

BY THE YARD

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

 Cooperative
Extension Service

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Inside this issue:

- Preparing for Frost
- Recipe of the Month
- Golden Argiope
- In Praise of Trees
- Tree Planting Care
- Feed the Birds
- Upcoming Events
- Quick Tips



Don't forget you can plant
garlic now through the
beginning of November!



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Agent's Note

October can be a beautiful month in the Bluegrass. I love fall with its cooling temperatures and the spectacular changing colors. I hope this year's lack of rainfall does not impact the display. Amid all the fall chores, October brings us many opportunities to learn more about the importance of trees. Tree Week, an annual celebration of trees brought to you by Lexington's Urban Forest Initiative and many other local partners, is October 10-19th. You can find many family friendly activities and discussions where you can learn more about the value of trees.

When was the last time you slowed down enough to actually think about trees? I think we all value trees, but their benefits are multifaceted. Trees obviously visually enhance our landscapes and provide tangible cooling benefits and energy savings but also quietly sequester carbon and help filter our water supply. Their roots stabilize soil, prevent erosion, and help manage stormwater, reducing flooding.

Our neighborhoods benefit from the reduction in noise and light pollution so common in urban areas. They increase our property values, reduce stress, and boost our mental and physical health. They further provide food shelter and protection for countless songbirds, small mammals, and innumerable pollinators and other insects. It is estimated that one large tree provides enough oxygen for 4 people each day.

In addition to all these benefits, I encourage each of you to pause under a large, impressive tree and simply look up at its majesty. Contemplate how long ago this tree began its journey. Take in the beauty of its bark and branches and reflect on the spectacle of the natural world. It is a humbling experience to realize many trees outlive us by centuries and span generations of our human existence. Finally, put your hand on the trunk and express your gratitude before you leave.

In appreciation,

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Fayette County Extension Agents for Horticulture



October is prime bulb planting
time! Plant tulips, daffodils, crocus
and other spring favorites now for
a beautiful early display.

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Preparing for Frost

The average frost date for our region is mid to late October, which means it's time to start thinking about protecting your garden, yard, and landscape. If you're not quite ready to say goodbye to your plants, here are some practical tips to help you extend the season just a little longer.

Harvest Early

Frost-sensitive crops like tomatoes should be harvested before temperatures drop. If you don't have a way to protect your plants, pick any fruit that has reached the mature green stage. These tomatoes will continue to ripen indoors, although they may not develop the same flavor as vine-ripened ones.



Frost nipped winter garden.
(Adobe stock image)

To ripen indoors:

- Place fruit in a single layer in a warm, dark area with good air circulation.
- Avoid direct sunlight—light actually slows ripening.
- Keep temperatures above 55°F; cooler conditions can result in poor flavor and texture.

Water Before the Frost

Moist soil retains four times more heat than dry soil and transfers that heat to the surface more effectively. In one study, air temperature above wet soil was 5°F warmer than that above dry soil, and this difference lasted until early morning. Water your garden thoroughly in the late afternoon or early evening before a frost is expected. This simple step can make a big difference in protecting your plants. Be sure to water the ground and not the foliage!

Cover Your Plants

Covering plants can provide 2 to 5°F of protection from frost. You can lay covers directly over plants or support them with stakes to avoid contact, which can reduce effectiveness. Best practices for covering:

- Use woven fabrics like old sheets, blankets, or frost cloths—they insulate better than plastic or paper.
- Apply covers in the late afternoon once the wind has died down.
- Remove covers in the morning before the sun hits them to prevent overheating and moisture buildup.

Additional Tips:

- Move potted plants indoors or to a sheltered location.
- Mulch around the base of tender perennials to insulate roots.
- Check the forecast daily and be ready to act quickly.
- Use row covers or cold frames for longer-term protection of fall crops like lettuce, spinach, and kale.



