

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

 Cooperative
Extension Service

Fayette County Extension

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November

2025

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Did You Know

We have a monthly newsletter for all the program areas at the Fayette County Extension Office. Use the QR code to sign up for one or all of them!

Programs include Community Arts (*new!*), Family Consumer Science, Agriculture & Natural Resources, and 4-H Youth Development



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Welcome Blair Ripley

Hello, all! My name is Blair Ripley, and I am the newest member of the Horticulture Team here in Fayette County. I'm very excited to serve as the Horticulture Assistant and looking forward to learning more from Jamie and Reena. I graduated from Emory University in 2021 with a B.A. in environmental science and then received an M.S.C. in natural resource management from Newcastle University in 2022. There I conducted research on arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi in ecosystems contaminated with heavy metals from mine spoil.



I originally moved to Lexington to work with the US Forest Service, as the Volunteer & Service Program Specialist for the Daniel Boone National Forest. There I learned the unique beauty of Kentucky landscapes and helped create public outreach programs focused on environmental education and sustainable recreation. I often lead trail days and trash cleanups of popular recreation areas. Our partnerships consisted of local county school groups, as well as non-profits like the Red River Gorge Climber's Coalition and the Sheltowee Trace Association.

In my new role with UK Extension, I'm excited to continue working in public service and to have the opportunity to make an impact on my community here in Fayette County. I'm interested in supporting management practices which benefit the ecosystem as a whole and help interested homeowners understand how to make more sustainable choices.

In appreciation,

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Leave the leaves! A thin layer of leaves is actually healthy for grass and provides habitat for pollinators. Luna moths disguise their cocoons as dried leaves, blending in with the real ones. Or you can just move the leaves! Rake them into garden beds and around tree bases for a tidier look.



Luna moth, Adobe Stock Images

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Agriculture and Natural Resources
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Lexington, KY 40506



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Growing Herbs Indoors

If you are hoping to keep growing indoors throughout the fall and winter months, consider a few containers of culinary herbs to brighten up your living space. Aromatic plants in the home can be a welcome sight during the cold winter months and can save money and time at the grocery store.

Choosing What to Grow

Herbs that do best indoors include basil, chives, oregano, thyme, rosemary, parsley, sage, mint, and winter savory. Be aware that despite good conditions indoors, herbs tend to grow slower than they would outside. If you plan to use an herb frequently, consider having two plants.



Figure 1: Basil, Penn State Extension

Space constraints should be considered when growing indoors. Avoid herbs with large root systems and any that could be toxic to pets. This includes horseradish, fennel, lovage, and tarragon.

Light

Most herbs need between 6-8 hours of sunlight each day. Consider south-facing windowsills with direct exposure and utilize supplemental light if needed. Supplemental lights are not equivalent to natural light, however. You will need to provide an extra 2 hours of artificial light for every 1 hour of natural light your plants are missing. Positioning of supplemental lights depends on the bulb. Two 40-watt, cool white, fluorescent bulbs can be placed 6 to 12 inches from the herbs. Automatic timers can be purchased to ensure lights are turned on and off each day at regular times.

If you have a sunny windowsill available, be sure to rotate your containers every few days. Otherwise, you will notice plants starting to bend towards the light source. This behavior is called phototropism. Plants that do not get enough light will become thin and spindly, produce smaller leaves, and have reduced aroma and flavor.

Temperature and Humidity

Maintain a temperature of at least 65° F during the day and 55° F at night. Placing herbs right next to a window results in colder nighttime temperatures. Avoid placing plants directly below or above a heat vent, as HVAC systems tend to release dry air. To increase humidity, group plants together. The natural processes of transpiration will help increase the humidity directly around them. Transpiration is the process of water moving through plants and evaporating from the leaves. This helps plants regulate their temperature and move nutrients around. You can also increase the humidity around your plants with a humidifier placed nearby.

Containers

Choosing the correct container is key for growing any indoor plant. Select a pot with at least one drainage hole to make sure that excess water can drain and prevent the soil from being waterlogged. Avoid watering on a timed schedule. Instead, allow the soil to dry between waterings. The container will become lightweight or check the top 2 inches of soil for moisture. Water enough so the water will run out of the drainage hole. Contrary to popular belief, chlorine in tap water is not significant enough to harm plants. Room temperature water is usually best.

Soil

Indoor plants cannot extend their root systems beyond the boundary of the container to replenish nutrients or water. Therefore, indoor plants use container soil more intensively than they would if growing outdoors. Good potting soil usually contains a high proportion of coarse minerals for drainage, organic matter to hold water, and sufficient nutrients for the plant. Garden soil is not recommended for use in container plantings. Fertilizer may still be required over time. A monthly feeding schedule is usually sufficient.

