Gardening With The Masters

Growing, Gardening and Gaining Knowledge

February/March 2024

Come Grow With Us and select a free tree on Arbor Day, Friday, February 16, 9am until 4pm, downtown Canton under the gazebo. Master Gardeners will be there to help with your selections.

Editor's Corner ..... Page 1

Cold Frames ..... Page 2

Detoxifying Your Home with Houseplants ..... Page 3

Get Ready! They're Coming! ..... Page 4

Beyond Better Boy ..... Page 5

Cold Frames and GBBC ..... Page 6

Detoxifying Your Home continued and "Did You Know" ..... Page 7

February Gardening Tips and Rainfall ..... Page 8

March Gardening Tips ..... Page 9

Recipes/Links ..... Page 10

Editor's Corner

By Marcia Winchester,
Cherokee County Master Gardener

Master Gardener Ed Stumler demonstrates proper tool care courtesy Marcia Winchester

This year the Cherokee County Master Gardeners are offering an outstanding selection of in-person classes for the public. We have numerous classes on vegetables, including everyone's favorite, tomatoes. We have several classes on general veggie gardening and have added a potato-growing class in two locations. Our pruning class will be offered at three locations in February. We have added a class on tool care in April. The class on cut flowers has been brought back, and classes on using and saving herbs round out the summer. Of course we will be presenting classes on pollinators in August to compliment the multi-state Pollinator Census. Please come and learn about pollinators, and help count in our garden. The pollinator class and Pollinator Census will be open to kids and Scouts, plus we have two other gardening classes for kids at Veterans Park in Canton.

The various classes will be held at the following locations:

- Encompass Ministries, 6551 Commerce Parkway, Woodstock
- Canton Senior Center, 1001 Univeter Drive, Canton
- Woodstock Senior Center with Woodstock Parks & Recreation, 223 Arnold Mill Road, Woodstock ($10 fee per class)
- "The Buzz" Ahrens Recreation Center at Veterans Park with Cherokee Recreation & Parks, 7345 Cumming Highway, Canton ($5 fee per class)

You must be registered to attend. Check out our website at cherokeemastergardeners.com for information on our classes and to register. Sign up for as many classes as you want to attend.

Marcia

Cold frame image Washington State Extension

Cold Frames:

Get a Head Start on Spring and Extend Your Fall Garden

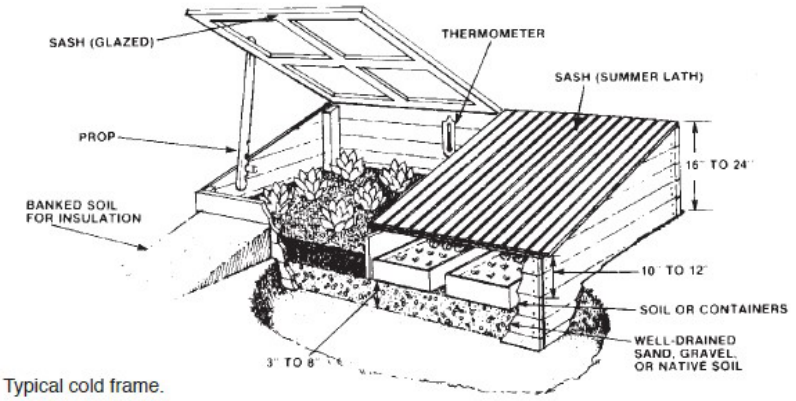
By Mike Lloyd, Cherokee County Master Gardener

If you're like me, come early March, I'm ready for spring, and that includes starting my spring garden. Window sills never work … there's just not enough light. That leaves either using grow lights or a cold frame. Although using grow lights is close to ideal, it requires a dedicated and warmed space and the purchase and operation of grow lights and possibly heaters, shelving, etc. Although it is not a completely controlled environment, a cold frame is inexpensive and is an easy way to grow an early season or late season cool-weather garden, get your warm-weather seedlings off to an early start, and even harden off your warm-weather seedlings. It's a great way to get that jump start on spring and to extend your fall garden.

What's a "cold frame"? It's simply an insulated box in or on the ground that has a transparent (or translucent) lid. The lid lets sunlight into the box for plant photosynthesis, and incoming sunlight also heats the soil and enclosed air space. The stored soil heat is slowly released to the enclosed space when the sun is not shining. So, the cold frame "traps heat" during the day and slowly releases it during the night. Think "greenhouse effect." The plants inside the box have both sun and warmth to grow even when it's cold out.

