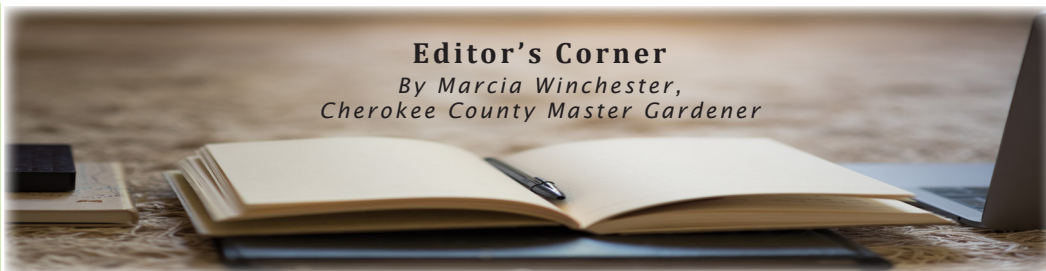


Gardening With The Masters

Growing, Gardening and Gaining Knowledge
February/March 2022

Follow our events, webinars and activities. Visit us on Facebook, or website. Links are on Page 10 of this newsletter. We look forward to seeing you soon.



Editor's Corner

By Marcia Winchester,
Cherokee County Master Gardener



In early January, my neighbor asked if it was time to prune her crape myrtle trees. She'd noticed several lawn companies pruning then and figured it was time. Her question is one I didn't have to look up.

For over 20 years, this Cherokee County Master Gardener newsletter has published monthly gardening tips. I've always found them very useful. I put some of the most important ones on sticky notes and place them on my calendar so when I flip the page I can see what needs to be done each month. I'm low-tech, so however you remind yourself, I highly recommend that you add some gardening reminders that are important to you to your personal calendar.

For example spring-blooming bulbs like crocus and daffodils should not be planted until after November 1. Fescue grass seed should be put down after September 20 when the night temperatures are 60 degrees. I always check with my lawn service company regarding their chemical applications to avoid applying pre-emergent and new grass seed too close together. Otherwise the pre-emergent will prevent the grass seed from germinating. I have a reminder to plant pansies in early to mid October and to plant summer annuals after tax day in April.

February has a lot of reminders: clean bluebird houses, fertilize blueberries, prune roses and put a dab of white glue on the ends. This year I added planting snow peas in mid-February. UGA has a great vegetable planting chart, Publication C963, which you can find at this link: <https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/html/C963/C963VegeChart.pdf>.

This two-page chart is packed with quick and easy data on recommended varieties for Georgia, days to maturity, and both spring and fall planting dates. If you raise vegetables this resource is a must.

Being prepared and doing gardening chores in a timely manner is important. By the way, crape myrtles should not be pruned until late February/early March. Pruning encourages growth, and you don't want tender new growth to emerge that will be killed by a freeze.

Marcia

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Orchids: Not Your Common Houseplant

By Diane Walton, Cherokee County Master Gardener

The orchid always stands out in the store with its extraordinary beauty that entices you to buy it and take it home. Now the fun begins!

The orchid has a bad reputation as a plant that needs a lot of care. This is a myth! The orchid may have specific needs, but when these needs are met, it's very simple to keep it happy.



Orchid roots Adobe Stock | Andriy Blokhin #250550412

Most orchids sold as houseplants are air plants (epiphytes). Their roots are covered with a layer of white cells called velamen. The coating protects the roots from heat and moisture loss. In addition, it absorbs water and nutrients that the plant needs. In their natural habitats, orchids live on the surfaces of plants like tree trunks and branches. Their roots are not adapted for soil.



Orchid photo courtesy Mary Tucker

Pots – Orchids like to have the air moving through their roots, so orchid pots have holes in the sides and bottom. Porous pots (like clay) are the best because the potting medium can dry uniformly. Do not use pots

that have a glaze inside because they hold moisture and could create root rot. Plastic pots will allow the medium to dry slower and from the top down which can fool you into watering the orchid too often.

Potting Medium – An orchid needs a well-drained medium that will allow the plant to shed water the same as if it was growing on the side of a tree. Do not use potting soil! You can use orchid bark, redwood bark, coconut husks, fir bark nuggets, loosely packed sphagnum moss, or tree fern fiber. Do not use pine bark! This will kill the roots. You may have to change the medium after you purchase the orchid as many growers use a peat moss-based mix. Put some medium in the bottom of the pot, then add the orchid, and fill in the medium around the orchid. Do not pack the medium; place it just firm enough to hold the orchid upright.