Sources: Christopher Enroth, University of Illinois Extension, Elsa Sánchez and Erin Kinley, Penn State Extension

Hibernation in Your Neighborhood

Winter is a time that slows us down. That's also true across many different forms of life from plants to mammals to even insects. As the days get shorter and temperatures fall, we all have different strategies to help us cope with the cold. My personal favorite is hot tea at hand, but other mammals have their own methods. Many undergo some form of dormancy where they spend many hours sleeping and consume very little food or water. We'll dive into what species might be hibernating below our feet or even above our heads this winter.

Daily Torpor vs. True Hibernation

There are two types of prolonged rest in the animal world. Hibernation, which we are most familiar with, is known as a *multi-day torpor*. This means an animal dramatically reduces its body temperature and other functions over multiple days in a row. During the time of year when food is hard to find, this is a way to conserve valuable energy. While hibernation is commonly used to refer to any kind of winter dormancy, there are three requirements which define *true hibernation* for experts like wildlife biologists. True hibernation requires an animal to: 1) reduce its metabolism, 2) slow its heart rate, and 3) significantly lower its body temperature. Many species are thought to be hibernators, such as skunks or grey squirrels. While it's true they go dormant in winter, they are not true hibernators. These species exhibit behavior known as daily torpor.

Daily torpor is the same state of dormancy induced by environmental conditions, like harsh climate or inadequate food, as hibernation. However, daily torpor lasts for several hours a day, and periodically throughout the year, whereas hibernation lasts for days at a time and usually just over a few consecutive weeks to months in the winter. Mammals still experience a similar decrease in metabolic rates, body temperature, and heart rate during both hibernation and daily torpor.

How is it that these animals spend such long periods of time without any additional food or water? Hyperphagia refers to the sharp increase in eating behaviors that hibernators exhibit prior to hibernation. The most well-known example would be bears, where some species double in weight from spring to autumn! Not all animals need hibernation as an excuse for hyperphagia, though. Migratory bird species that travel through Kentucky, such as warblers, flycatchers and swallows, also exhibit this behavior. These birds need to store fat before beginning the long journeys south to avoid the tough Kentucky winters. I'm sure at some point this winter many of us will be wishing we had wings too!

Not Hibernating, But Close!

While our neighborhood skunks and grey squirrels might not be true hibernators, they do den in the winter to keep warm and employ some of the same energy saving tactics. Dog owners beware! When nighttime temperatures are over 30° F, skunks can become active for short periods. Keep this in mind as the sun sets much earlier and startling a skunk might have some undesirable consequences.



Figure 2: Big Brown Bats Ohio Department of Natural Resources

The Big Sleep

Bats, however, are true hibernators. Their metabolism, temperature, and heart rate drop significantly during winter. These amazing mammals are incredible pollinators in the spring and summer, but in winter they can roost in all sorts of urban spaces depending on the species' unique preferences. Big brown bats, for example, will primarily be found in caves, chimneys, or crevices on taller buildings. Eastern red bats, on the other hand, are a tree-roosting species, and many have been found across Fayette County in different parks and natural areas.

Unfortunately, many of Kentucky's bats are in decline. Consider documenting any bat sightings on the available citizen science apps for wildlife. This includes both iNaturalist and Project N.O.A.H. (Networked Organisms and Habitats), among others. With a good photo of the bat's face, experts may be able to positively identify rare species. There are more resources online if you are interested in bat conservation. They include things like creating bat boxes, gardening for bats, and other efforts to help these important pollinators thrive. They also help us naturally keep mosquito populations down in our yards!

Groundhogs are also true hibernators. While many consider them pests due to their propensity to attack vegetable crops, they can provide beneficial ecosystem services such as aerating compacted soils. Groundhogs prefer open woodlands, or lightly wooded areas for hibernation, but also use pastures, meadows, fencerows, and stream banks as habitat. Their burrow systems are called *hibernacula*, and groundhogs have been known to share them in winter with rabbits, opossums, raccoons, and skunks. Because groundhogs are true hibernators, they engage in hyperphagia and put on a dense layer of fat before they disappear into their burrows for the winter.

Humans have been fascinated with hibernation and winter dormancy for thousands of years. If you go look deep enough, you'll find folklore practices of weather prediction anywhere animals go dormant in winter. Groundhog Day has roots which can be traced back to different celebrations across Europe. However, it was in 1840s Pennsylvania where a diary entry first mentioned the practice of observing the emergence of the groundhog on February 2nd. It's entertaining to read about these ancient practices, but it reminds me that we've come a long way in predicting the weather.

Sources: John Whitaker *Mammals of the Eastern United States*. Ohio Department of Natural Resources. University of Wisconsin Stevens Point. Fritz Geiser, *Current Biology*. Margaret Kruesi, *Review of Groundhog Day*. Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Who's hibernating this winter?