You can buy a ready-made cold frame or build one yourself. If you're a DIY person and have the tools and time, you can browse on the internet to find "your plan." Whether you buy or build, it's important to be familiar with the main features of the cold frame, including its materials and orientation in the landscape.

The lid is simply a transparent roof. It can be a sheet of plastic or glass. For a homemade cold frame, it can be a recycled old window frame, a scrap storm door, or a purchased sheet of polycarbonate or acrylic plastic; although not that great an insulator, it can even be something as simple as a sheet of polyethylene plastic sheeting. The lid can be simply laid on top of the box; however, it's best to hinge it to the top back side of the box. The hinged top will allow you to open and close the lid from a small crack to a full open position for ventilation. Some sort of seal where the lid contacts the sides of the box will help hold warm air in the box during cold nights. Short lengths of wood can be used to prop the lid open on those warm days.



Typical cold frame.

Cold frame construction Purdue extension

The back of the box should be constructed so that it is higher than the front. The two sides are angled to meet the front, back, and lid. The box should be oriented so that the low side faces south. The slope of the lid not only maximizes the amount of light entering the box but also helps the box to shed rain and/or snow. For homemade cold frames, the dimensions of the lid will often define the dimensions of the box, since some materials cannot easily be cut (e.g., tempered glass). The sides of the box not only support the lid and create a vertical space for the plants, but they also serve to insulate the box.

Wood is generally a good choice of material for the cold frame, because it is easy to work, provides excellent structural support, and is an excellent insulator. However, other materials, such as bricks and cinder blocks, can be used for the sides. Regardless of the material used, it is always a good idea to place additional insulating material, such as bales of hay, along the outside of the box. Along the same lines, placing the box in a wind-free location will further help it retain heat on a chilly, windy night.

Technically, cold frames have only one source of heat: the sun. If you want, you can add other heat sources, such as incandescent light bulbs in the air space or soil heating tape in the soil. When supplemental heat is used, the "cold frame" becomes a "hot bed." The advantage of supplemental heating is obvious: it can extend the time that the cold frame can be used (earlier in the spring, later in the fall) since it will help prevent freezing conditions in the space inside the box, especially during cold snaps. The additional heat also helps reduce humidity in the box; this helps reduce disease pressure from pathogens such as fungi and molds.

Continued on page 6

Detoxifying Your Home with Houseplants

By Diane Walton, Cherokee County Master Gardener

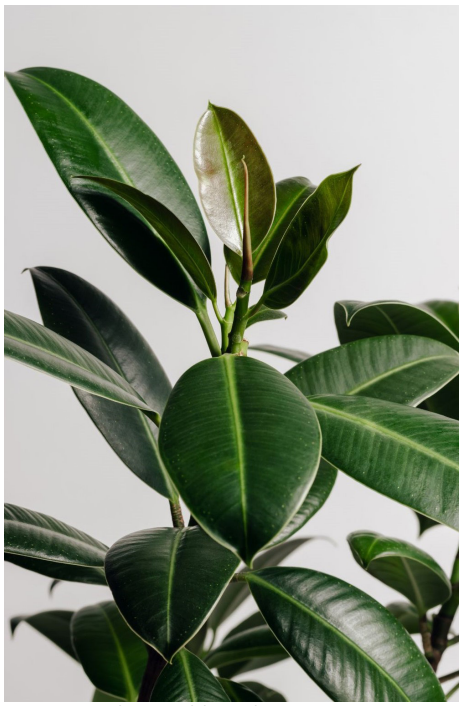


Photo rubber plant courtesy CANVA

Houseplants bring the beauty of the outdoors inside and add life to a room. They can be a source of décor for any room in your home. Besides adding to the beauty to a room, houseplants are also very beneficial to your health since they act as natural air filters. Some plants can reduce pollutants by as much as 80 percent in just 24 hours.

Harmful indoor air pollutants, such as formaldehyde, trichloroethylene, benzene, and xylene, can cause a host of serious illnesses. The air inside homes and offices can have a concentration of pollutants which can be 100 times higher than in the air outdoors. One 10-inch potted plant can clean up to 100 square feet of air space. In addition, plants increase a room's humidity level, which is helpful in the wintertime with the dry heat in our homes.