Fir bark

Coconut husk chips

Sphagnum moss

Orchid mediums courtesy <http://everything-orchids.com/orchid-care/orchid-medium>

Fertilizing – It is better to under-fertilize than over-fertilize. Water soluble fertilizer is recommended – not a slow-release formula. Dilute the formula more than you would for a regular houseplant. The medium you use does not provide nutrients; therefore, you need to fertilize in order to sustain healthy growth. Fertilize lightly every two to three weeks except during midwinter or right after the plant has been re-potted. Use a 10-10-10 or 10-10-30 fertilizer.

Light – Most orchids grow best in a bright room with east or south windows. A fluorescent light or a grow light can also be used. Do not put orchids in direct sunlight as the leaves will turn brown. Indirect light for 12 hours is recommended.

Air circulation – This is an important factor in growing orchids. A warm breeze from a window or overhead fan is needed for orchids. On the other hand, do not put in an overly drafty area. Indoor temperatures should be 60 degrees or above at all times.

Humidity – Orchids love humid, moist air, and humans work hard not to have humid, moist air in their homes. To compensate, place the orchid pot on a tray of gravel, keeping a half inch of water in the gravel. As the water evaporates, the orchid gets the humidity it craves.



Clever Canids: Red and Gray Foxes

By Karen Garland, Cherokee County Master Gardener

Across Georgia, foxes have become a regular sight in many urban and suburban neighborhoods, including my backyard. While I was excited to see one casually trekking through our woods one evening, I was not thrilled to smell the musky scent it used to convey its status and mark its territory. A neighbor also had the displeasure of uncovering a small animal corpse while gardening, which was most likely a food cache that foxes bury throughout their territory for the times when food may be scarce. Despite these encounters, many gardeners agree that they are clever, resourceful, curious animals that bring a hint of magic to our gardens.



Gray fox Adobe Stock | Danita Delimont #420857784

Many gardeners may not know that Georgia is home to two species of fox, the gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) and the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). Furthermore, while both species are common in Georgia today, the gray fox is the state's only native fox species, with the red fox being introduced to America by early European settlers.

Although these canids are infamous in stories for raiding the hen house, most foxes will avoid confrontations unless provoked, threatened, or cornered. Similarly, they rarely attack dogs or cats because they are noisy and troublesome. The culprit of many backyard exploits is often a coyote, a raccoon, or another dog.

Red and gray foxes generally choose different types of habitats that on occasion overlap in their ranges and usage. Reds are generalists and thrive in natural areas as readily as urban or suburban settings. Gray foxes tend to prefer shrubbier regions with more cover and access to water. They are also somewhat wary of urban and suburban habitats, though this seems to be shifting with increasing development.

Most of us may only catch fleeting glimpses of these secretive creatures, and these brief encounters often leave us wondering what species we saw. Although foxes are distinctively shaped, with pointy muzzles, large triangular ears, long thin bodies, and long bushy tails, known as a brush, there are some noticeable differences in size and coloration.



Red fox Adobe Stock | AB Photography #326632548

The red fox, weighing 8 to 17 pounds, usually features russet to red-orange fur, a white breast and belly, and white markings on its muzzle and the tip of its bushy tail. Its feet and legs look like they are wearing black stockings, and its pointed ears are also black or black-tipped. Maintaining a home range of three to four square miles, red foxes are solitary animals and do not form hunting packs like wolves.

Smaller than the red fox, adult gray foxes can weigh between 7 to 13 pounds. They are also stockier and have shorter legs than red foxes. Their color is predominantly silvery gray, with patches of reddish fur and a distinctive black streak along the top to the black tip of the tail. The feet, legs, and sides are a rusty yellowish color.

Gray foxes are unique among canids in their ability to climb trees. They have strong, hooked claws that enable them to be excellent tree climbers and leap from branch to branch like a cat. This ability allows them to escape from predators, forage for food, and access dens or resting places.

Both fox species are omnivores with extremely keen senses. As opportunists, their diet consists mainly of what is easily obtained, including rodents, small mammals, fruits, and eggs. They may also possibly rummage through a backyard compost or garbage bin.



