

Horticulture Newsletter

December 2024

"From the Ground Up"

1400 Fortune Drive
Winchester, KY 40391

Call Us: +859-744-4682

More Info: <https://clark.ca.uky.edu/>
clark.ext@uky.edu



A Word from the Agent . . .



Hello my friends and a delightful December to you! I hope everyone is doing well and looking forward to the new year! I know I am personally excited to see what 2025 brings us.

I have been fully immersed in planning for next year, so I want to make my official plea to each of you. Tell me what you want to learn more about! If you have a topic that intrigues you, an idea for a class, or anything horticulture related that would make a great class, share it with me! It helps me to hear what things you all want to learn about so that I can hopefully make it happen.

Email me, call me, or stop by and see if you can catch me in the office! See you around the county!

Carrie Spry
Clark County Extension Agent
for Horticulture
carrie.spry@uky.edu



KEEPING YOU **Informed**

Find us on **Facebook**
<https://www.facebook.com/ClarkCountyExtension>

Follow us on **Instagram**



Clark / Powell Beekeepers Association Meeting

Monday, December 9
6:30 pm
Powell County Extension Service
169 Maple Street; Stanton Kentucky

~ POT-LUCK MEAL ~



At this meeting you will be taught how to make sugar bricks for your honey bees.

There will be NO Zoom for this meeting!

**We will be
CLOSED
for the
Holidays**

December 24th thru January 1st





**FREE
Seeds!**

We were generously donated numerous packets of vegetable and flower seeds. We are delighted to share this abundance of seeds with you. Come to the Extension Office on the following dates and times and take all the seeds you want.

Monday, December 2
8:00 to 6:00 pm

Tuesday, December 3
8:00 to 4:00 pm

Wednesday, December 4
8:00 to 4:00 pm

**UPCOMING
2025
Winter School Dates**

4 February **BEEF NIGHT**

6 February **FARM NIGHT**

11 February **HORT NIGHT**

13 February **ALL PROPERTY OWNERS NIGHT**
This is a new class that is for everyone!

More details in upcoming newsletters!

Controlling Plant Disease

By Carrie Spry, Clark County Extension Agent for Horticulture



Have you ever thought that a law enforcement assault team may use techniques similar to those we use to control diseases during plant dormancy? The team often conducts raids in the early morning

hours when the criminals likely are sleeping. The law enforcement team's search leads it to silently surround the dwelling and take necessary measures to catch the villains.

These tactics also might be appropriate for gardeners to control plant diseases this time of year. Plants also "rest" when their metabolic processes become relatively inactive over an extended period of time. This mechanism is called "dormancy." It allows plants to survive the winter cold.

Disease-causing organisms also have a dormant, or "overwintering," stage that usually coincides with plant dormancy. Where these pathogens hide and how they spread influences the measures we take to arrest their destructive activities. It's important to take care of them while plants are dormant, during the winter, because when the temperature begins to warm up the villains will become active and infect plant materials. Like law enforcement teams, we can use many practices to track down and remove plant villains from our gardens. Below are a few examples.

Use wood chips, disease-free leaves or needles to mulch beneath shrubs and trees, or between garden rows. This forms a barrier to keep pathogens from being splashed from the soil surface or carried by the wind to nearby plants. Limit the mulch depth to two inches or less

to avoid smothering plant roots and inviting rodent activity.

Some disease organisms hide in dead tissue on the soil surface of vegetable gardens and annual flower beds. Plowing deeply buries pathogens far beneath the soil so they cannot come into contact with plants. The organisms are quickly decomposed by other microbes. However, you shouldn't plow near established trees, shrubs or perennial flowers. Their roots are close to the soil surface and extend far beyond the area beneath these plant materials.

Another way to eliminate organisms on the soil surface is to remove and destroy old, diseased leaves and stems beneath trees and shrubs. Don't forget to clean up beneath fruit trees. Destroying old, mummied fruit keeps disease organisms from reproducing and infecting the new crop.

