Hello, Neighbors! In this Halloween issue, we’ve got some wicked wildlife, mummy-dust weather, and resurrected apples.

**WICKED WILDLIFE**

**Flesh-eating worms**

Late last month, USDA’s National Veterinary Services confirmed that New World Screwworms are back in the United States. Screwworms are the larva, or maggots, of *Cochliomyia hominivorax* flies. While the maggots of other fly species provide an environmental cleaning service by feeding on dead and decaying animals, screwworms are unique because they eat living flesh.

Female screwworm flies seek out wounds on warm-blooded animals and lay their eggs in them. Even a wound as small as a tick bite may attract screwworm flies; the umbilicus of a newborn calf or fawn provides a rich environment for screwworm eggs. Within 24 hours, 100-300 screwworm eggs laid around the edges of the wound hatch and the maggots begin feeding. They continue feeding for 1-2 weeks as they develop, enlarging the wound as they grow into a potentially fatal lesion.

From the 1930s through the 1960s, screwworms caused economic losses to cattle operations and claimed over 60 percent of white-tail deer fawns each year. U.S. cattlemen led an eradication program that successfully eliminated screwworms from the southeastern states in 1959, and from all areas north of Panama by the mid-1980s. Unfortunately, in late September, screwworm infested deer and other animals were found on Big Pine Key in south Florida.
While Florida may seem far away, adult screwworms fly, and insects can be transported long distances through human movement. The USDA and the University of Georgia are encouraging all livestock and pet owners to closely monitor their animals, and hunters should inspect harvested game for the presence of maggots on fresh kills.

Please collect all suspicious maggots in a sealable container, such as a zip-top plastic bag or a screw-top jar, rather than simply scraping them off the animal onto the ground where they may survive to reproduce. As soon as possible, add isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol to the container to preserve the specimens, and take it to your local Extension office so that the maggots can be identified.

If caught early enough, veterinary treatment can restore infested livestock and pets to full health. Early identification and quick response can help prevent the re-establishment of screwworms in Georgia.

**Migratory Birds – The good, the bad, and the ugly**

Although our temperatures are still warm, the hours of sunlight are noticeably fewer these days. Short day length is one factor that triggers the fall migration of birds from their northern summer nesting grounds to warmer southern regions. Many of these migrating birds pass through Georgia, either following a route along the Blue Ridge Mountain range, or skirting the Atlantic coastline.

While warblers, wrens, and sapsuckers bring winter color and song to our backyards, some migratory birds cause damage. Woodpeckers may drill holes in wood siding of homes. Migratory waterfowl are the primary carriers of avian influenza, the virus that caused the loss of over 49 million chickens and turkeys in 2015. In addition, Canada geese may cause damage to lawns, landscape plants, and agricultural crops; create unsanitary situations in parks; and become aggressive toward people. This is especially true when flocks of Canada geese decide to become permanent residents in certain areas, rather than moving on with their migration.

Perhaps the most objectionable migratory bird, judging by calls to the Extension office, are the black vultures. The carrion-eating birds are large – over two feet long and boasting a wingspan approaching five feet – and almost entirely black, including their bald, wrinkly heads. To add to the creepy factor, black vultures hiss and grunt. They don’t have a vocal box, so they can’t produce more melodic sounds.
Less populous than the familiar red-headed turkey vultures, black vultures are nevertheless present in Georgia year-round. Some flocks move southward in the fall, however, taking layovers in Forsyth County neighborhoods during their short migration and stirring up concern among homeowners. Fortunately, the rest periods are brief and the birds move on in a few days.

Even if their behavior or appearance is objectionable, all birds in Georgia are considered migratory and are protected by federal law. Canada geese may be hunted in season, but otherwise, property owners may only use non-lethal tactics to encourage nuisance birds to move on.

**Considerations as drought persists**

According to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](https://www.drought.gov/), two-thirds of the state is experiencing D2 (severe) to D4 (exceptional) drought levels. The northwest counties have been in continuous severe drought for 23 weeks. In updates last week, climatologists from Alabama and Georgia indicated that we can expect drought conditions to persist for another three months.