Gray fox climbing up tree
Adobe Stock | hkuchera #187923769

The Great Backyard Bird Count: February 18-21, 2022

By Mary Tucker, Cherokee County Master Gardener

From February 18 to 21, you will have the opportunity to take part in a world-wide bird count that will help scientists evaluate the abundance and distribution of birds. This event also helps track bird population changes and trends that occur over the years. This annual event is called the Great Backyard Bird Count, and it was launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The four-day count now involves more than 200,000 people of all ages across the globe. In 2021 over 6500 species of birds were observed around the world, with over 650 species in the United States alone.

You don't have to be an expert birder to take part in the count, and if you can't identify every bird you see, that's OK too. Just log in the ones you know. If you want some tips on identifying birds, see the article on that very topic in this newsletter.

It's easy and fun to take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, and I've personally been participating for about 15 years. Bird counts can be done anywhere, though I usually do mine at home by watching birds at my feeders. Other participants prefer to go to a park or nature trail or a favorite birding site, such as a lake shore.

All you have to do is watch birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count. Keep a separate record for the different times or places that you participate. Count the highest number of each bird species seen at one time (to ensure the birds are not counted more than once), and keep track of the amount of time spent counting. Then log on to the GBBC website (<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>) to enter your data.

Results are updated in real time in the form of animated maps and colorful graphs, so you can see what's happening with birds around the world during the count. Of course, it's especially fun to see what species other birdwatchers in Georgia are observing.

Visit the GBBC website for more information about the event and how to participate. You will find full instructions in addition to bird lists tailored to your Zip Code to help you record your bird sightings.

There are other similar events that occur throughout the year, including the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch and NestWatch and the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Any time of year, you can report bird sightings via eBird, an online database of bird observations that is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society.

The Cornell Lab also has a wealth of resources that give average folks like you and me an opportunity to learn more about birds in general. Their website "All About Birds" offers information about bird identification and has detailed facts about various bird species. At Cornell Lab's "Bird Academy" you can find videos, lectures, online learning games, and numerous online courses about birds.

Websites:

Great Backyard Bird Count: <https://gbbc.birdcount.org>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu>

All About Birds: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org>

Cornell Lab Bird Academy: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org>

National Audubon Society: <https://www.audubon.org>

eBird: <https://ebird.org>



<https://www.birdcount.org/social-media/>

Did You Know?

Did you know that a fabulous way to attract birds to your yard is to plant native berry-producing trees and shrubs? These include flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), downy serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*), viburnums (*Viburnum* spp.), native hollies (*Ilex* spp.), American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), chokeberries (*Aronia* spp.) and blueberries (*Vaccinium* spp.).

Among the many birds that eat these berries are the eastern bluebird, northern mockingbird, brown thrasher, American robin, cedar waxwing, northern cardinal, and blue jay.

Photos of dogwood berries and beautyberry courtesy Mary Tucker



Some Basics of Bird Identification

By Mary Tucker, Cherokee County Master Gardener

If you want to take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, you must be able to identify birds you're seeing! That can be difficult, but there are many resources to assist. Any good field guide will help, and there are many to choose from. There is also a world of information from trusted sources on the internet.

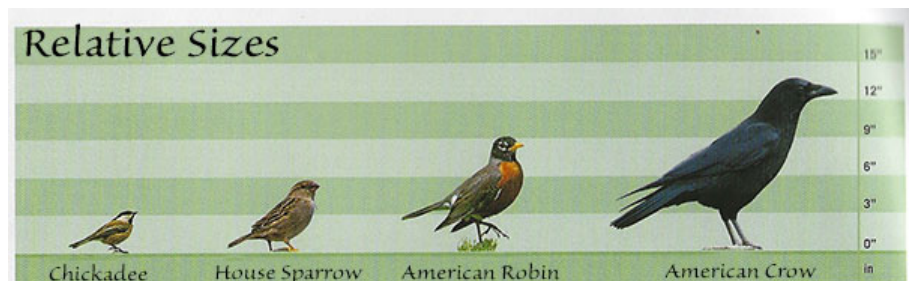
For example, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website "All About Birds" (<https://www.allaboutbirds.org>) has an excellent online bird identification feature called "Merlin." It will walk you through a process that will help you narrow the bird down to several choices. You will see multiple photos of those birds, and you can decide which matches the bird you wish to ID. There is also a mobile Merlin app for Apple and Android devices. The mobile app even helps you ID a bird by its song.