Be sure fabric touches the ground to ensure thermal protection.
(Adobe stock image)



Recipe of the Month

For more Plate It Up Recipes, visit:

<https://fcs.mgcafe.uky.edu/plate-it-up>



Butternut and Acorn Squash Soup

1 butternut squash, halved and seeded	1/2 cup chopped sweet onion	1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 acorn squash, halved and seeded	4 cups chicken broth	1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 tablespoon olive oil	3 tablespoons peanut butter	1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
	1/2 cup packed brown sugar	Fresh parsley for garnish

Using a vegetable peeler, **remove** the skin from the butternut and acorn squashes and **cut** into 1-inch cubes. In a large soup pot, **heat** the oil on medium high. **Add** the onion, and **cook** 1 to 2 minutes until it starts to become translucent. **Add** cubed squash, and cook 4 to 5 minutes. **Add** chicken broth, and bring to a boil. **Lower** heat, and **simmer** 30 to 35 minutes, until the squash is fork tender. Allow to **cool** slightly, then **blend** until smooth in a food processor or

blender. **Return** mixture to the pot, and **heat** to medium low. **Add** peanut butter, brown sugar, pepper, cinnamon, and nutmeg. **Stir** until well blended. **Garnish** with fresh parsley. **Serve** warm.

Yield: 7, 1-cup servings

Nutritional Analysis:

200 calories, 6 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 600 mg sodium, 36 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 14 g sugar, 10 g added sugar, 4 g protein.

Golden Argiope

The golden argiope (also known as the yellow garden spider) is one of the most striking—and sometimes startling—spiders we encounter in early fall. While they may bite if provoked, they are not dangerous to humans and are generally considered beneficial predators in the garden.



Barbara H. Smith,
Clemson University, 2020

Golden argiopos are orb weaver spiders, known for their large, flat, wheel-shaped webs.

These webs feature silk lines radiating outward like spokes from a central hub and can span up to 2 feet across. You'll typically find their webs in sunny, overgrown areas where tall grasses, brambles, or shrubs provide support. These locations offer both structural stability and access to flying insect prey.

When resting, the golden argiope often holds its legs together in pairs, making it appear to have only four legs instead of eight. This posture can make the spider look less threatening—or more mysterious. Despite their dramatic appearance, golden argiopos have poor eyesight. They rely on vibrations in the web to detect and locate prey. Once an insect is trapped, the spider uses its long legs and strong silk to quickly immobilize it. They can subdue prey up to twice their own size, wrapping it tightly in silk before feeding.

One of the most distinctive features of the golden argiope's web is the zigzag or zipper-like pattern that runs vertically from the center toward the bottom. This structure, called a stabilimentum, has inspired the nickname "writing spider." While its exact purpose is still debated, researchers believe the stabilimentum may strengthen the web's structure, attract flying insects by reflecting UV light and make the web more visible to birds, helping prevent accidental destruction.

Though their size and appearance may be intimidating, golden argiopos are harmless garden allies. They help control pest populations and rarely leave their webs unless disturbed. If you spot one in your yard this fall, consider observing from a respectful distance. These spiders are fascinating creatures and a reminder of the rich biodiversity that thrives in our Kentucky landscapes.

In Praise of Trees

If you're reading this newsletter, chances are you already appreciate trees. But did you know that trees contribute to your well-being in ways you may not have considered? From improving public safety to enhancing mental health, trees are a powerful asset in our communities.



While trees near freeways can pose hazards if placed too close to the pavement, strategic planting can actually improve safety. Studies show that when grassed and treed medians and shoulders are added to roadways, accident rates decrease significantly. This is because trees help to define the spatial edge of the road, increase driver awareness and reduce average driving speeds.

You've also probably heard that trees are good for your health—but the benefits go beyond fresh air. A landmark study from the 1980s found that hospital patients recovering from gallbladder surgery had shorter hospital stays, fewer pain medications and more positive evaluations of their nurses when their rooms had a view of trees compared to a plain brick wall.

More recent research continues to support this connection. A 2023 study published in *Nature Mental Health* found that exposure to urban green spaces was associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Even brief walks in tree-lined areas can improve mood and cognitive function.

The reverse is also true—losing trees can negatively impact human health. A study cited in *The Atlantic Monthly* reported that in areas affected by the Emerald Ash Borer, the resulting loss of tree canopy was associated with 6,113 additional deaths from respiratory illness and 15,080 additional deaths from heart disease across 15 states between 1990 and 2007.

If you're a landlord or property manager, trees offer financial and social advantages like higher rental income for properties with mature trees, longer tenant retention and reduced crime rates. A survey found that apartment complexes with mature trees had 52% less crime than those without. Trees also increase property values, reduce energy costs by shading buildings, and improve stormwater management by absorbing rainfall.

So let's hear it for trees! Whether you're planting one in your yard or advocating for more green space in your community, trees are an investment in health, safety, and quality of life.