Keep in mind that many houseplants can be toxic to indoor pets if they were to eat any of the leaves. Keep the plants out of the reach of small children and pets to ensure their safety. Research a plant before buying to see if it might be harmful to any pets or children in your home. In the article below, plants that may be toxic are noted with asterisks (*).

CHEMICALS FOUND IN HOMES

Indoor air pollutants are found in many materials and substances that you will find in the average household. Consider what substances your home has in abundance, and use plants recommended for the specific chemical that material may contain.

For instance, formaldehyde may be found in carpeting, pressed wood, fiberboard, foam insulation, paper products, furniture, water repellents, and cleaners. Plants known to help include azalea*, spider plant, philodendron*, golden pothos*, dieffenbachia*, bamboo palm, Boston fern, dracaena*, poinsettia*, and chrysanthemum*.

Trichloroethylene occurs in ink, paint, lacquer, varnish, adhesive, and dry cleaning. If you are concerned about these chemicals, consider Gerbera daisy, peace lily*, chrysanthemum*, and dracaena*.

Benzene is found in tobacco smoke, synthetic fabric, gasoline, plastic, ink, detergents, and oil. Plants that will help remove these chemicals include ivy*, dracaena*, chrysanthemum*, peace lily*, Gerbera daisy, and orchids.

All of these air pollutants can be controlled by the use of houseplants. Unlike commercial filters that absorb toxins like a sponge and are discarded in a landfill, plants break toxins apart by sucking air into the soil where microbes degrade these pollutants into fundamental sources of energy and life.

Photo peace lily courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli

PLANT FOR SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

So, what plants are best for your particular needs? The following describes some common houseplants and how they can work for you in your home or office.

Boston ferns, areca palm, peace lily* and weeping fig* are houseplants that reduce aerial concentrations of volatile formaldehyde which can trigger asthma symptoms or eye, nose, and throat irritations. Boston ferns and peace lilies* are great in a bathroom since they thrive in shaded areas and like a humid environment.

Have allergies? A rubber plant* has a high humidity content and like a magnet draws in dust and allergens which adhere to the leaves of the plant instead of remaining in the air. This is why you have to clean the leaves often.

Get headaches often and don't know why? It could be from paints, ammonia, dry cleaning chemicals, plastics, and cosmetics that you use. Orchids are a great way to clear these toxins from the air in your home. With a cool temperature, medium light, and a little water each week, these plants will continue to work daily to keep your air clean.

Continued on page 7

Get Ready! They're Coming!

By Mary Tucker, Cherokee County Master Gardener

Photo birds in nest courtesy CANVA

Soon it will be time for birds to start nesting, so get your yard ready for them. Many birds begin looking for homes very early in the year, hoping to pick out and defend a suitable site even if they aren't quite ready to build a nest yet.

The bluebirds in our yard keep an eye on our nest boxes throughout the winter, and they also use the boxes to roost in during the winter months when they need extra warmth or shelter from the elements. They have started actually building nests as early as late February or early March.

To get your birdhouses ready for occupancy, there are a few easy tasks you should perform. First clean out any debris or old nesting materials. Check to be sure the box is still in good repair so that it will be sturdy and will keep out the rain. If repairs are needed, use untreated wood since the chemicals used to treat lumber can be harmful to birds. Also check that the box has some air circulation; you don't want it so tightly sealed that too much heat builds up in summer months.

Ensure that the box is strongly attached to its pole. It is generally preferred to use a pole rather than attaching a box directly to a tree trunk since trees are easier for predators to climb. However, snakes and raccoons can climb poles too, so take necessary precautions by installing a baffle or guard to thwart their entry into the box. If limbs of trees or shrubs are encroaching on the box, trim them away to prevent predators from climbing onto the top of the birdhouse.

If you want to attract a particular species of bird, check online resources to be sure the birdhouse you have (or buy) is best constructed and sited for that species. The hole size is especially important since you want a hole that is large enough for the desired bird but small enough to prevent unwanted birds or predators from entering.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology (www.birds.cornell.edu) and the National Audubon Society (www.audubon.org) are reliable sources of information about birdhouse specifics. A section of the Cornell site called nestwatch.org even has a section called "All About Birdhouses" that will help you figure out exactly what kind of birdhouse you need for the birds you want to welcome. In addition, you'll learn the proper height to mount the house, the entrance hole size, and habitats that different birds prefer.

