- In central and eastern Kentucky, a pre-emergent herbicide should typically be applied prior to around April 15; however, pre-emergent herbicides might need to be applied earlier than normal this year because of the warmer weather.
- A good indicator plant for knowing when to apply a pre-emergent herbicide is forsythia. Generally, a pre-emergent application should be applied before forsythia drops its blooms.

Do: Mow at Regular Height.

Because the grass grows at a high volume in the spring, it's best to not let the height get too long before mowing. Ideally, never cut off more than 1/3 of the leaf in one mowing. For example, if you want to maintain your lawn at 3 inches, mow when the height reaches about 4.5 inches. Removing more than 1/3 of the leaf blade results in a reduction in root growth.

- Mow at taller heights to reduce crabgrass populations without the use of herbicides. Recommended heights for lawn grasses in Kentucky are:
Tall fescue- 3 inches or taller
Kentucky bluegrass- 2.5 inches or taller

Don't: Apply Nitrogen.

- The vast majority of nitrogen fertilizer should be applied in the fall. Fall applications improve the health of the lawn and result in a greener lawn in the winter, less spring mowing, and less weeds, heat stress, need for water, and disease problems in summer.
- Nitrogen applied in spring and summer promotes growth of warm-season weeds such as crabgrass, goosegrass, and bermudagrass. Further, high amounts of nitrogen in spring and summer can result in increased damage from white grubs in the soil. Adult beetles are attracted to the lush lawns and high nitrogen levels restrict turf rooting which compounds the damage from the white grubs feeding on the turf roots.

Don't: Apply Weed and Feed Products.

- Do not apply weed and feed products as we don't want to be applying nitrogen to our cool-season lawns in the spring.

Don't: Seed in the Spring.

- The best time of year to seed lawns is in the early fall. A spring planting has significant competition between seedlings and grassy weeds and the immature seedlings can struggle with summer heat and drought more.

For more information about home lawn care in Kentucky, please contact the Fayette County Cooperative Extension Service at (859) 257-5582 or visit: <https://ukturf.ca.uky.edu/tips-and-recommendations-maintaining-home-lawns>.

Source: Dr. Gregg Munshaw, UK Extension Turf Specialist

Quick Tip: The best time to seed Kentucky lawns is in mid-August to mid-September



The blooming period of forsythia shrubs is a good indicator of when crabgrass preventers should be applied. Photo credit: Denise Ellsworth, The Ohio State University, Bugwood.org

What is the Difference between Cool Season and Warm Season Vegetables?

Cool season plants grow best with a relatively cool air temperature (50 to 60 °F). These plants are the first ones to be planted in the garden season and then can be replanted in the fall. They grow well during the short and cool days of spring and fall. They can be planted several weeks up to a couple of months before the last frost date (around May 10th). Plant cool season crops as soon as the soil is workable in the spring. If planted too late in spring, the heat of summer will reduce their quality. They may become bitter, have lower yields or bolt (form flowers and go to seed). Light frost will not injure them.

Many cool season crops can be sown in early spring and again in fall. For fall planting, they must be planted early enough to reach maturity before winter weather, although there are a few winter hardy vegetables. Some of the best quality vegetables are produced during fall's warm days and cool nights. Plants grown in the fall have a higher sugar content and better flavor.

Examples of cool season vegetables include asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, chives, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Swiss chard, kale, leek, lettuce, onion, parsnips, peas, radishes, spinach, and turnips.

Warm season vegetables should be planted after the threat of frost has passed. These plants require warm soils and air temperature for growth and fruiting. They grow best with long warm days and mild nights.

The growing season in our area is too short to allow for some warm season crops to be directly seeded in the garden. For example, if you plant a tomato seed, it will take 60-80 days to reach maturity depending on the variety. To be able to get tomatoes earlier in the season they are started indoors and then transplanted to the garden once the danger of frost has passed.

Examples of warm season vegetables include beans, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, peppers, zucchini and summer squash, pumpkin and winter squash, sweet potato and watermelon.

Source: Amanda Sears, Agent for Horticulture, Madison Co. Cooperative Extension Service

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.



Cabbages are a common cool season vegetable that can be transplanted outdoors as early as March 15th in Central Kentucky. Photo credit: Marissa Schuh, Extension educator, and Jill MacKenzie

Plant Spotlight: Spring Beauty

The humble Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) is one of our earliest spring ephemerals to bloom here in Kentucky. This plant is native to most of the eastern half of North America and in the wild it can typically be found in rich, moist woods. The leaves of this plant are quite small, and grass-like, which makes it a bit easy to overlook when it's not in bloom. During blooming it grows to a height of three to six inches tall and the plant develops a drooping raceme with multiple star shaped flowers. Each flower is around $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch in diameter with five white petals that are adorned with pink stripes that run from the base of the petal to the tip. There is a lot of variability in the color and pattern of the pink stripes with some plants having very muted stripes and other with very prominent and brightly colored stripes. To top it all off the anthers of the flower are also pink and produce pink pollen.