In its online "Bird Academy" (<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org>), the Cornell Lab offers in-depth courses, some of which are tailored to bird identification, either for the beginner or for the more experienced birder. The "eBird Essentials" course (which is free) is a great place to start. Other classes range from about \$30 to \$130. In addition to these paid courses, the Lab has many free instructional videos on its site.

To help you identify a bird you see, take note of the features listed below. Have some paper with you to jot down notes or make simple drawings. Better yet, get a photo of the bird if possible. Then you can go to your trusted field guide or the Cornell Lab's online ID resource to help you make a firm ID.

Overall Size: How does the size of the bird compare with other birds you are already familiar with? For example, note that the bird you want to identify is smaller than a robin but larger than a bluebird.

Body Shape: What is the overall shape of the bird? Is it slender like a mockingbird or stouter like a robin? Does the bird have a crest on its head?



Bird ID scale photo courtesy Jennifer Ruscelli

Wing Shape and Size: Are the wings rounded or sharply pointed? How long are they in relation to the body?

Bill Shape and Size: Is the bill short and thick, or is it longer and pointed? Is the bill curved or straight?

Tail Shape and Size: Is the tail rounded or square at the tip? Is it forked or pointed? How long is the tail in relation to the bird's body?

Colors: What are the primary colors that you see on the body, head, bill, tail, and legs? Be aware that color can be quite variable within a species. For example males, females, and juveniles often have different coloration, and breeding plumage may be brighter than non-breeding.

Markings: Does the bird have spotting or streaking on the body? Does the eye have a ring around it or a stripe through it? Do the wings have any bars on them? Is the tail a solid color, or is there a pattern on it?

Perching behavior: Does the bird hold its tail up or down when perched, or is it held straight out behind the bird? Does it bob its body or tail up and down?

Flight behavior: Does the bird fly straight and fast, or does it dip up and down in the air? Does it glide or soar?

Feeding Behavior: Is the bird climbing a tree trunk to feed? Is it primarily on the ground? Is it wading in the water?

Common birds in Cherokee County

If you are just getting started with bird identification, you may want to first learn some of the most common birds you are likely to see in your own backyard in Cherokee County. Here's a list of the birds I have seen most frequently during previous Great Backyard Bird Counts: mourning dove, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, eastern phoebe, blue jay, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, brown-headed nuthatch, Carolina wren, brown thrasher, northern mockingbird, eastern bluebird, American robin, house finch, American goldfinch, song sparrow, white-throated sparrow, eastern towhee, northern cardinal.

Edgeworthia: Winter Garden Gems

By Stephanie Howard, Cherokee County Master Gardener

Winter is generally considered the time of year to prepare the garden for spring. Instead of allowing your garden to go into dormancy with lack of interest in winter, you can transition it into a four-season garden. Consider starting with a stunning winter focal point!

The unique *Edgeworthia chrysantha*, or paperbush, is a beautiful addition to your garden. Note that this plant was previously known as *Edgeworthia papyrifera*, and you may still see it referred to by that name in some references. This deciduous shrub grows up to 7 feet tall and gives year-round interest. Silky silver buds form in late fall to early winter. During the latter winter weeks, tiny florets form golden clusters that hang from the tips of bare, symmetrical branches. These blooms emit a lovely, sweet fragrance. You can clip a few branches and place them in a vase to adorn your home with this luscious scent.



Edgeworthia chrysantha courtesy Hiroshi Nishimoto [CC BY 4.0](#)



Edgeworthia chrysantha leaves Cathy Dewitt [CC BY 4.0](#)

In recent years, its captivating floral display and appealing fragrance has made this shrub one of the most sought after in the Southeast. Once the flowers fade in the spring, slender, oblong bluish green leaves emerge. To a novice, its foliage can be mistaken for rhododendron. Seasonal interest even extends into fall, when the foliage takes on various shades of amber.

Paperbush is a native of China and is a relative of daphne (*Daphne* spp.), and you may be wondering where the common name comes from. Interestingly, the bark is used to produce fine paper for calligraphy and paper money, and the plant is widely cultivated for that use.

Paperbush is relatively easy to grow since it seems to tolerate either acidic or alkaline soil conditions. However, the soil should be moist but well-drained.