Tree Planting Care

Fall is one of the best times to plant trees in Kentucky. Cooler temperatures and increased rainfall help young trees establish strong root systems before the stress of summer heat. Whether you're planting a shade tree in your yard or contributing to your community's canopy, proper planting and care are essential for long-term success.

Choosing the right tree for your site is the first—and most important—step. Consider soil type, drainage, sunlight exposure, space for mature height and root spread, and proximity to buildings, sidewalks, and utilities. Native trees are often the best choice, as they're adapted to local conditions and support Kentucky's wildlife.

Proper planting technique can make or break a tree's future. Here are key steps:

1. **Dig the right hole:** The planting hole should be 2–3 times wider than the root ball, but only as deep as the root ball itself. Planting too deep is a common mistake that can lead to root rot and poor growth.
2. **Handle roots carefully:** For container-grown trees, gently loosen circling roots before planting. For balled-and-burlapped trees, remove as much burlap and wire as possible without disturbing the root ball.
3. **Backfill with native soil:** Avoid adding compost or fertilizer to the planting hole. Trees establish better when their roots grow into the surrounding native soil.
4. **Water deeply and regularly:** Newly planted trees need consistent moisture. Water slowly and deeply once or twice a week, depending on rainfall.
5. **Mulch properly:** Apply 2–4 inches of mulch in a donut shape around the tree—not touching the trunk. Mulch helps retain moisture, regulate soil temperature, and reduce competition from weeds.

Most trees don't need staking unless they're in a windy or exposed location. If staking is necessary use soft, flexible ties that allow some movement. Remove stakes after one growing season to prevent girdling. Protect young trees from lawn equipment, deer, and other hazards with physical barriers or tree guards.

Prune sparingly in the first year—only remove dead or damaged branches. Monitor for pests and diseases, especially in urban areas. Avoid overwatering or compacting soil around the base.

Fall is for planting—and planning. With the right tree and proper care, you're not just improving your yard; you're investing in a healthier, more resilient Kentucky landscape.

Feed the Birds

As fall arrives, many of us begin thinking about feeding the birds. While some people provide food year-round, others focus on the colder months when natural food sources are scarce. Watching birds through the window can be a joyful way to brighten up a dreary winter day—and with the right setup, you can attract a wide variety of feathered visitors.



The type of food you offer will determine which birds (and other wildlife) visit your feeders. If you want to attract a variety of birds, offer a variety of seeds.

- **Black oil sunflower seed** is a favorite among many species, including cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, finches, nuthatches, and sparrows. It's a great starter seed—affordable and widely available.
- **Safflower seed** is a good choice if you want to discourage squirrels. Most squirrels won't eat it, but birds like cardinals, mourning doves, woodpeckers, blue jays, tufted titmice, and chickadees enjoy it. Though more expensive than sunflower seed, safflower offers better value by avoiding squirrel raids.
- **Thistle (nyjer) seed** is loved by goldfinches. Because it's tiny, it requires a special finch feeder—usually a clear tube with small holes and perches. Some feeders have perches above the holes to discourage other birds. Goldfinches are fun to watch as they often feed while hanging upside down.
- **Suet**, made from animal fat, is a high-protein food often hung in wire cages. It attracts many birds, especially woodpeckers, whose striking plumage adds color to the winter garden.
- **Seed mixes** are popular with beginners and attract a wide range of birds. However, birds may scatter the mix while searching for their preferred seeds, creating a mess below the feeder.
- **Fruits and nuts** like apple slices, orange wedges, peanuts, peanut butter, and cracked corn are also bird favorites—but they'll likely attract squirrels and other wildlife, so use with caution.

The style of feeder you choose depends on the type of seed and birds you want to attract.

- **Hopper (house) feeders** are versatile and weather-resistant, with walls, a platform, and a roof to keep seed dry.
- **Platform or tray feeders** are ideal for ground-feeding birds like grosbeaks, cardinals, and mourning doves. They're great for offering fruit and nuts but are easily accessed by squirrels—unless you use safflower seed.
- **Window and balcony feeders** are perfect for apartment or townhouse dwellers. These feeders attach directly to glass or railings, bringing birds up close.
- **Squirrel-proof feeders** are widely available, but keep in mind that squirrels are clever and often find ways around barriers. Watching their antics can be entertaining, too!