Spring beauties are very adaptable plants and will grow in a wide variety of conditions. In Fayette County they can frequently be found growing in some of the older parks and neighborhoods of Lexington. Perhaps the two most prominent populations of this plant can be found at Ashland, the Henry Clay Estate, and the Lexington Cemetery where the entire lawns are blanketed with the small white and pink flowers of the spring beauty. If you're lucky, you might also find this plant growing in your own lawn or flowerbeds.

Because of its tendency to grow in lawns and flowerbeds, some people consider the spring beauty to be a weed and actively try to control it with herbicides along with some of our other native wildflowers like the common blue violet. If you have this plant in your yard or gardens, I encourage you to leave it be as the spring beauty will not negatively affect your lawn. The spring beauty is actually a very important pollinator resource as it provides both nectar and pollen for pollinators. It also has a very long bloom time, which typically lasts from early March to late April. In addition to its importance to generalist pollinators, the spring beauty also has a specialist pollinator, the Spring Beauty Mining Bee, which has evolved to only utilize the pollen of spring beauties (*Claytonia* spp.) for feeding its young. Without the spring beauty, this specialist pollinator would not exist.

If you already have this plant in your yard and you would like to encourage it to spread more, then try to hold off on mowing your yard for as long as possible. Spring beauties are prolific seeders, and allowing them to go to seed will help them spread around your yard. You should also avoid the use of systemic herbicides—especially broadleaf selective herbicides. Despite the grass-like foliage this plant is a dicot, and it is very susceptible to common broadleaf herbicides like 2,4-D.

If you would like to add this plant to your yard or garden, check with a neighbor and see if they might have some that you can collect seeds from. You might also consider transplanting to add this plant to your garden. Spring beauty has small bulb-like corms that are buried in the soil. These corms can easily be dug up when the foliage is visible and then transplanted to wherever you would like them to be. You could also check with local or online nurseries to see if they have any plants available for purchase.



Spring Beauty in bloom. Note the grass-like foliage. Photo credit: Joseph O'Brien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Fire Blight

Fire blight is a highly destructive disease of apple and pear that can occur in commercial orchards and home plantings. Many landscape trees and shrubs in the rose family are also susceptible to this disease. Fire blight can cause severe damage in a very short period of time. Because precise conditions are needed for infection, disease appearance is erratic from year to year.

The earliest disease symptoms are observed on infected spurs when the bases of individual flowers or pedicels (flower stems) wilt and darken. As blooms collapse, infection spreads rapidly into other flowers in the cluster, causing the entire spur to wilt suddenly and die. Diseased tissues usually remain attached to the tree.

Infections frequently spread from blossoms to supporting spurs and branches, resulting in stem lesions or cankers. Fire blight cankers appear shrunken with a dark brown to purple color. As cankers increase in size, they can girdle stems or branches; as a result, tissues above these infection sites die.

Bacterial cells can build up during the blossom and spur blight phases of fire blight and infect rapidly growing shoots. Blighted shoots wilt from the tip and develop a crook or bend at the growing point, commonly referred to as a 'shepherd's crook.' This phase occurs after bloom.

Trunk and rootstock infections can occur from the internal movement of the fire blight bacterium through water conducting tissue or from infected water sprouts.

The fire blight organism, *Erwinia amylovora*, survives from one year to the next at the margins of previously formed branch and trunk cankers. In most years, fire blight begins during the bloom period and, as long as the environment is favorable, it will continue through petal fall and/or until shoot elongation stops.

Fire blight is generally favored by:

- High relative humidity or rainy conditions.
- Temperatures between 65°F and 70°F.

Under favorable conditions, bacterial populations can build-up rapidly. At 70°F, numbers of bacterial cells double every 20 minutes; one cell can become one billion cells overnight, each capable of causing a new infection.

The key to fire blight management is preventing the infection of flowers. Once flowers become infected, they serve as a source of inoculum for the rest of the tree. Management of fire blight requires an integrated approach that relies primarily on cultural practices and is supported by the judicious use of bactericides.

While few cultivars of apple, pear, and the various ornamental host species are immune to fire blight, some cultivars are more resistant or tolerant than others. Whenever possible, plant resistant cultivars and resistant cultivar/rootstock combinations. For information on fire blight tolerant apple and pear cultivars, consult the [Midwest Tree Fruit Pest Management Handbook, ID-93](#).