October to early November is normally the time to reseed tall fescue lawns and pastures. Fall is also – usually – the best time to plant trees and shrubs. With our soil dry as mummy dust and no rain in the forecast, however, be prepared to provide irrigation where you plant. Despite the EPD’s drought declaration, the [Water Stewardship Act](https://www.ugaextension.com/water-stewardship-act) is still in effect. This allows irrigation of new plantings for 30 days, and watering of established plants between 4 p.m. and 10 a.m.

Although established perennial plants don’t need much water during the winter, the root systems continue to grow even when the above-ground parts of the plant are dormant. It’s also important to keep some moisture around the crowns of warm-season grass species to avoid desiccation of the plants. Through November, continue to provide ½ inch of rain weekly to lawns and landscape plants in the absence of rainfall. Continue to monitor plants and irrigate as necessary into December.

Because the dry summer stalled the growth of perennial grasses, they may not have built up carbohydrate reserves in the root system. UGA Turfgrass Specialist Clint Waltz warns that a consequence of poor carbohydrates stores this year may be failure to green-up next spring.

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Drought also affects stream flow and groundwater levels, which in turn, can affect the level of water in wells. Indications that your well is not keeping up with water demand include a drop in water pressure and cloudy or silty water.

**FRESH AND LOCAL FOODS: Apples**

John Chapman, an entrepreneur from Massachusetts, developed a forward-looking business model. He took a waste product that he could get for free, cultivated it over several years into a must-have item for other independent start-ups, and strategically positioned his sales outlets along developing travel routes.

Finally allowed to venture west of the Appalachian Mountains after the American colonists prevailed over the British in 1783, adventurous pioneers were required to plant 50 apple trees on their land before they could prove up on their homestead claims. While they might strap a beehive to the side of their wagons and keep the bees alive over several months of rough travel, the same was not true for 50 apple tree seedlings. They would need to acquire these later, near where they had settled. Anticipating this need, Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, filled sacks with discarded seeds from cider mills, hacked orchards out of dense forest from Pennsylvania to Indiana, and planted apple seeds.

Despite his good instincts and high demand for his products, Chapman never realized riches. Many of his customers were too poor to purchase his products. So Chapman took items in trade – which he often returned the next day – or gave trees away to help pioneers claim the west.

Apples require cross-pollination from a different variety to set fruit. Grown from seed, Chapman’s apple trees would be genetic wildcards, producing apples with wide variations in size, color, texture, taste, and vigor. Apple breeding programs at universities began in the early 1900s and are still on-going. These programs help develop cultivars with desirable traits, including disease resistance. Outstanding cultivars are replicated by cloning – using cuttings to propagate new plants, or grafting cuttings onto hardy rootstock. Cloned trees are genetically identical to the parent, so the fruit they produce is predictably standard.

Even as new cultivars hit the market, home orchardists are resurrecting heritage apple cultivars. Apples are highly versatile; they can be dried, sauced, jellied, preserved, baked, cidered, and of course eaten fresh from the tree.
UPCOMING CLASSES
Starting November 5th, Forsyth County Master Gardener Extension Volunteers are partnering with The Place of Forsyth County to offer Saturday gardening classes for kids ages 6-12. All classes run from 10:30 a.m. to noon. The schedule includes:

- Introduction to Gardening and other FUN STUFF, November 5
- Make a Thanksgiving place mat with herbs, November 12
- Planting herbs and seeds, November 19

Classes are free, but space is limited. Participants must register by calling or emailing Sue at 770-887-1098 or sue@theplaceofforsyth.org. In addition, children must wear closed-toe shoes and clothes that can get dirty to the workshops.

FORSYTH COUNTY 4-H WILDLIFE JUDGING TEAM ADVANCES TO NATIONAL COMPETITION
Congratulations to the Forsyth County 4-H Wildlife Judging senior team for earning first place at the state competition on October 22, 2016. With this win, the four-member team, consisting of Leah Hornsey, Ella Kerrisk, Dusty Haney, and Jonah Daugherty, advances to the national level, where they will compete against teams from other states next summer.

FOOD RECALLS TO NOTE
Recent food recalls include taco seasoning mix, a variety of sauces, and ice cream.

HAPPY HALLOWEEN
I hope you enjoyed this shamelessly sensational issue of Forsyth County Cooperative Extension News. Remember to “fall back” one hour on November 6 as daylight saving time ends for 2016.

Heather & all of your Extension staff