Looking for natural weed control? Get Mulch!
By Heather N. Kolich
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Of all the pests that trouble plants, weeds cause the most economic damage. While many gardeners want to get away from chemicals, we seem to be conditioned to battle pests with some sort of spray. So we get lots of calls here at the Extension office from people looking for a spray that will provide natural weed control.

Well, there is no spray, chemical or natural, that controls all weeds under all conditions. But guess what? The hands-down best weed control for gardens and landscapes is all natural mulch.

Mulch creates a physical presence that interferes with seed germination and seedling emergence. Sunlight can’t reach weeds underneath the mulch barrier. Denied the light they need for photosynthesis, weeds weaken and die.

Mulch has the added benefits of maintaining soil moisture and moderating soil temperature. Organic mulches such as pine straw, pine bark, and wood chips restore organic matter to the soil as they decompose, improving soil structure and fertility. Inorganic mulches such as lava rock, crushed gravel, and river rocks don’t decompose, but they may create heat islands that can damage tender plants. The weight of rock mulch may also cause soil compaction.

To get the best results from mulch:

- Apply a 3-4 inch deep blanket of organic mulch around the root zone of plants. This is sufficient depth to shade out weeds, but not deep enough to suffocate roots or tempt rodents to nest in the mulch. Remember that roots extend horizontally through the soil far beyond the plant stem, so just as you dig the planting hole 2-3 times wider than the pot, make your mulch island 2-3 times wider than the spread of the plant’s leaves or branches.
- Pull mulch away from the stem or trunk of plants. One of the functions of mulch is to retain moisture. This is good for roots, but bad for stems. Constant contact with moist mulch – as in mulch volcanoes – can rot stems and bark, leading to plant death.
- Use aged mulch around plants to get more immediate benefits of nitrogen release.
Use freshly ground tree trimmings on paths and unplanted areas for the best weed control. This green mulch initially reduces soil nitrogen, but as the mulch ages and decomposes, it returns that nitrogen to the soil.

Better yet, you can get free mulch at the Forsyth County Recycling Convenience Center at Coal Mountain Park, located at 3560 Settingdown Road. This mountain of mulch comes from the annual “Bring One for the Chipper” Christmas tree recycling event and county maintenance branch trimming. Bring your shovel and containers for yet another benefit – a free mulch workout!

**Forsyth County 4-H archers hit the bullseye**

By Jack Lowery  
4-H Agent  
UGA Extension Forsyth County

Under the guidance of several exceptional 4-H volunteer coaches, 12 Forsyth County 4-H archers competed against other archers from around Georgia at the 4-H State Target Challenge Weekend at Rock Eagle on April 28, 2018. After all the arrows flew, half of our competitors placed in the top five for their divisions, and the Senior Team placed first in the contest.

4-H Archery includes three age divisions (Cloverleaf for 4th-6th grades, Junior for 7th-8th grades, and Senior for 9th-12th grades), and three disciplines (Novice, Recurve, and Compound). Within those age and discipline divisions, our Forsyth County 4-H archery winners were:

- Anne Wersal, 5th place in Cloverleaf Novice
- Xavier Wersal, 1st place in Cloverleaf Recurve
- Aiden Wersal, 1st place in Junior Recurve
- Jacob Gibson, 5th place in Junior Recurve
- Josef Scarboro, 2nd place in Senior Recurve
- Rachel Carlisle, 4th place in Senior Recurve

Other Forsyth County 4-H competitors include Rachel Meeks in the Cloverleaf Recurve Division, Angelina Scarboro, Pavni Goel, and Esther Smith in the Junior Recurve Division, and Graham Bishop and Madeline Wersal in the Senior Recurve Division.

Placing 1st in the Senior Team competition, Forsyth County 4-H’ers Josef Scarboro, Rachel Carlisle, Graham Bishop, and Madeline Wersal earned the opportunity to represent Georgia at the National 4-H Archery Tournament this June in Grand Island, Nebraska.
This exciting state victory comes right after another great achievement of the 4-H Archery Team. April 21st and 22nd marked the annual GA Cup Archery Tournament in Statesboro, hosted by Southern Eagles Archery, with five Forsyth County 4-H’ers competing. After two days of fierce competition, Josef Scarboro placed first in the Junior Male division, Rachel Carlisle placed first in the Cadet Female division, Angelina Scarboro placed third in the Cub Bare Bow Female division, and Graham Bishop placed third in the Cadet Male division.

Forsyth County 4-H is very proud of all these amazing archers. For more information about the Forsyth County 4-H Archery program and other 4-H Project S.A.F.E (Shooting Awareness Fun and Education) sports, please contact the Forsyth County Extension Office at 770-887-2418.

**Let’s Look: Mosquito breeding sites**

Now that the weather is warm, summer insects are showing up. Among these are biting insects like mosquitoes. These pests may carry harmful diseases and transmit them to humans through their bites. Mosquitoes are also carriers of heartworm larvae.

Aerial spraying does not control mosquitoes, but it does kill other beneficial insects. A better approach to reducing mosquito populations is removing their breeding sites.

After taking a blood meal, a female mosquito seeks out standing or stagnant water to lay her eggs in. She may find it in a birdbath or in unexpected places, like tiny rainwater puddles in planter bases, children’s toys, or even a bottle cap.