(Continued on next page)



Fire Blight canker at base of spur shoot. Photo Credit: William M. Ciesla, Forest Health Management International, Bugwood.org



A blighted apple shoot displaying a "Shepherd's Crook" at the end of the branch tip. Photo Credit: Penn State Department of Plant Pathology & Environmental Microbiology Archives, Penn State University, Bugwood.org

Fire Blight (continued)

Implementing the following cultural practices is important in managing this disease:

- Avoid any cultural practice which stimulates rapid tree growth; young succulent tissue is susceptible to infection.
- Fertilization, especially nitrogen application, should be adequate for tree health without promoting rapid growth and prolonged succulence.
- Prune trees to improve air circulation and to promote rapid drying of foliage. Aggressive pruning will stimulate growth, so selective pruning is recommended.

Pruning can play an important role in a comprehensive fire blight management program, and when done properly, should reduce inoculum and tree damage. However, while removal of sources of the pathogen is desirable, pruning when the disease is active can further spread the pathogen. Thus, pruning out fire blight strikes during the growing season is a controversial issue. Currently UK recommends that pruning blighted twigs and cankered branches be delayed until winter.

Timely chemical sprays may be used as preventative measures to control fire blight during the spring when the pathogen is at the surface of cankers and on flowers. After the bacterium has invaded tissues, bactericides are not effective. Fungicides will not control fire blight. Refer to the [Midwest Tree Fruit Spray Guide \(ID-92\)](#) for application rates and other details.

Source: Nicole Ward Gauthier & Cheryl Kaiser, University of Kentucky, Department of Plant Pathology

For Your Information



Products that contain corrosive, toxic, or flammable ingredients are household hazardous wastes (HHW). These materials include common household items such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries and pesticides. Improper disposal can pollute air, water or soil and pose a threat to human health.

From time-to-time, the city offers a household hazardous waste collection. During these events, Fayette County residents can drop off the hazardous materials that have accumulated in their homes. The city will properly dispose of them, free of charge.

The next Household Hazardous Waste event will be held at 1631 Old Frankfort Pike on **Saturday, March 25** from 8:30 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Visit lexingtonky.gov/household-hazardous-waste to see a list of acceptable items and to learn how to dispose of HHW safely. If you have any questions about HHW disposal in Lexington, contact LexCall at 311 or (859) 425-2255

March Quick Tips

- Sow grass seed. First half of the month is ideal, but you can seed all month with reasonable results. Turf type tall fescue is your best choice. Dwarf varieties equal less mowing.
- Feed bulbs a balanced fertilizer now to promote nice blooms next year. Do not cut leaves down after flowering. They provide food for the plant. Let them die naturally.
- Vegetable gardens are awakening. Only work soil when crumbly. Squeeze a handful of soil into a ball. Drop it from waist height. If it crumbles easily soil is dry enough to work. If not wait for drier times as wet soils form hard clods.
- Remove old stems from rhubarb and asparagus. Fertilize with nitrogen, compost or rotted manure.
- Time to plant cool crops in the garden. These include: asparagus, beets, cabbage plants, carrots, chard, collards, kale, lettuce seed and plants, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach, and turnips.
- Repot houseplants. Increase pot size gradually. Plants may be fed a weak fertilizer solution (one quarter strength).
- Plant pansies and other cold tolerant flowers.
- Use sunny days to begin bed clean up. Be careful not to tread on emerging plants.
- Cut back perennials and ornamental grasses. Most grasses can be divided at this time. Some grasses are very woody and may require an axe or a mattock.
- Prune and fertilize brambles and blueberries.
- Clean out birdhouses or if you don't have any, now is the perfect time to hang a few.
- Seeds of hardy annuals such as larkspur, bachelor's buttons, Shirley and California poppies should be direct sown in the garden now.
- Spray peach trees with a fungicide for the control of peach leaf curl diseases. See [HO-57](#) for more info on peaches.
- Register for Gardener's Toolbox Classes: <https://fayette.ca.uky.edu/classregistration>

Recipe of the Month



Asian Asparagus Salad

1 pound fresh asparagus
1½ tablespoons low sodium soy sauce

2 teaspoons sugar or artificial sweetener
1 tablespoon olive oil

2 teaspoons sesame seeds

- 1. Snap** off and discard the root ends of the asparagus.
- 2. Wash** remaining stalks thoroughly.
- 3. Slice** stalks into 1½ inch lengths on the diagonal.
- 4. Blanch** asparagus for 1-3 minutes in boiling water, until bright green in color.
- 5. Cool** immediately

under cold water and drain.

- 6. Combine** soy sauce, sugar, olive oil, and sesame seeds in a small glass bowl. **Mix** dressing until sugar is dissolved.

- 7. In** a gallon zip-seal bag, add asparagus and dressing. **Turn** bag to coat asparagus with

dressing and chill in the refrigerator for 15 minutes. **Turn** bag again and chill for an additional 15 minutes before serving.

Yield: 4, ½ cup servings.
Nutrition Analysis: 70 calories, 4.5 g fat, .5 g sat. fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 250 mg sodium, 7 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 3 g protein.

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