Bluebird fledgling courtesy Mary Tucker

If you are especially interested in attracting bluebirds, there is a whole website dedicated exclusively to them: www.sialis.org. Here you can find details of nest box plans and specifications, how to site the box to the best advantage, how to prevent predators, and how to properly monitor the box.

Of course not all birds use nest boxes. Some, such as robins, sparrows, towhees, and thrashers, prefer to build their nests in trees or shrubbery. This kind of vegetation will naturally attract some of these birds to your garden.

Photo bathing birds courtesy CANVA

Once you have nesting sites available, remember to provide the birds with other needs. A clean water source for both drinking and bathing is a must. A birdbath should be no more than 2 inches deep with the water level only 1 inch to 1-1/2 inch, and choose a style that is easy to clean so you can keep fresh water available at all times. It's best to place the birdbath near some shrubbery so the birds have a safe perch from which to approach the birdbath.

Keeping a birdbath in the shade will keep the water from heating up too much, and it will also slow the growth of algae. If you place some rocks in the bottom, it will help the birds gauge the depth of the water and give them a foothold.

Birds are attracted to moving water, so if you want, you can add a small pump to spray or drip water into the bath. As an added bonus, moving water discourages mosquitoes from breeding.

Yes, spring will be here soon, and so will the birds looking for a place to raise their young. Better get ready!

Continued on page 6

Beyond Better Boy

By Mike Smith, Cherokee County Master Gardener

Tomato seed varieties courtesy Marcia Winchester

We all do it—take the path of least resistance, rather than the path less traveled.

Springtime comes, and we head out with renewed vigor to our big-box store of choice to buy our tomato plants. There we find the racks full of flat after flat of plants with names like Big Boy, Better Boy, Best Girl, etc. Great varieties, disease resistant, great producers, really red, pick themselves . . . boring.

It's time to get out of your comfort zone!

This winter, when you're sitting around looking for something to do, go online and look at some of the great online sites that sell seeds. Totally Tomatoes, Baker Creek, and Johnny's Seeds are some that I have used in the past. And let's focus on unusual tomatoes. I've been growing tomatoes both commercially and privately for over 45 years, and I can tell you your options are almost limitless. And it's not hard to find unusual tomatoes; all of the varieties mentioned in this article can be purchased at multiple sites.

I like to start my tomato seeds indoors in February to be able to plant after the last frost, which is usually in late April. It's not as hard as you think. You just need an inexpensive seed starting kit, a warm place to keep the plants, and some artificial light, and you have a great start to becoming a "tomato connoisseur."

Some of these varieties will take a little more attention as they may be more susceptible to disease, but you should have good success if you pay attention to these factors:

- Choosing the right location (lots of sun)
- An adequate water source (consistent watering)
- Proper feeding (all tomatoes are heavy feeders)
- Learning how to prune your plants to provide good air circulation
- Avoiding back splash from the ground
- Finding a good way to support your plants (there are many methods)
- And of course mulching

Tomatoes come in about every color of the rainbow, many have unique shapes, and they may be striped in purple, orange, green, or pink. This past year I grew a cherry tomato (named Apple Yellow Hybrid) that's bright yellow and shaped like an apple. I also enjoyed trying a variety that develops a deep purple shoulder (Midnight Snack Hybrid). It's packed with anthocyanin, the same pigment that makes blueberries blue, and they are some of the healthiest tomatoes you can grow.

I like to try new things every year. Some work, some don't, but the ones that do—what tasty fun! Here are a few of my favorites.

Aunt Ruby's German Green
Brilliant, neon-green flesh with a strong, sweet, and fruity flavor; much tastier than most red tomatoes.

Green Zebra
Chartreuse with deep lime-green stripes; very attractive. Flesh is bright green and very rich tasting, sweet with a sharp bite to it.

Just about any Brandywine (Pink)
Large fruit with superb flavor. A great variety from 1885! Pink fruit up to 1½ lbs each!

Cherokee Purple
An old Cherokee Indian heirloom, pre-1890 variety; beautiful, deep, dusky purple-pink color, superb sweet flavor, and very large fruit.

Ananas Noire
Bright green with deep red streaks. Superb flavor that is outstanding, being both sweet and smoky with a hint of citrus.

