Hello, Neighbors! Time is flying by this spring. It seems like just yesterday I was urging everyone to delay planting summer veggies until after Tax Day. Well, now it’s time to . . .

**ACTIVATE YOUR PEST MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Just last week, we received word from South Georgia that the downy mildew that affects cucumber, squash, and pumpkin plants has arrived from Florida. It will soon be blowing its way up to our area. If you’re growing cucurbits, prevention is the only cure. Begin treating plants with fungicides before fungal infections hit them, and continue treatments at recommended intervals throughout the growing season. Rotate applications between different fungicide chemicals to avoid building pesticide resistance, and make applications in the evening hours to help protect the pollinators who are working beside you in the garden.

Prevention is the best solution to insect pests, too. While scouting for pests, check the underside of leaves for egg masses. Destroy (smash) or remove the eggs as much as possible to limit populations of damaging insects. Insecticides are most effective against insects in the juvenile and larval stages. Pesticides are ineffective against insects in the egg and pupa stages, and have lessened effectiveness against mature bugs.

Wet leaves and warm weather create the ideal environment for many fungal diseases. Use drip irrigation, or limit overhead watering to early morning hours. Thin or prune plants to increase air flow between leaves. Both of these practices help to minimize leaf wetness.

Another good practice is to harvest your vegetables early and often. Younger beans, lettuce, and other green veggies are more tender and tasty than mature ones. Tomatoes ripen just as yummy on the kitchen counter as they do on the vine — without attracting pests with their “I’m ripening” aroma. Plus, frequent harvesting encourages plants to produce more fruit, leaves, and pods.

If you have questions or need help identifying insects and plant diseases, bring samples (in sealed jars or zip-top plastic bags, please) to the Master Gardener Help Desk at the Extension office, or send photos to ask.master.gardener@gmail.com.
CAN’T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

Last week, I spent a few hours down on Big Creek Greenway with a group of Forsyth County Master Naturalist Extension Volunteers. As we lingered along the edge of the path, garden cart in tow, staring skyward, consulting field guides, and logging locations, we seemed to arouse curiosity in the joggers, skaters, and bikers that sped past us. What on earth, amidst all those trees, was worth so much attention?

The answer is, trees. The upper piedmont region of Georgia is rich with natural resources, including many types of trees. Within the first few yards of our two-mile foray down the Greenway from the Bethelview trailhead, Master Naturalist Bill Roper had helped us identify 10 different native tree species. One of them was a wild black cherry, a specimen Bill and the Master Naturalist tree identification team had been on a quest to find for some time.

“I can tell y’all that you’ll walk the trail six times and pass the tree you’re trying to find five times,” Bill said. “On the sixth time, you’ll say, ’son of a gun!’”

As the group conferred about surrounding trees, Bill placed a small red flag near the black cherry and recorded the GPS coordinates of it. He later shared the information about that tree, and a few more newly located species, with Cary Toth at Forsyth County Parks and Recreation Department. With Parks and Rec approval, sometime in the near future, the Master Naturalists will install a storyboard near each of these specimens. The durable and attractive signs describe the historic, ecological, and economic importance of the particular tree species they mark.

To many people, a tree is a tree, especially when viewed at high speed. But for native wildlife, pollinators, and some plants, the presence or absence of a particular type of tree is the difference between a happy home and moving on. In the past century, introduced diseases have all but wiped out American chestnut trees, and have killed off miles of American elm trees that once lined neighborhood streets. More recently, Emerald Ash Borers, an invasive insect brought in from Asia in the 1990s, have destroyed hundreds of millions of native ash trees in U.S. forests and urban areas.
The loss of a species reduces biodiversity and has a ripple effect on the ecosystem. Wildlife that depended on that tree species moves out, and invasive plants can move in. Chinese privet is the number one invasive plant on the Georgia Forestry Commission’s “Dirty Dozen” list, a rank it has held for years. Non-native privet spreads aggressively and chokes out native plants. It’s a problem in parks in Forsyth County, too. At places along the Greenway, even Master Naturalists couldn’t see the trees for the privet.

The Interpretive Tree Trail along Big Creek Greenway is one of several Forsyth County Master Naturalist Extension Volunteer conservation and education projects undertaken in collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Department. The next time you’re on the Greenway, I hope you’ll take a little time to learn about some of the amazing native trees that offer shade to visitors, and food, shelter, and habitat to our native wildlife.