E. chrysantha performs best in light shade. It also makes a good container plant. To make a dazzling statement, plant several in the back of a mixed border with shade-tolerant evergreens. When planted as a specimen in full sun, the foliage is usually not as striking.



Edgeworthia chrysantha bark Cathy Dewitt [CC BY 4.0](#)

Available cultivars include:

E. chrysantha 'Snow Cream' is the most common and hardy cultivar. It can grow up to 8 feet.

E. chrysantha 'Red Dragon' sports red-orange flowers. Although, it has become an instant favorite of Zone 7 gardens, it is still difficult to find.

E. chrysantha 'Akebono' bears flower clusters of white and vibrant orange. It is an arresting specimen, but not as fragrant as other cultivars.

Your winter vignette is reminiscent of a treasure chest when the topaz *E. chrysantha* shrub is surrounded with under-plantings of sparkling snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*), amethyst-colored crocus (*Crocus* spp.), ruby-colored cyclamen (*Cyclamen hederifolium*), and jewel-toned hellebore (*Helleborus* spp.).

** All photos provided by <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/>



Edgeworthia chrysantha pollinator interest Cathy Dewitt [CC BY 4.0](#)



Clever Canids: Red and Gray Foxes ...continued from page 3

Breeding for both species occurs from mid-January through February, so gardeners should be on the lookout as foxes seek dens in which to give birth. While they may dig their dens, foxes prefer to acquire and enlarge the burrows of other mammals such as groundhogs. However, it is not uncommon for foxes to use crawl spaces under a shed or a deck.

No matter how adorable the new kits are, never feed or try to pet them, as “a fed mammal often leads to a dead mammal.” When bowls of pet food or kitchen scraps are available for wild mammals, it causes them to change their natural diet, which could cause nutritional problems. Even worse, they could lose their natural fear of humans and start approaching people. Wild animals that do this may not survive long.

Therefore, if you want to help foxes, consider creating a wildlife habitat garden landscape that naturally provides what foxes and other wildlife need to survive. Coexisting with them in these spaces can be a winning proposition if we offer simple accommodations. However, if you are frustrated with repairing the damage to flowerbeds or filling holes, here are some suggestions to help you live more peacefully. They include feeding pets indoors to stop foxes from eating the leftover food; placing bird feeders high and out of reach; collecting fallen fruit from trees or shrubs; blocking gaps in outdoor structures; avoiding using fish, blood, and bonemeal-based fertilizers; and enclosing compost or garbage bins in sturdy, lidded containers.

Fortunately, most fox guests cause minor damage and cause few conflicts with humans, so they are not usually categorized as a nuisance. Nevertheless, as with most wildlife, practice safety if you are lucky enough to observe one of these magnificent creatures sharing your garden with you.



Baby red fox kits Adobe Stock | geoffkuchera #109079222

Orchids: Not Your Common HouseplantContinued from page 2

Watering – Orchids like to be drenched and drained well and then not watered again until they dry out. Always water early in the day using warm water (not ice cubes as some recommend). Frequency of watering depends on the temperature and humidity. The quickest way to kill an orchid is by over-watering. Make sure the roots are not sitting in water in the pot you have chosen. Do not mist the orchid as the leaves may wilt and turn brown.

Re-potting – Orchids need fresh medium every one to two years. Take the plant from its pot, and rest it on newspaper. Remove all the old potting medium and any dead roots. If you have a lot of root rot, use a new pot or wash the old pot thoroughly. Re-pot using new medium.

Flowering – There is no specific time that an orchid will bloom. When you buy an orchid in bloom, chances are it is maturing, and once the flower dies it will be some time before you see another. When an orchid stops blooming, cut off the flower stalk at the base of the plant.

Pest and Diseases – Like other plants, orchids can get aphids, scale, mealy bugs, thrips, fungus gnats, and spider mites. Fungus is the major cause of orchid death. To prevent fungus, never over-water, do not water on cool cloudy days, keep air moving, and change the growing medium before it decays. The best treatment for fungus is to repot quickly.

Now that you know how to handle an orchid, this plant can bring beauty to your home for several years with proper care and attention.