SunRise Bumble Bee
Swirls of reds and oranges; sweet, fruity taste good for snacking,

Think about how these will look, sliced and sitting on the picnic table! The neighbors will be impressed at this year's cookout. Set up a smorgasbord of the unusual tomatoes you grow this year, and have a taste test; it's a lot like a wine tasting.

Cold Frames: *continued from page 2*

Cold Frame at 2011 Philadelphia Flower Show by Daniel Gasteiger CC BY 2.0

You can get fancy with supplemental heating, like adding thermostatic controls, etc. The downside of adding supplemental heat and heating control devices is that they increase the cost and complexity of the construction and can complicate the operation of the project. But, that's your call; it is probably best to start simple and add complexity as you go.

Now, it's time to discuss the reason for the project: "What can I plant in a cold frame/hot bed?" Well, there's a lot of choice, but there are limits, too. In general, the best plants are those that tolerate the lower light levels during the cooler months, are frost tolerant, and are low growing. The list includes leafy greens, such as spinach, lettuce, arugula, kale, and collard greens; root crops, such as radishes, beets, and parsnips (growing in popularity and super delicious); and even some cool-weather herbs, including cilantro, parsley, and bunching onions.

And, one last thing: you'll need to manage your cold frame. This is easy. As with any garden, you should plan to visit your cold frame at least once a day. If the inside gets too warm, you'll need to open the lid a bit and later close it (as the sun sets). You'll need to water when needed, which is not that often. You may also need to look for pesky aphids and other creatures, like snails. And, of course, the best part, you'll want to harvest your treasured cool-weather crops when they mature.

Happy Gardening!

References:

Extending the Crop Season: Unheated Spaces, **UGA link click HERE**.

UGA CAES Newswire, "Weekend Project: Cold Frames Help Stretch Gardening Season": **click HERE**.

Iowa State University News article, "Yard and Garden: All about Cold Frames": **click HERE**.

University of Illinois Extension article, "Cold Frames Extend the Garden Season": **click HERE**.

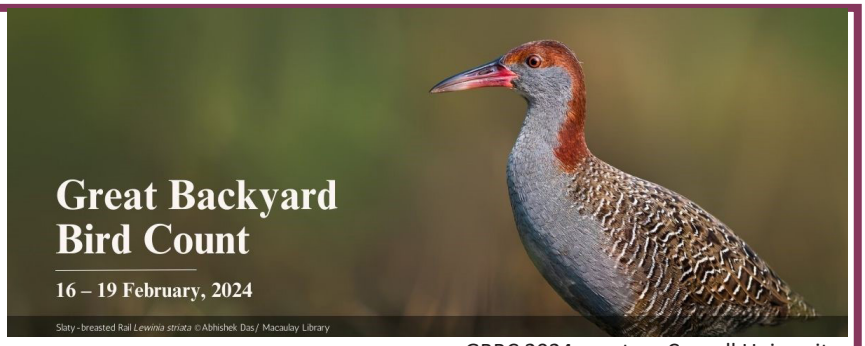
University of Missouri Extension article, "Building and Using Hotbeds and Cold Frames": **click HERE**.

Minnesota State Horticultural Society article, "Add a Cold Frame to Extend the Season": **click HERE**.

growjourney article, "Cold frames: a useful resource for cool and cold-weather gardening": **click HERE**.

The Great Backyard Bird Count: February 16–19, 2024

By Mary Tucker, Cherokee County Master Gardener



GBBC 2024 courtesy Cornell University

The Great Backyard Bird Count has been an annual event since 1998 when it was launched by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The purpose of this world-wide event is to help scientists evaluate the abundance and distribution of birds. This event also helps track bird population changes and trends that occur over the years.

It's easy and fun to take part in the GBBC. You can count birds anywhere: at home at your feeders, at a park or nature trail, or at any favorite birding site, such as a lake shore. All you have to do is watch birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count. Keep a separate record for the different times or places that you participate. Count the highest number of each bird species observed at one time (to ensure the birds are not counted more than once), and keep track of the amount of time spent counting. Then log on to the GBBC website (http://gbbc.birdcount.org/) to enter your data.

Visit the GBBC website for more information about the event and how to participate.

Detoxifying Your Home with Houseplants ..continued from page 3

To increase air quality in general, place a few snake* plants in the corner of each room. These plants work overnight to lower levels of carbon dioxide, which means the oxygen levels are higher during the day. They are almost indestructible and are tolerant of a variety of lighting conditions.