To eliminate these breeding places, tip water out of collection places after every rain, empty and refill birdbaths on a daily basis, remove litter and debris, and clean out gutters. For landscape water features or ponds, consider adding fish that eat mosquito larvae, or use Bti (Bacillus thuringiensis subspecies israelensis) pond dunks or granules. This natural pest control kills mosquito larvae without harming other species.

**Fall fair contests – get started now!**

Why are we talking about the October Cumming Country Fair and Festival in May? Because winning fair contest entries don’t grow overnight! May is the time to plant, sample, plan, and practice your entry for the Forsyth County Extension Fall Fair Contests.

**School contests:**
- Scarecrow Contest, K-5 classroom entries. Theme: Famous Georgians
- School Garden Sweet Potato Contest – New this year! Open to K-12 schools. Three ways to enter – Largest Sweet Potato; Most Artistic Natural Form Sweet Potato; Best Class-created Sweet Potato Recipe. All entries must be grown in the school’s garden.
Open to everyone contests:

- Baking Contest – Must feature Georgia Grown products
- Canning Contest – Must feature Georgia Grown products
- Giant Pumpkin Contest – Pick up seeds and entry form at the Extension office now!
- Hay Contest – In conjunction with 2018 Southeast Regional Hay Contest

Visit our website for details, rules, and entry forms.

Learning with Extension – Events and Opportunities

Etowah Wonders Lecture – May 16, 10:30 a.m., Hampton Park Library
As part of the Forsyth County Extension Master Gardener Lunch and Learn series, Diane Minick, past president of the Upper Etowah River Alliance, will provide a peek into the natural wonders and ecological importance of the Etowah River, which runs through the northwest corner of the county. Please join us at Hampton Park Library for this event.

Workshop on New Farm and Land Tax Law, May 15, Carroll County Extension Office
Georgia farmers and landowners can learn how the new tax laws affect them at a University of Georgia workshop at the Carroll County Extension office on May 15. The workshop will highlight estate tax changes, individual tax changes, changes in the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Acts,” and equip farmers to better navigate the new tax provisions. Workshop begins at 9 a.m., and lunch is included. To register, visit http://attend.com/713b987137bc05.

Preserving your Garden Bounty, June 5-7 or June 26-28, Sawnee Mountain Preserve
Learn how to preserve your home-grown fruits and veggies! Forsyth County Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Barbara Worley is taking registrations now for her June Put It Up Food Preservation classes. Series 1 covers canning tomatoes, drying blueberries, and making strawberry jam. Series 2 covers making pickles, freezing vegetables, and pressure canning green beans. For registration information, visit the Forsyth County Extension website.

Fireant Management Workshop for Pastures and Hayfields, June 19, Warbington Farms
During this class and field demonstration at Warbington Farms in Cumming, Carrol County Extension Agent and fireant expert Paula Burke will show you how to get pesky fireants under control in pastures and hayfields. Pesticide applicator credits available. For registration information, visit the Forsyth County Extension website.

Scholarship for Horticulture Students
Forsyth County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers have created a scholarship for Forsyth County high school seniors interested in pursuing a degree in horticulture. Two scholarships in the amount of $1,250 are available to seniors accepted to attend a two or four year Georgia college to pursue a degree in horticulture. Visit the Forsyth County Extension website for application information and form.
Summer Programs at UGA for High School Students

University of Georgia’s College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) hosts student learning programs each summer. This year, UGA High School Programs include:

- ADVANCE Ag Institute for rising high school seniors
- Georgia Plant Science Scholars for rising 10th-12th grade students
- Livestock Judging Camp for rising 6th – 12th grade 4-H and FFA members
- Poultry Science Open House for high school and college students interested in science, technology, and animals
- Avian Academy for middle and high school STEM and Vo-Ag teachers

Forsyth County 4-H Summer Programs for 4th-8th Graders

Forsyth County summer day camps offer high excitement and education at affordable prices. All day camps are $35 or less, but spaces fill up quickly. Register now!

*Animal Shelter Work Days* – June 7 or June 14. Make dog and cat toys, help around the shelter, and visit with the animals! Each 4-H’er may choose one date for participation. Lunch will be provided.

*Farm Day with Horses* – June 21. Spend a fun filled day as a ranch hand learning equine behavior and care essentials. There will also be fun games and hands on work with herding dogs and horses, seminars, and riding demonstrations. Lunch is provided.

*Sawnee Mountain High Climbing Adventure* – July 5. Thrill seekers, get ready to explore the natural environment on a hike to the Indian Seats, then get a view of life in the trees as we use special climbing equipment to explore the tree tops. Bring a sack lunch for a picnic at the park.

*Dahlonega Day* – July 12. Join the gold rush with gold panning, a tour of a gold mine, and visits to shops in historic Dahlonega, then rush down the Chestatee River on a tube! Bring a picnic lunch and a change of clothes for this exciting adventure!

*Atlanta History Center Day* – July 19. 4-H’ers and their families are invited to tour the Atlanta History Center at a discounted cost. Admission includes access to tour the farm, museums, and even the Swan House that was featured in the Hunger Games! This event is for the entire family, and we will meet there at the History Center.

For more information about how to sign up for these day camps, please contact the Forsyth County Extension Office at 770-887-2418.

Got Questions?
Visit UGA Extension Forsyth County for answers, articles, upcoming events and classes, and lots more useful information.