Some disease organisms lie dormant in seed. So use reliable sources of seed grown in areas where the disease doesn't occur, or treated seed that has been subjected to heat or chemicals to reduce the amount of pathogen present.

Several woody-plant pathogens live and reproduce in dead wood. Removing and destroying diseased and dead wood eliminates much of this dormant villain.

Although it's okay to remove dead or diseased wood any time of the year, routine pruning is best left to late winter, say mid-February to mid-March. There are several reasons to prune during this period. It gives you time to evaluate the extent of winter injury and remove damaged limbs. Also, plants are beginning to break dormancy and are redirecting stored nutrients from the roots to branches. This is the most rapid healing time for wounds on the pruned surface.

While disease organisms are sleeping this winter, gardeners, like law enforcement teams, can track them down, catch them off guard and remove these dormant villains.

For more information, contact Clark County Cooperative Extension Service 859-744-4682.

In A Stressful Season . . . Seek Nature



According to songwriters and composers Edward Pola and George Wyle, this is the most wonderful time of the year, but research indicates it may be that and more. According to the American Psychological Association, two in five adults experience an increase in stress levels between November and January. A nearly equal number of adults say that the increased stress affects their ability to enjoy holiday celebrations and gatherings.

As the hustle and bustle of the season continue, the calming, restorative benefits of nature may be just the thing we all need. A growing body of research continues to expand our understanding of the positive health benefits time in nature provides.

Time in nature offers social, emotional, physical, and cognitive benefits regardless of the season. Engaging with natural spaces has been shown to reduce stress levels, thereby leading to a lower risk of chronic disease. Time outdoors exposes us to sunlight contributing to the body's production of vitamin D, a nutrient that studies indicate contributes to improved bone health and immune system function, lifts mood, and defends against heart conditions and stroke. Symptoms of anxiety and depression are reduced through time in nature while creativity, concentration, and problem-solving skills are enhanced.

Frequent expeditions to the outdoors are prime opportunities to spend time with loved ones. Large group outings or intimate walks with a person both provide a time to connect and strengthen relationships. Being a part of a community, large or small, has been shown to improve well-being and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Combining time in nature with family or friends compounds the beneficial impact of the outdoors.

There are hundreds of ways to increase our time outdoors. Some require special equipment, some involve extravagant travel plans, but not all. Here are a few low-cost, easy-to-implement ways to get outside this winter. Use these as a starting spot then let your imagination run wild. Feel free to email the Good Growing team with your ideas and photos, we love hearing from you.

• **Schedule walks**

People are creatures of habit; in fact, some studies indicate that up to half of our daily activities are done as

routine. Developing a habit begins as an intentional, frequently performed behavior. If making time outdoors is a habit you want to develop, start by scheduling time on your calendar. For added motivation, make a note on your calendar as to why you are committed to spending time outdoors, and remind yourself of one or more of the benefits you want to experience through this nature connection. For an added social benefit and accountability, invite a friend to join.

• **Decorate a natural holiday tree**

Birding is a popular nature-based activity any time of year, but the charming little critters are especially delightful in midwinter months. Hanging a birdfeeder outside a window is an easy way to attract and enjoy winter birding. Extend the activity and nature connection by creating natural birdfeeders. Halved citrus fruit, pinecones covered with peanut butter and seeds, or strings of dried fruit and popcorn are a few ways to feed the birds but there are many ways to get creative while getting outside.

• **Sip a hot beverage in the dormant garden**

Many growers happily spend countless hours working and playing in backyard landscapes from spring to autumn, but as flowers fade and leaves fall, dormancy in the garden often results in a hiatus from the garden for the gardeners. During these winter months, the bones and structure of a garden stand out. Spent seedheads of perennial flowers, wispy clumps of grasses, and bare branches of shrubs and trees create an entirely different kind of beauty. Bringing a warm beverage out into the garden creates an exciting contrast between the temperature of winter and the beverage at hand while also elevating your body temperature by up to 2.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

• **How much time outside?**

I know, it's cold outside so it can be tempting to forgo outdoor activities for a hibernation-inspired winter survival strategy. Before settling in for a long winter's nap, consider recent research that suggests even a few minutes spent outdoors offer health benefits. Other studies suggest that a minimum of two hours over a week is what it takes to achieve substantial improvements in health.