English ivy* is a very invasive plant outdoors, but you can try potting it for ridding any room of potential mold, such as in a musty basement or laundry room. English ivy* has been known to eliminate more than 65 percent of airborne mold in a room. These plants thrive in shade, cold, drafts, and just about anywhere you put them.

Bromeliads in the bedroom help you get a better night's sleep because they give off oxygen during the night instead of during the day as with most plants. They like to be placed by a window for light.

Bamboo plants are probably one of the best plants for air quality. They remove toxins as well as humidify the air. Bamboo is easy to grow and requires bright filtered light and frequent watering.

NASA STUDY
In 1989 NASA conducted the NASA Clean Air Study to figure out how to detoxify the air in space stations. Though our homes are not sealed to the extent a space station is, the study still gives us insight into the detoxifying characteristics of the plants that were studied. The study discovered the following plants can remove significant amounts of benzene, formaldehyde, trichloroethylene, or xylene from an enclosed space:

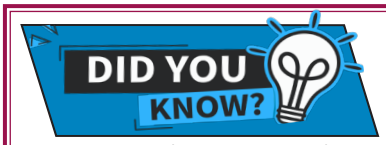
Aloe vera	Flamingo lily*
Banana	King of hearts
Barberton daisy	Orchids (dendrobium, phalaenopsis)
Chinese evergreen*	Palms (areca, dwarf date)
Devils' ivy *	Philodendron* (elephant ear, heartleaf)
Dracaena* (cornstalk, Craig, Warneckei)	Rubber plant*
Dumb cane*	Spider plant
Ferns (Boston, Kimberly Queen)	Weeping fig*

Six plants removed all the toxins:

English ivy*,
Peace lily*
Bamboo palm
Variegated snake plant*
Red-edged dracaena*
Florist's chrysanthemum*

You may already have some of the houseplants discusses in this article gracing your décor. If not, consider adding some, depending on your specific concerns about toxins in your home or health issues you may face. Decorating with houseplants is an easy, economical way to keep your home safe and pollutant free.

Sources of facts: Organic Gardening; Prevention; National Wildlife; and ATT Home & Garden.



By Mary Tucker, Master Gardener

Some of the most flavorful tomato varieties are considered "heirloom," but do you know what that means? First and foremost, heirloom tomatoes are open-pollinated rather than hybridized.

Heirloom tomatoes, photo by MSU Extension Service/Gary Bachman, click HERE for tomato link.

This means they come true from seed, with each successive generation being identical to the parent plants. For this reason, gardeners can pass a tomato variety down from generation to generation like a piece of heirloom jewelry. Another characteristic of these tomatoes is that their fruit can be found in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and colors.

Usually the reason heirloom tomatoes are worthy of being passed down over the generations is because they are especially flavorful. They may also perform exceptionally well in a particular region of the country. This means that an heirloom that your cousin in Nebraska grows may not do well for you here in Georgia.

Heirloom tomatoes may have a thinner skin than the standard hybrid grocery-store tomato since the commercially grown hybrids need to be able to withstand shipping and must have a longer shelf life.

How old must a tomato variety be to qualify as an heirloom? That may depend on whom you ask. Some tomato aficionados say an heirloom must be at least 25 years old; some say 50. Others date heirlooms as pre-1945 since after World War II hybridization became more common.

FEBRUARY GARDENING TIPS

Ornamentals

Master Gardener, Shirley Lowe demonstrating rose pruning courtesy Marcia Winchester

Late February is the time to prune hybrid tea and Knock Out Roses©. Remove old canes, lowering plant to a height of 12-15 inches. Prune out dead and damaged canes leaving the center open for air flow. Apply a drop of white glue to the end of fresh cut canes to prevent borers. Fertilize using a fertilizer heavy in potassium (K). Remove all debris and apply fresh mulch. **For more rose pruning info click HERE.**

- Winter is a good time to prune deciduous trees and shrubs that don't bloom in the spring. It allows you to view the trunk and branches when making your cuts. **For guidelines on pruning ornamental plants in the landscape, click HERE.**
- Use a new plant light to grow seedlings. Older, partially used bulbs may not give off sufficient light.
- Continue to fertilize pansies and other winter annuals with fertilizer high in nitrate nitrogen. **For success with winter pansies and annuals, click HERE.**
- Prune clumps of ornamental grass before new growth appears. Tie large clumps with rope; cut with a hedge trimmer. **For care and maintenance of ornamental grasses, click HERE.**