FRESH AND LOCAL FOODS FOR MAY
The weekend forecast looks perfect for backyard cookouts. If you’re looking for local meats to grill, Randy Gazaway is fully stocked with his locally grown pork cuts and beef cuts. They can be purchased at the Gazaway Farm, 6112 Franklin Goldmine Road, Cumming, GA. Call 770-843-2485 before you go to make sure someone is there to help you.

Strawberry picking has begun at Warbington Farms. I had a chance to sample some on Monday. Delicious! Check out their Facebook page for hours and special events, or call 770-889-1515.

If you’re curious about what other local foods are available, drop by The Cumming Harvest on Saturday morning to see what local growers and food craftsmen have to offer. The Cumming Harvest is located at 135 Enterprise Drive, Suite I, Cumming, GA 30040, and is open from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. You can also view weekly offerings on the website.

BEEF & BERRIES
Forsyth County Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Barbara Worley created the recipe below to celebrate our local food options.
Mini Local Raised Beef Meatballs with Berry Balsamic Barbeque Sauce

Mini Meatballs

1 pound local lean ground beef  
1 teaspoon fresh thyme  
1/2 cup quick cooking oats  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/4 cup milk (skim preferably)  
Ground black pepper, to taste  
2 Tablespoons very finely minced shallot  
Olive oil  

Combine first 7 ingredients. Form into small balls, about 1” in diameter. Heat oil over medium high heat. Brown meatballs on all sides until cooked through, about 10 minutes. Makes about 35 meatballs. Serve on picks with Mixed Berry Balsamic Barbeque Sauce.

Berry Balsamic Barbeque Sauce

2 cups mixed berries (raspberries, blueberries, strawberries)  
¼ cup balsamic vinegar  
3 T sugar (or sugar substitute)  
3 T ketchup  
½ t garlic powder  
¼ t salt  

Bring all ingredients to a boil in a saucepan and reduce to a simmer. Simmer for 15 minutes or until the mixture begins to thicken. Remove from heat and allow to cool. Pour mixture in to a blender or food processor and process until smooth.

BEAR SCARE
Forsyth County News reported a couple of bear sightings around schools in Cumming this week. We can help the bears move on to better habitat by removing tempting snacks from our landscapes. Bring bird feeders, pet food bowls, and garbage cans into the garage at night.

NATIONAL POLLINATOR WEEK COMING SOON
Well, maybe soon is a relative term. National Pollinator Week is actually June 20-26. But takes longer to prepare a feast for pollinators than it takes to cook a pot roast, so the time to start is now! Check out the USDA’s Million Pollinator Garden Challenge for ideas on what to plant to feed bees, butterflies, and birds.
**TIP & TOSS CAMPAIGN FOR MOSQUITO CONTROL**

To date, all reported cases of Zika virus have been contracted outside of the U.S., but in keeping with the idea that prevention is the best cure, here’s an update on preventing disease by reducing exposure to mosquitos.

The information we’ve received from university entomologists is that the mosquitoes that carry Zika virus (and other diseases) are “container mosquitoes.” Females lay eggs at the water line of shallow containers, such as bird baths, planter bottoms, children’s toys, and other outdoor items that can hold small amounts of water. The eggs need to dry out after being laid, which happens as the water evaporates. When the water level rises back up to where the eggs are, perhaps after a rainfall, the eggs hatch. Some eggs may hold out for the next wet cycle. Container mosquito eggs can survive and delay hatching for up to a year after being laid.

The Georgia Department of Public Health is urging people to Tip & Toss standing water from containers around their homes, and to clean up trash that can hold water, to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds. This should be done at least weekly and after every rainfall. As warmer temperatures arrive, the mosquitoes will take only seven days to complete their life cycle from hatching to laying the next round of eggs.

Home landscape water features should be treated with mosquito dunks containing Bti, a natural pathogen that kills mosquito and blackfly larvae. Bti is not harmful to pets or people.

People should also protect themselves from mosquito bites by wearing clothing that covers skin, and by applying a mosquito repellant containing DEET to exposed skin.

**THINGS TO DO – KIDS VERSION**

Thinking summer camp? Forsyth County 4-H has a few spots left for Cloverleaf Camp (4th-6th Grades) at Rock Eagle 4-H Center. Camp dates are July 4-8.

If you can’t take a week away, we also have our summer day camp adventures open to 4th-6th grades.

Please call Jack Lowery, Forsyth County 4-H Associate, or Emily Addis, Forsyth County 4-H Agent, at 770-887-2418 if you have questions.

**FOOD RECALLS TO NOTE**

Raisin broccoli salad, frozen vegetables, and energy drinks are among recent Georgia food recalls.

Enjoy the weekend weather, and as always, please let us know if you have questions!

Heather