As this field of study continues to refine recommendations for how much time is optimal, the positive effects of spending time outdoors is supported by a large body of scientific research. Prioritizing time in nature, especially during seasons of life that are more stressful, is an important part of self-care and overall well-being.

As the calendar advances through the next few months, I hope the hustle and bustle of the season brings you magic and joy. And when it all becomes too much, perhaps these words will be your inspiration to bundle up and head outside to find sanctuary.

Written by: Emily Swihart,
Horticulture Educator with the University of Illinois Extension

Telling on Kissing Bugs

By Lee Townsend, Extension Entomologist



Kissing bugs are in news stories that imply the bugs are recent discoveries. However, these insects are relatively widespread (Figure 1). At least 11 species occur in the U.S.; most are limited to southwestern states. The eastern bloodsucking conenose bug (ECN) (*Triatoma sanguisuga*) (Figure 2) is the most widely distributed species. This insect is probably present throughout Kentucky, but known encounters have been very rare. In approximately the last 30 years, the only documented specimens in the University of Kentucky database have been from Adair, Caldwell, Fayette, and Franklin counties. All were found in homes or structures, but no bites were reported.

Habitats and Habits:

ECN typically inhabit wooded areas where they hide in and around animal nests or burrows. There are two main ways that they become accidental invaders in home and structures:

- 1) Adults fly to lights and can enter through gaps or cracks around doors or windows.
- 2) Bugs may come from nearby nests or burrows that have been abandoned.

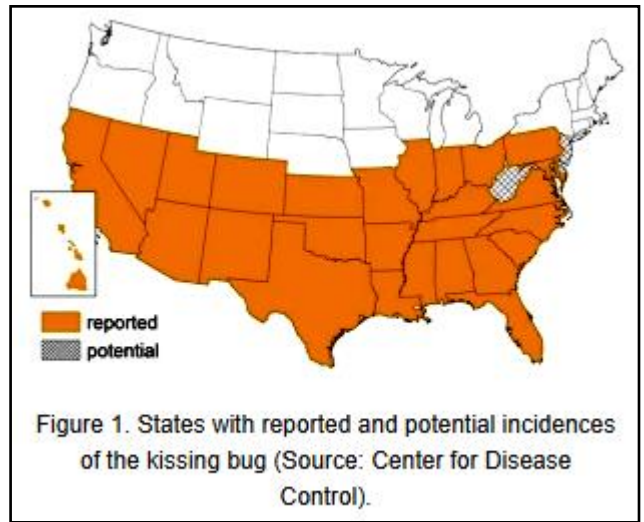


Figure 2: Eastern bloodsucking conenose bug, *Triatoma sanguisuga* (Photo: James Gathany, Center for Disease Control)

ECN hide during the day and feed at night on a variety of animals and humans. Bites on humans are often near the mouth or eyes. While the insects are called “deadly,” bites are similar to bad mosquito bites that tend to swell, itch for a time, and clear. Health issues occur only if the bugs are carrying the pathogen that causes Chagas disease, which is endemic in much of Latin America and has chronic, not acute effects. Bugs can acquire the pathogen (trypanosomes) from infected hosts (raccoons, chickens, rats, etc.), but this is rare.

Mistaken Identity

If you suspect you have found a kissing bug, capture it in a closed container and take it to your local Cooperative Extension Service office or health department. The wheel bug (Figure 3) and the leaf-footed bug (Figure 4) are two common Kentucky insects that can be mistaken for kissing bugs.



Figure 3: The wheel bug belongs to the same family as the kissing bug. The shape and markings are similar, but the wheel on the back of this predator is distinctive.