Orchid repot Adobe Stock | gicku91 #295811596

FEBRUARY GARDENING TIPS



Pruning roses Adobe Stock | Olga #253854968

ORNAMENTALS

- Prune hybrid tea roses and Knock Out Roses® now, removing old canes and lowering plant to a height of 12-15 inches. To care for rose bushes now,

apply a fertilizer heavy in potassium (K). Apply a drop of white glue to the end of fresh cut canes to prevent borers. Apply a dormant spray of copper or sulfur before active growth appears. Clean up rose beds, discard old foliage, pieces of canes, and remove old mulch with weeds. Re-apply a fresh layer of mulch to rose beds. For more rose pruning info: https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%201001_2.PDF

- Winter is a good time to prune deciduous trees and shrubs that don't bloom in the spring. It allows you to view the trunk and branches when making your cuts. <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B961>
- Change plant light bulbs over seedlings, as older bulbs do not give off as much light.
- Continue to fertilize pansies and other winter annuals with fertilizer high in nitrate nitrogen. http://extension.uga.edu/publications/files/pdf/B%201359_2.PDF
- Prune clumps of ornamental grass before new growth appears. Tie large clumps with rope; cut with a hedge trimmer.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- Remember that vegetable seeds have a short life and usually will not be good after a year or two. This includes sweet corn, onion, okra, beans, parsnip, and peppers.
- Consider the family vacation when planning your garden. Choose planting dates and varieties so your garden won't be ready for a full harvest while you are away. <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C943>
- Peaches grow best when maintained with an open center (no central leader). Keep 3 or 4 strong, scaffold branches evenly distributed around the trunk. Limbs that branch out at a 60° angle are preferred. Spreaders can be used to widen narrow crotch angles. https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%201063_2.PDF
- Prune fruit trees and grapes in late February or early March after the worst of the winter cold is passed but before spring growth begins when temps maintain at 45°.

For disease and insect control, cut out dead wood and dispose of the prunings. After each cut, disinfect pruners with rubbing alcohol, or nine parts water to one part bleach. Take care because both mixtures can cause damage to grass or other plants. <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1027-10>

- Before working an area in the garden for early spring planting, check the soil. It should be dry enough to crumble in your hands, so that you don't compact the soil while working it.
- Don't start your vegetable plants indoors too early. Six weeks ahead of the expected planting date is early enough for the fast growing species such as cabbage. Eight weeks allows enough time for the slow growing types such as tomatoes and peppers. http://extension.uga.edu/publications/files/pdf/B%201432_3.PDF
- Handle seed packets with care. Rubbing the outside to determine how many seeds are inside can break the protective seed coats, thereby reducing germination.




Seed starting tray
<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B1432>

MISCELLANEOUS

- To make old hay and manure weed-free, spread on the soil in late winter, water well, and cover with black plastic. Weed seeds will sprout after a few days of warm weather, and then will be killed by frost and lack of daylight.
- Hang or clean out bluebird houses now before the birds start looking for a home. Don't clean them on a windy day.
- Clean and disinfect clay pots by soaking them in a solution of one part liquid bleach and nine parts water. Rinse thoroughly to remove all bleach residue. This will have your containers ready to plant with spring annuals.

RAINFALL COMPARISONS

	Cherokee County			State Wide		
	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	YTD 2021	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	YTD 2021
 Actual	2.4	6.1	61.4	0.7	4.9	53.2
Normal	4.3	4.6	55.0	3.8	4.0	47.2
Deviation	-1.9	1.5	6.4	-3.1	0.9	6.0

MARCH GARDENING TIPS

ORNAMENTALS

- Be aware that a brown plastic material that looks and feels like natural burlap, but does not break down in the soil, may be used to wrap root balls of B & B plants. Synthetic materials enclosing the roots of trees and shrubs must be completely removed to ensure success of the transplants. Planting techniques for trees can be found at: http://extension.uga.edu/publications/files/pdf/B%20932_4.PDF
- Propagate deciduous shrubs, such as forsythia and winter jasmine, now by ground layering.
- Give your roses a starter application of complete fertilizer.
- Cut back butterfly bushes to 1/3 desired height.
- Fertilize spring bulbs after they bloom. Do not remove leaves until they turn yellow.
- Prune crape myrtles only removing the old flower heads. Do not cut back to the same spot each year as it creates a weak joint and the branches can split and fall in the summer with the additional weight of heavy flower heads. Remove sprouts at the base of the tree. <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C944>
- If you have left a few inches of plant stems on your perennials to ID the plant's location cut them back before the new growth emerges. It is also a good time to cut back the tattered foliage on evergreen ferns and perennials.
- Using sharp pruners to create a clean cut, clip any tattered foliage off lirioppe.
- Start fertilizing pansies and winter annuals with houseplant fertilizer.
- Divide daylily and hosta clumps when the leaves just start to emerge from the ground so you don't damage the new growth. More hosta info: <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C955>