Take the quiz below, read the article to check your answers.



Groundhog
Marmota monax

☐ YES
☐ NO



Eastern Grey Squirrel
Sciurus carolinensis

☐ YES
☐ NO



Big Brown Bat
Eptesicus fuscus

☐ YES
☐ NO



Figure 3: Groundhog, Adobe Stock

American Beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*



Close-up of Jamie's American beautyberry and its striking fruit

If you have not seen *Callicarpa americana* in person before, trust me that it lives up to its name, as the Latin 'callicarpa' means beautiful fruit! It's clusters of delicate flowers wrap around arching stems and bloom in late spring or early summer. In August, the blooms give way to bright purple berries creating a wonderful visual effect. There are also varieties available which set pink, white, or cream-colored fruits. By October, the berries begin to mature, with some hanging on into the early winter. Since they ripen in fall, American beautyberry is a good source of valuable calories for songbirds and small mammals just before the harshest weather conditions begin.

Beautyberry is a perennial, deciduous, woody shrub that can grow 3-8 feet tall and 3-6 feet wide in all types of soil, provided it has good drainage. Diseases to keep an eye out for include leaf spots, and black mold.

This shrub is native to the southeast and appears usually in meadows, thickets, woodlands, and pond margins. Therefore, it will not tolerate deep shade and prefers full sun to part shade. A great idea for mass plantings, large landscapes, naturalized areas, pond margins, and even container gardening. If used for landscaping, berries appear on new shoots, so pruning back to 1 foot high in late winter will help maintain size and ensure flower production. Stem cuttings can be propagated. When crushed, the leaves of American beautyberry can be used to repel mosquitos which can surely be useful come summer.



Jamie's American beautyberry last year

Sources: North Carolina State Extension, USDA NRCS

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 LEXINGTON Parks & Recreation

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 NOVEMBER 14TH, 2025 - 1-3PM



Recipe of the Month

For more Plate It Up Recipes, visit:
<https://fcs.mgcafe.uky.edu/plate-it-up>



Kale and Potato Soup

4 teaspoons olive oil	6 red potatoes, diced	¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 chopped yellow onion	½ cup chopped carrot	
3 cloves garlic, minced	4 cups shredded kale	
1 box (48 ounce) low-sodium chicken broth	½ pound cooked chicken breast, shredded	

1. In a large saucepan, **heat** the olive oil over medium heat for 1 minute. **Add** chopped onion and garlic and **cook** uncovered for 5 minutes.
2. **Add** chicken broth, potatoes and carrot; cover and bring to a boil.
3. **Reduce heat** and simmer for 20 minutes.
4. **Mix** in the kale, chicken and black pepper. **Cover** and **simmer** for 15 minutes or until kale is tender.

Yield: 6, 1½ cup servings.
Nutritional Analysis:
270 calories, 5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 25 mg cholesterol, 210 mg sodium, 43 g carbohydrate, 5 g fiber, 15 g protein.

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



Upcoming Events

Look out for these events happening at the Extension Office and across Lexington. **Some of these require registration. Be sure to look them up ahead of time!**

- Nov. 1st – Raven Run Volunteer Morning: Invasive Species Removal 10-11:30AM
- Nov. 1st – UK Arboretum Bird Walk 9-11AM
- Nov. 3rd – Stonewall Park Cleanup with LFUCG
- Nov. 6th – Belleau Woods Park Cleanup
- Nov. 8th – Community Tree planting at Lexington Housing Authority with Trees Lexington
- Nov. 19th – Mapleleaf Forest Park Cleanup with LFUCG
- Nov. 14th - Raven Run Bird Walk
- Nov. 17th – Uk Arboretum presents Lichens of Kentucky
- Nov. 17th - Crosskeys Park Cleanup
- Nov. 18th – Tree Steward Education: Tree Physiology and Pruning with Trees Lexington
- Nov. 18th – Gardener's Toolbox: Epiphytic Plants to Consider
- Nov. 20th – Elkhorn Park Cleanup
- Nov. 21st – Art By Nature Gallery Hop
- Nov. 22nd – McConnell Springs Volunteer Morning
- Nov. 29th – Jacobson Lake Stewardship Day Canoe and Kayak Cleanup

November Quick Tips

- Although we are past 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.
- If you aren't shredding leaves to keep them on your lawn for fertilizer, now is the time to remove them, especially from new plantings. This will help prevent grass from being damaged.
- You can also start a compost pile with all those leaves. It doesn't have to be elaborate or technical. A simple pile will make compost if left long enough.
- 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 any foliage that had 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.
- 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.

By the Yard Newsletter



Jamie Dockery



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