Fruits and Vegetables

- Peaches grow best when maintained with an open center (no central leader). Keep 3 or 4 strong, scaffold branches evenly distributed around the trunk. Limbs that branch out at a 60° angle are preferred. Spreaders can be used to widen narrow crotch angles. **For more information on growing peaches, click HERE.**
- Prune fruit trees and grapes in late February or early March after the worst of the winter cold is passed but before spring growth begins when temps maintain at 45°. For disease and insect control, cut out dead wood and dispose of the prunings. After each cut, disinfect pruners with rubbing alcohol, or nine parts water to one part bleach. Take care because both mixtures can cause damage to grass or other plants. **For more information on pruning fruit trees, click HERE, and pruning grapes, click HERE.**
- Remember that vegetable seeds have a short life of only a year or two. This includes sweet corn, onion, okra, beans, parsnip, and peppers.
- Consider the family vacation when planning your garden. Choose planting dates and varieties so your garden won't be ready for a full harvest while you are away. **For a vegetable garden calendar resource, click HERE.**
- Before working an area in the garden for early spring planting, check the soil. It should be dry enough to crumble in your hands, so that you don't compact the soil while working it.
- Don't start your vegetable plants indoors too early. Six weeks ahead of the expected planting date is early enough for the fast growing species such as cabbage. Eight weeks allows enough time for the slow growing types such as tomatoes and peppers. Handle seed packets with care. Rubbing the outside to determine how many seeds are inside can break the protective seed coats, thereby reducing germination. **For more information on seed starting, click HERE.**

Seed starting tray. **For more tray options, click HERE.**

Miscellaneous

- To make old hay and manure weed-free, spread on the soil in late winter, water well, and cover with black plastic. Weed seeds will sprout after a few days of warm weather, and then will be killed by frost and lack of daylight.
- Hang or clean out bluebird houses now before the birds start looking for a home. Don't clean them on a windy day.
- Clean and disinfect clay pots by soaking them in a solution of one part liquid bleach and nine parts water. Rinse thoroughly to remove all bleach residue. This will have your containers ready to plant with spring annuals.

RAINFALL COMPARISONS

	Cherokee County			State Wide		
	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	YTD 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	YTD 2023
Actual	1.0	5.1	50.0	2.0	2.9	45.5
Normal	4.8	4.4	55.3	3.8	4.6	51.8
Deviation	-3.8	0.7	-5.3	-1.8	-1.7	-6.3

MARCH GARDENING TIPS

Ornamentals

- Be aware that a brown plastic material that looks and feels like natural burlap, but does not break down in the soil, may be used to wrap root balls of B & B plants. Synthetic materials enclosing the roots of trees and shrubs must be completely removed to ensure success of the transplants. **Planting techniques for trees can be found HERE.**
- Prune crape myrtles only removing the old flower heads. Do not cut back to the same spot each year as it creates a weak joint and the branches can split and fall in the summer with the additional weight of heavy flower heads. Remove sprouts at the base of the tree. **For information on crape myrtle growing and maintenance, click HERE.**
- Cut back butterfly bushes to 1/3 desired height.
- Divide daylily and hosta clumps when the leaves just start to emerge from the ground so you don't damage the new growth. **For more hosta info, click HERE.**
- If you have left a few inches of plant stems on your perennials to ID the plant's location cut them back before the new growth emerges. It is also a good time to cut back the tattered foliage on evergreen ferns and perennials. **For more info on flowering perennial care, click HERE.**
- Fertilize spring bulbs after they bloom. Do not remove leaves until they turn yellow.
- Give your roses a starter application of complete fertilizer.
- Start fertilizing pansies and winter annuals with houseplant fertilizer.