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- Don't rush to remove mulch from strawberries. Leave it over your plants to protect them from late cold spells. When plants start to grow, the mulch must be removed to allow leaves to develop in the light. If leaves develop under the mulch, they will become etiolated (blanched) and yellow from lack of chlorophyll, and may burn and die when exposed to the sun. http://extension.uga.edu/publications/files/pdf/C%20883_4.PDF
- Begin summer vegetable seedlings inside now.
- Spring applications of pesticides should be made on peaches, apples and pears. Correct timing for spraying depends on the stage of development of flowers. Check the label and follow the directions.

- Lettuce is very sensitive to low pH. Lime should be applied to the soil if the pH is below 6.0. https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%201018_2.PDF
- If your garden is on a hillside, plant across the slope (not up and down) to help hold moisture in the soil and reduce erosion.
- Plant seeds of root crops, such as carrots, beets, radishes and parsnips, in your garden.
- Do not add lime to the area for potatoes. The lower pH helps control scab. http://extension.uga.edu/publications/files/pdf/C%201011_3.PDF

MISCELLANEOUS

- One way to avoid the danger of unusually cold nights is to set water-filled plastic jugs around each seedling. Warmed by the sun, these will radiate heat all night, preventing cold damage. Other ways to protect from the winter cold are at https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%20872_6.PDF
- Place bird houses outdoors early this month. Birds will begin looking for nesting sites soon and the houses should attract several mating pairs. Ideally, houses erected on smooth metal poles where predators cannot climb are most often selected, but placement on top of fence posts or in trees will usually suffice. <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C976>
- The purple martin (*Progne subis*) isn't a year-round bird in Georgia, but arrives in southern Georgia in early February, reaches northern Georgia by mid-February, and then leaves during the fall. With increasing interest in our environment and nonchemical pest control, the martin is regaining popularity. <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C977>
- Put out hummingbird feeders in mid-March.
- Houseplants can be watered more frequently with the onset of spring and new growth. Start fertilizing houseplants now for good growth. http://extension.uga.edu/publications/files/pdf/B%201318_5.PDF



Photo courtesy <https://extension.uga.edu/story.html?storyid=7869>



Photo hummingbird feeders courtesy John Ruscilli



Recipes

Chicken, Broccoli, & Tortellini Soup

From Maurya Jones

Ingredients

2 quarts fat-free chicken broth
2 cups sliced carrots
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 cups broccoli florets
2 cups frozen cheese tortellini
2 cups shredded cooked skinless boneless chicken breast
1-1/3 cups chopped plum tomatoes
6 Tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese
4 Tbsp. chopped parsley

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a Dutch oven over high heat, bring broth, carrot, and garlic to a boil; stir in broccoli and tortellini. Reduce heat to medium-low; simmer for 2 minutes.
2. Add chicken and tomatoes; simmer until tortellini and broccoli are tender, about 3 minutes. Transfer to individual bowls and garnish with Parmesan and parsley.

Serves 4



Courtesy Maurya Jones

Summer Sausage

By Lynn Knotts

Ingredients:

2 lbs. lean ground beef
1 cup of water
1 tsp. liquid smoke
1 Tbsp. brown sugar
1/2 tsp. garlic powder
2 Tbsp. Morton's Tender Quick Salt
2 tsp. mustard seed
2 tsp. cracked black pepper (or coarsely ground black pepper)

INSTRUCTIONS

Mix last 6 ingredients with water. Add to beef, and mix well by hand. Lay out 3 long pieces of Saran Wrap. Put a third of the recipe on each piece. Wrap the Saran Wrap around the beef to form a sausage-type roll. Use your hands to form into a roll the thickness of sausage. Refrigerate for 24 hours. Take Saran Wrap off and put rolls on a rack in a shallow pan. (I use a broiler pan.) Bake for 1 hour at 300 degrees, and then turn and bake for another 20 to 30 minutes, still at 300 degrees. This recipe freezes well.

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