(Photo: Lee Townsend, UK)



Figure 4. The leaf-footed bug has wide flat areas on its hind legs that make this sap feeder easy to recognize. (Photo: Lee Townsend, UK)



Submitted by: Kristin Goodin Hildabrand, Extension Horticulture Agent, Barren County

This time of year, amaryllis is a popular winter blooming bulb found on shelves in local flower shops and garden centers. Their large showy trumpet shaped blooms produced atop a tall flower stalk provide a nice welcome to the cold winter. Below are a few steps to ensure the biggest and brightest amaryllis blooms.

Most amaryllis bulbs are sold either as bare root bulbs or in a kit which includes the bulb, container, and potting soil mixture. If purchasing bare root bulbs, select a large, firm bulb that is free of cuts and bruises. Large bulbs indicate a healthy plant that will produce larger blooms and more flowering stalks. There are a wide variety of colors and types of amaryllis blooms available from traditional red, white, pink, orange, salmon or bicolored which are white with brush strokes of pink or red.

Choose a container that is 1 to 2 inches wider than the diameter of the bulb, since amaryllis bulbs prefer a slightly pot-bound container. Look to see if the container has drainage holes before planting. If no drainage holes are present, drill a few small holes in the bottom of the container to provide adequate soil drainage.

Next, purchase a quality potting soil mix that is a sterilized, well-drained, and high in organic matter. A mixture containing equal parts of peat and perlite is an excellent choice for growing amaryllis. Moisten the potting soil mix with water prior to adding to the container to assist in establishing a good root system.

To begin planting, add a small amount of moistened potting soil to the container and place the amaryllis bulb in the center so that one-third to one-half of the bulb is located above the soil level. Continue to fill the container with soil until the potting medium reaches 1 inch below the top rim. This step

keeps the fungal disease known as red blotch from occurring and allows for space when watering. Tap the container on the counter to remove any air pockets from the soil, add more soil if needed, and lastly firm the soil around the roots and bulb.

After planting, water the soil thoroughly with lukewarm water and place in a warm 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit location. A well-lighted area such as a south-facing window or sunroom that receives at least four hours of direct sunlight would be ideal for amaryllis growth.

While the bulb is growing, keep the soil slightly moist until flowering. Water when the soil feels dry to the touch. Rotate the plant frequently to promote a straighter flower stalk rather than one that leans toward the light. Flowering usually takes about 6 to 8 weeks after potting.

Once blooms appear, locate amaryllis to a cooler location indoors around 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit to extend the life of the flowers. After flowering, apply a liquid or slow release fertilizer for houseplants according to recommendations on the label for amount and frequency.

It may seem that amaryllis requires extra care and time investment, but once people see the bright, almost tropical shaped blooms, it can brighten any room on even the gloomiest winter day!





Gus'

QUICK TIPS

for


December

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

RECIPE

What's Cooking?






Sweet Potato Crisp

<p>3 large fresh sweet potatoes, cooked until tender.</p> <p>8 ounces reduced fat cream cheese, softened</p> <p>1 cup brown sugar, divided</p>	<p>1 teaspoon vanilla</p> <p>1 tablespoon ground cinnamon</p> <p>2 medium apples, chopped</p>	<p>½ cup all-purpose flour</p> <p>¾ cup quick cooking oats</p> <p>3 tablespoons butter</p> <p>¼ cup chopped pecans</p>
---	--	--

1. **Preheat** oven to 350° F. Lightly spray a 13 x 9 x 2 inch pan with non-stick spray.
2. **Mash** sweet potatoes. Add cream cheese, ¾ cup brown sugar, vanilla and cinnamon. Mix until smooth.
3. **Spread** sweet potato mixture evenly into pan.
4. **Top** sweet potatoes with chopped apples.
5. In a small bowl, **combine** flour, oats, and ½ cup brown sugar. **Cut** in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbles. **Stir** in pecans.
6. **Sprinkle** mixture over apples.
7. **Bake** uncovered for 35-40 minutes or until topping is golden brown and fruit is tender.

Yield: 16, ¾ cup servings.

Nutritional Analysis:
240 calories, 6 g fat, 3 g sat fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 200 mg sodium, 44 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 20 g sugar, 4 g protein.



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