Fruits and Vegetables

- Don't rush to remove mulch from strawberries. Leave it over your plants to protect them from late cold spells. When plants start to grow, the mulch must be removed to allow leaves to develop in the light. If leaves develop under the mulch, they will become etiolated (blanched) and yellow from lack of chlorophyll, and may burn and die when exposed to the sun. **For more info on home gardening and strawberries, click HERE.**
- If your garden is on a hillside, plant across the slope (not up and down) to help hold moisture in the soil and reduce erosion.
- Plant seeds of root crops, such as carrots, beets, radishes and parsnips, in your garden.
- Begin summer vegetable seedlings inside now.
- Spring applications of pesticides should be made on peaches, apples and pears. Correct timing for spraying depends on the stage of development of flowers. Check the label and follow the directions.
- Lettuce is very sensitive to low pH. Lime should be applied to the soil if the pH is below 6.0. **For more information on growing home garden lettuce, click HERE.**
- Do not add lime to the area for potatoes. The lower pH helps control scab. **For more information on growing home garden potatoes, click HERE.**

Evidence of severe "Crape Murder". **To avoid aggressive pruning, click HERE.**

Miscellaneous

- Place bird houses outdoors early this month. Birds will begin looking for nesting sites soon and the houses should attract several mating pairs. Ideally, houses erected on smooth metal poles where predators cannot climb are most often selected, but placement on top of fence posts or in trees will usually suffice. **For more info on how to attract birds to your landscape, click HERE.**
- Spring is a good time to install nest boxes and hole size is very important for cavity-nesting birds. **For more information on cavity nesting birds and sizes, click HERE.**
- The purple martin (*Progne subis*) isn't a year-round bird in Georgia, but arrives in southern Georgia in early February, reaches northern Georgia by mid-February, and then leaves during the fall. With increasing interest in in our environment and nonchemical pest control, the martin is regaining popularity. **For more information and facts about purple martins, click HERE.**
- Put out hummingbird feeders in mid-March, and make sure the roosting material has been cleaned out of your bluebird houses after winter.

Photo hummingbird and feeders courtesy John Ruscilli

Recipes

Hamburger Soup
From Maurya Jones

This is an easy, hearty meal to serve any time of year, and it's especially welcome during the colder months. Serve with a green salad or crusty bread.

INGREDIENTS:
1 lb. ground beef
1 cup thinly sliced carrots
1 cup sliced celery
1 pkg. (one ounce) dry onion soup mix
1 pkg. (one ounce) Italian salad dressing mix
1/4 tsp. seasoned salt
1/4 tsp. black pepper
3 cups boiling water
1 can (about 14 ounces) diced tomatoes
1 can (8 ounces) tomato sauce
1 tbsp. soy sauce
2 cups cooked macaroni
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley

INSTRUCTIONS: (For Slow Cooker)
1. Brown ground beef in large skillet over medium high heat 6 to 8 minutes, stirring to break up meat. Drain fat.
2. Place carrots and celery in slow cooker. Top with beef, onion soup mix, salad dressing mix, seasoned salt, and pepper. Add water, tomatoes, tomato sauce, and soy sauce. Mix well. Cover and cook on LOW 6 to 8 hours.
3. Turn slow cooker to HIGH. Stir in macaroni and Parmesan cheese. Cover and cook 15 to 30 minutes or until heated through. Sprinkle with parsley just before serving.

Beef Stroganoff
From Maurya Jones

This is a favorite recipe I got from my mother. I've been making it for 50+ years, and it's always popular with family and friends.

INGREDIENTS:
1-1/2 lbs. round or sirloin steak
1 large can mushrooms or 1-1/2 cups fresh mushrooms
2 large onions finely, chopped
1 stick butter
1 can tomato soup
1 6-oz. can tomato paste
1 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. black pepper
1 tsp. soy sauce
1 cup dairy sour cream
Minced parsley
Rice

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Cut meat in very thin strips; trim off excess fat.
2. Brown meat and mushrooms in 1 stick butter; add onions.
3. Combine soup, tomato paste and seasonings; add to meat mixture.
4. Cover, simmer for 1 hour.
5. Just before serving, stir in sour cream; serve in ring of fluffy hot rice.
6. Garnish with fresh parsley.

TIPS: to save time, most grocery stores will slice the beef in thin strips if you call ahead. Also, ground chuck can be substituted for round or sirloin steak (Poor Man's Stroganoff).

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION
Cherokee County

https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices/cherokee.html
1130 Bluffs Pkwy, Suite G49
Canton, GA 30114
770-721-7803

"An Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, Veteran, Disability Institution"

Cherokee County Master Gardeners

https://cherokeemastergardeners.com
https://www.facebook.com/cherokeemastergardeners