Feed the Birds (continued)

To attract more birds, use multiple feeders placed in different areas of your yard. Position feeders near trees or shrubs to give birds quick access to cover in case of predators. If there are outdoor or feral cats in your area, it's best not to feed birds. Cats are a major contributor to songbird decline, killing an estimated 1 billion birds annually in the U.S.

Clean feeders once a month to prevent mold and bacteria, which can harm birds and spread disease. Goldfinches, in particular, will avoid moldy thistle feeders. Use a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts hot water, or a mild solution of unscented dish soap. Rinse thoroughly and allow to dry before refilling. A dirty feeder can also attract unwanted pests like insects, mice, or rats.

Once you start feeding birds, try to maintain a consistent schedule through winter. Birds rely on regular food sources to survive cold nights. Buy in bulk or look for seasonal sales to save money. Store seed in a cool, dry place to prevent spoilage.

Feeding birds is a rewarding way to connect with nature and support local wildlife. With a little planning, you can turn your yard into a winter haven for Kentucky's feathered friends.

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!**

- October 4 – Fall Tree Giveaway with Trees Lexington @ Greyline Station
- October 4 – Let's Go Nuts! Tree Walk @ The Arboretum
- October 4 – Bioblitz @ Kelley's Landing Park
- October 4 – Volunteer Tree Planting @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- October 6 – Volunteer Park Cleanup @ Mary Todd Park
- October 10-19 – TREE WEEK!! Nearly 100 events celebrating trees across Lexington. Visit treeweeklexington.com to learn more!
- October 11 – Arbor Day Celebration and Fall Plant Exchange @ The Arboretum
- October 11 – Halloween Scavenger Hunt @ Hisle Park
- October 14 – Fantastic Fungi @ The Arboretum
- October 14 – Volunteer Park Cleanup @ Idle Hh Hour Park
- October 15 – Local Tour of KY's Nature Preserves @ The Arboretum
- October 15 – Tiny Tot Naturalist "Terrific Trees" @ McConnell Springs Park
- October 16 – "Next Steps for Nature" with Doug Tallamy virtual talk from Wild Ones
- October 17 – Invasive Species Walk with UK Extension Agents @ Kelley's Landing Park
- October 18 – Junior Naturalist "Trekking to Trees" at McConnell Springs Park
- October 20 – Bee Friendly Lawns & Landscapes @ The Arboretum
- October 21 – Invasive Trees & Management with Trees Lexington @ Good Food Co-Op
- October 23 – Volunteer Park Cleanup @ Coldstream Park
- October 25 – Nature Journaling @ Floracliff Nature Sanctuary
- October 25 – Junior Explorers "Bats!" @ Raven Run Nature Sanctuary
- October 26 – Farm Fest Fundraiser for Seedleaf
- October 27 – Volunteer Park Cleanup @ Masterson Station Park
- October 29 – Halloween Night Hike @ Kelley's Landing Park

October Quick Tips

- Feeding lawns is best done in the late fall. The end of this month and all of November are great times to fertilize your turf.
- House plants should be treated as necessary for insects before coming indoors for the winter.
- Store any pots or containers that may be damaged by freezing temperatures.
- Avoid planting broadleaf evergreens in the late fall as winter injury may result. Hollies, Boxwoods, Magnolias and others are best planted in the spring.
- Needled evergreens drop their old needles in the fall. Yellowing, browning, and subsequent needle fall is normal if it is only occurring in the interior of the plant.
- Many insects find their way indoors in the fall. Most are not harmful, just annoying. Your vacuum cleaner is an easy way to get rid of an occasional insect.
- Clean up around fruit trees by raking leaves and removing dried fruit. This will help control several diseases and insects.
- Remove and burn bagworm cases from evergreens. The cases contain eggs which will hatch in spring to produce next year's population.
- Check tree twigs for egg cases of eastern tent caterpillar. The egg cases are dark and shiny, they look like someone has dabbed lacquer around the stem. They usually occur on branches that are about pencil size in diameter. They will break off the branch easily if rubbed with the hand or fingers.
- Although normally not necessary, fall is the best time to apply fertilizer to woody plants. It is best to wait until the plants are dormant so don't apply fertilizer before late October. Dividing the fertilizer application into two or three parts is a good idea. Apply 1/3 in late October, 1/3 in November, and the final 1/3 in December. Altogether you should apply 0.2-0.3 pounds of Nitrogen per 1000 square feet.



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Newsletter Enclosed *Fayette County* *“By the Yard”*

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